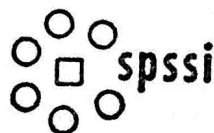


# The Journal of SOCIAL ISSUES



1977 Vol. 33 No. 2

## Sexual Behavior: Social Psychological Issues

**Issue Editors: Letitia Anne Peplau and Constance L. Hammen**

Social Psychological Issues in Sexual Behavior:	
An Overview . . . . .	Letitia Anne Peplau and Constance L. Hammen <b>1</b>
A Cognitive Perspective on the Experience of Sexual	
Arousal . . . . .	Karen S. Rook and Constance L. Hammen <b>7</b>
Bisexuality: Some Social Psychological Issues	
. . . . .	Philip W. Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz <b>30</b>
Moral Reasoning and Premarital Sexual Behavior:	
Toward Reasoning about Relationships	
. . . . .	Judith Frankel D'Augelli and Anthony R. D'Augelli <b>46</b>
Sexual Behavior in Adolescence . . . . .	J. Roy Hopkins <b>67</b>
Sexual Intimacy in Dating Relationships	
. . . . .	Letitia Anne Peplau, Zick Rubin, and Charles T. Hill <b>86</b>
Sexual Arousal and Aggression: Recent Experiments and	
Theoretical Issues . . . . .	Neil M. Malamuth, Seymour Feshbach, and Yoram Jaffe <b>110</b>

Sexual Permissiveness, Sex-Role Rigidity, and Violence across Cultures . . . . .	Shirley A. McConahay and John B. McConahay <b>134</b>
---	--

Sexual Pollution: Reproductive Sex Taboos in American Society . . . . .	Karen Ericksen Paige <b>144</b>
--	---------------------------------

Cultural Values and the Therapeutic Definition of Sexual Function and Dysfunction . . . . .	Joseph LoPiccolo and Julia Heiman <b>166</b>
--	---

Ethical Requirements for Research on Human Sexual Behavior: From the Perspective of Participating Subjects . . . . .	Paul R. Abramson <b>184</b>
--	-----------------------------

Biographical Sketches . . . . .	<b>193</b>
---------------------------------	------------

### Comment and Rejoinder

Eliot R. Smith . . . <i>Comment on "Effects of Group Sex Composi- tion on Self-Presentation and Sex Typing" by Diane N. Ruble and E. Tom Higgins</i> . . . . .	<b>197</b>
E. Tory Higgins and Diane N. Ruble . . . . . <i>More about Single-Sex Colleges and Sex-Typing: A Rejoinder to E. R. Smith</i>	<b>200</b>

### Editorial Notes

Regretfully JSI can not accommodate unsolicited single manuscripts which are unrelated to issue themes. However, readers wishing to comment on articles appearing in this or other issues of the journal or on SPSSI concerns in a format which might appropriately appear in the journal are invited to submit such materials to the editor. To the extent that our limited time and space allotments permit, JSI will publish criticisms and observations thought to be of general interest.

### Looking Ahead

Journal issues now in process include *Privacy as a Behavioral Phenomenon* (Stephen T. Margulis); *Research among Racial and Cultural Minorities* (Darrel Montero & Gene N. Levine); *Male Roles and the Male Experience* (Joseph H. Pleck & Robert C. L. Brannon); *Children's Roles, Rights, and Responsibilities* (Norma Feshbach & Seymour Feshbach); and *Gambling in the U.S.* (Maureen Kallick & Peter Renter).

We encourage correspondence from interested professionals who wish to explore the possibility of assembling issues of the journal on additional topics.

### Cover by Shelley Adler

Correction: In regard to my article in Volume 32(3), 1976, I would like to acknowledge the inaccurate use of the term "dismay" to characterize H. Peskin's reaction to his research result (p. 184). This work was confused with that of other researchers. The page numbers for his article were also given incorrectly: the article appears on pp. 378-389. J. A. Sherman.

## Social Psychological Issues in Sexual Behavior: An Overview

Letitia Anne Peplau and Constance L. Hammen

University of California, Los Angeles

In the 1970s, research on sexual behavior has edged tentatively toward the mainstream of academic psychology. Previously, sex research had largely been the province of clinicians studying problems of sex dysfunction, survey researchers documenting the frequency of various sexual acts, or laboratory investigators charting physiological patterns of sexual arousal. The last decade has witnessed an increasing interest in sex research among a broader spectrum of social scientists, and a changed orientation toward the study of human sexual behavior.

A decade ago, the Journal of Social Issues published a volume on "The Sexual Renaissance in America." Issue editor Ira Reiss (1966) noted several characteristics of sex research at that time. He commented on the low status and relative rarity of scholarly studies of sex. "Probably no other area in the social sciences has such a poor pedigree as the study of human sexual relationships," he wrote, adding that the number of objective studies of sex could be counted on "one's fingers and toes" (p.1). Reiss emphasized the contribution that social science research could make to the emotion-charged controversies over such issues as pornography, unwed pregnancy, and changing sexual values and behavior. Reiss affirmed a belief in scientific objectivity, and argued that the application of systematic research methods would generate a solid base of factual data about sex that would illuminate important social concerns.

In the past 10 years, the study of human sexuality has altered greatly. The quantity of sex research has expanded dramatically, and considerable progress has been made toward compiling accurate information about sexuality. Concurrently, the respectability of sex as a subject for scholarly investigation has increased, encouraging university researchers to venture into the area. Equally important, current research reflects a change in emphasis,

away from viewing sex as a separate and special area of human experience toward viewing sexuality as on a par with other aspects of experience.

Finally, in contrast to Reiss's emphasis on what social science can contribute to sex research, there is growing recognition that a liaison between the two can benefit both endeavors. Sexual behavior provides a forum for the study of general theories of human behavior, and poses complex questions about the links between physiological arousal, subjective experience, and social interaction. Byrne (1977) has suggested several benefits to social psychology from studying sex. These include investigating a topic pertinent to social issues, increased cooperation from research participants who can recognize the relevance of the research, and an opportunity to study the relationship of self-report and physiological measures of motivational states.

### ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

The articles in this issue amply illustrate the breadth and diversity of current sex research. A concern with social issues is evident throughout, with authors addressing such varied topics as changing patterns of sexual behavior, the relationship between sex and aggression, and the influence of sexual values on behavior. Also apparent is an attempt to integrate sex research with more general psychological approaches. The research methodologies represented range from laboratory experiments to surveys and analyses of cross-cultural data. Unfortunately the increased quantity of sex research has made it impossible to include all relevant topics in one volume, and such important subjects as sexual variation, sex and aging, and rape, for example, have been omitted.

We have arranged the articles according to whether they emphasize individual, interpersonal, or cultural analyses of sexual behavior. The first two papers concern how individuals perceive and interpret their sexual experience. Following are articles focusing on sexual behavior in interpersonal relationships. Finally, several articles consider social and cultural factors related to sexual behavior.

In the first paper, Rook and Hammen use a cognitive model to examine how internal and external factors affect the perception, labeling, and meaning of sexual arousal for the individual. Next, Blumstein and Schwartz consider the relationship between overt sexual behavior and a person's self-definition as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. They document the diversity of labels

people apply to their bisexual behavior, and reflect on the circumstances that affect sexual self-definitions.

As a transition to a series of articles on sex in the context of interpersonal relationships, **D'Augelli** and **D'Augelli** employ a cognitive-developmental framework to analyze sexual decision-making in premarital relationships. Next, **Hopkins** reviews and evaluates research on changes in the incidence of premarital coitus during the past 40 years. The article by **Peplau**, **Rubin**, and **Hill** investigates the patterning of sexual interaction in dating couples and considers the impact of sex on the development of commitment in relationships.

A final set of articles considers links between sexuality and broader social and cultural factors. Two articles examine the relationship between sex and aggression. **Malamuth**, **Feshbach**, and **Jaffereview** their own and others' laboratory studies of sexual arousal and aggression. **McConahay** and **McConahay** use a cross-cultural approach to explore the relationships among sexual permissiveness, sex-role rigidity, and violence. The article by **Paige** also uses cross-cultural data, in this instance to examine the social functions of menstrual sex taboos and the way such taboos reflect cultural values about sex, reproduction, and marriage. In the next article, **LoPiccolo** and **Heiman** review historical changes in the concept of adequate sexual functioning and consider implications of cultural definitions of sexuality for sex therapy. Finally, in light of increased interest in sex research, we must consider questions of ethics. **Abramson's** article notes the relatively benign reactions of research participants to common laboratory methods and points up the importance of actually examining the impact of our research procedures.

### CURRENT ISSUES IN SEX RESEARCH

As the study of sex has moved more fully into the mainstream of social psychological research, new themes and questions have become salient. In this section we briefly outline several of these current issues in sex research.

*Cognitive aspects of sexuality.* The scientific milieu in which the pioneering research of **Kinsey** and his colleagues (1948, 1953) was conducted emphasized objectivity and the precise counting of specific sexual behaviors. Little attention was given to the person's subjective experience in sexual encounters, to the meaning attached to sex acts, or to the social contexts in which sexual behavior occurred. In contrast, several articles in this issue attempt

to go beyond overt behavior to understand the impact of cognitive processes in human sexuality.

*Sex and interpersonal relationships.* In 1966, **Kirkendall** and **Libby** argued strongly for viewing sex as an interpersonal relationship rather than as an act. Some progress in that direction has been made. As **Byrne** (1977) notes, research on interpersonal attraction has moved from the study of first impressions and liking to considerations of sexual attraction and love. Variables such as physical attractiveness and sexual arousal have been introduced into the study of interpersonal attraction. In this issue, two papers directly consider sex in the context of interpersonal relationships.

*Nonsexual aspects of sexual behavior.* Sexual behavior can serve highly diverse functions both for individuals and for society. Sexual pleasure and reproduction are two obvious motives for sexual behavior. Not infrequently, however, sexual acts may serve primarily to communicate closeness and affection, or to demonstrate competence, or to gain status in the eyes of others. Similarly, acts such as rape may basically reflect aggression and power. The role of nonsexual aspects of sexual behavior, the analysis of the many functions served by sexual experiences, has been approached in several articles. For example, two articles examine the relationship of sex and aggression, while another discusses societal functions served by menstrual sex taboos.

*Sex roles and sexuality.* Beliefs about sexuality are closely linked to conceptions of femininity and masculinity. Recently, however, traditional beliefs about male-female differences in sexuality have been challenged. Three interrelated issues are relevant.

First, traditional sex roles prescribe a double standard of sexual morality. The fairness of such a dual system of ethics is being seriously challenged, and there is some evidence that support for the double standard is waning (e.g., **Komarovsky**, 1976; **Peplau**, **Rubin**, & **Hill** in this issue.)

Second, assumed sex differences in sexuality bolstered the double standard. Men were viewed as more interested in sex, more easily aroused, as having a greater need for sex. For women, sex was assumed to be less urgent and more easily forgone. Recent research raises doubts about these beliefs. For example, **Masters and Johnson** (1966) reported that women have a capacity for erotic enjoyment at least equal to that of men, and that both sexes show similar patterns of physiological sexual arousal. **Schmidt** (1975) found considerable overlap in men's and women's responses to erotica. **Hopkins** in this issue documents an increasing conver-

gence in the sexual behavior of young men and women. Such evidence has led psychologists (e.g., Byrne, 1977) to emphasize similarities between the sexes. Tavis (1976) concluded that "the sexes are more alike than different in body (their arousal and orgasms), mind (their fantasies and turn-ons) and behavior (what they do sexually and how often they do it)" (p.52).

Third, male-female role playing has traditionally extended to sexual behavior. Men are expected to be the sexual initiators; women respond and set limits on the couple's behavior. While attitudes about this sex-typed behavior may be changing (Komarovsky, 1976), evidence from several sources (McCormick, 1976; Peplau, Rubin, & Hill in this issue; Safilios-Rothschild, 1977) suggests that this behavior pattern may be resistant to change. Further research is needed to adequately document and explain sex differences — and similarities — in sexuality.

**Sexual politics.** Implicit in Reiss's (1966) endorsement of scientific objectivity in sex research is the belief that scholarly researchers can act in a value-free way. The most recent challenge to this view comes from the women's movement. Feminists have emphasized two ways in which sexual behavior is political— or, more generally, in which sex is tied to cultural norms and values.

First, cultural values can be shown to affect scholars' conceptions of sexuality and their attitudes about what constitutes healthy versus dysfunctional behavior (see LoPiccolo and Heiman in this issue). Even the vocabulary of scientific research may convey implicit assumptions about "normal" behavior: studies of "premarital" sex suggest that participants are expected to marry, while inquiries about "foreplay" subtly indicate that intercourse is the central event in sexual encounters.

Second, the actual patterning of people's sexual behavior is affected by the norms and values of their culture. In Millet's view, "Coitus can scarcely be said to take place in a vacuum . . . it serves as a charged microcosm of the variety of attitudes and values to which culture subscribes" (1970, p. 23). Several writers (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Gordon & Shankweiler, 1971; Hite, 1976) agree with Millet that sexual behavior reflects the roles men and women play in society and is inextricably linked to sex differences in power and dependence. An implication is that changes in the status of women may have important consequences for sexual behavior. More generally, the impact of cultural beliefs on sexual behavior and on sex research is worthy of serious consideration.

\* \* \* \* \*

We are grateful to Carol Tavis who helped initiate this issue on sexual behavior and who has served throughout as a special consultant. In addition, we acknowledge the valuable assistance of the following individuals who reviewed manuscripts for this issue: Ronald P. Abeles, Andrew M. Barclay, Robert A. Baron, Karl E. Bauman, Peter M. Bentler, David G. Berger, Philip Brickman, Donn Byrne, Herbert J. Cross, Edward I. Donnerstein, Carolyn P. Edwards, Howard Gadlin, James H. Geer, George W. Goethals, Joshua S. Golden, William B. Griffitt, Alan E. Gross, David L. Gutmann, Anna G. Heinrich, Jonathan Kelley, George Levinger, Thomas E. Lickona, Karen Oppenheim Mason, Patricia Y. Miller, Joseph H. Pleck, Sharon M. Raphael, Ira L. Reiss, Carl A. Ridley, Judith Rodin, Paul C. Rosenblatt, Alice S. Rossi, William Simon, Tom Tyler, Douglas H. Wallace, Dolf Zillmann, G. Terence Wilson.

#### REFERENCES

- Brownmiller, S. *Against our will: Men, women and rape*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.
- Byrne, D. *Social psychology and the study of sexual behavior*. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 1977, 3, 3-30.
- Gordon, M., & Shankweiler, P. J. Different equals less: Female sexuality in recent marriage manuals. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 1971, 33, 459-466.
- Hite, S. *The Hite report*. New York: MacMillan, 1976.
- Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., & Martin, C. E., *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1948.
- Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., Martin, C. E., & Gebhard, P. H. *Sexual behavior in the human female*. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1953.
- Kirkendall, L. A., & Libby, R. W. Interpersonal relationships: Crux of the sexual renaissance. *Journal of Social Issues*, 1966, 22(2), 45-59.
- Komarovsky, M. *Dilemmas of masculinity: A study of college youth*. New York: Norton, 1976.
- Masters, W. H., & Johnson, V. E. *Human sexual response*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1966.
- McCormick, N. B. *Gender role and expected social power behavior in sexual decision-making*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of California, Los Angeles, 1976.
- Millet, K. *Sexual politics*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970.
- Reiss, I. L. Introduction. *Journal of Social Issues*, 1966, 22(2), 1-5.
- Safilios-Rothschild, C. *Low, sex, and sex roles*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977.
- Schmidt, G. Male-female differences in sexual arousal and behavior during and after exposure to sexually explicit stimuli. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 1975, 4, 353-364.
- Tavis, C. Good news about sex. *New York*, December 6, 1976, pp. 51-57.