

---

## MODULE 38

# Sexual Motivation and the Need to Belong

### Module Preview

Sexual motivation depends on the interplay of internal and external stimuli. In nonhuman animals, hormones help stimulate sexual activity. In humans, they influence sexual behavior more loosely. One's sexual orientation seems neither willfully chosen nor willfully changed; new research links sexual orientation to biological factors.

The need to belong is a major influence in motivating human behavior. Social bonds boosted our ancestors' survival rates. We experience our need to belong when feeling the gloom of loneliness or joy of love and when seeking social acceptance.

### Module Guide

#### Introduction and The Physiology of Sex

- ▶ Lectures: Why Do People Have Sex?, Introducing Sexual Motivation; Cultural Differences in Sexuality; Gender Differences in Sex Drive; Causes of Sexual Disorders
- ▶ DVD: *Anatomy of Sex*
- ▶ Instructor Video Tool Kit: *Sexual Dysfunctions and Their Treatments*; *Love: The Mind-Body Connection*

38-1. *Describe the human sexual response cycle, and discuss some causes of sexual disorders.*

The human **sexual response cycle** normally follows a pattern of *excitement*, *plateau*, *orgasm* (which seems to involve similar feelings and brain activity in males and females), and *resolution*, followed in males by a **refractory period**, during which renewed arousal and orgasm are not possible.

**Sexual disorders** are problems that consistently impair sexual functioning. *Premature ejaculation* and *orgasmic dysfunction* can often be treated by therapy. *Erectile dysfunction* is routinely treated by taking a pill.

- ▶ Exercise: The Sexual Opinion Survey

38-2. *Discuss the impact of hormones on sexual motivation and behavior.*

The sex hormones direct the physical development of male and female sex characteristics and, especially in nonhuman animals, activate sexual behavior. Although **testosterone** and the **estrogens** (such as estradiol) are present in both sexes, males have a higher level of testosterone and females a higher level of estrogen.

In humans, the hormones influence sexual behaviors more loosely, especially once sufficient hormone levels are present. In later life, as sex hormones decline, the frequency of sexual fantasies and intercourse also declines.

## The Psychology of Sex

38-3. *Discuss the impact of external stimuli and fantasies on sexual motivation and behavior.*

External stimuli, such as sexually explicit materials, can trigger arousal in both men and women, although the activated brain areas differ somewhat. Sexually coercive material tends to increase viewers' acceptance of rape and violence toward women. Images of sexually attractive men and women may lead people to devalue their own partners and relationships. Our imaginations also influence sexual motivation.

Wide-awake people become sexually aroused both by memories of prior sexual activities and by fantasies. About 95 percent of both men and women say they have had sexual fantasies. Fantasizing about sex does not indicate a sexual problem or dissatisfaction. If anything, sexually active people have more sexual fantasies.

## Adolescent Sexuality

- ▶ Lecture: Virginitv Pledges
- ▶ Feature Film: *Juno*

38-4. *Discuss some of the factors that influence adolescent sexual behavior, and describe trends in the spread of sexually transmitted infections.*

Although physical maturation fosters a sexual dimension to adolescents' emerging identity, sexual expression varies greatly with time and culture. Compared with European teens, American teens have a lower rate of contraceptive use and thus a higher pregnancy and abortion rate. Reasons for this failure include a lack of knowledge about sex and sexual health and a tendency to overestimate the sexual activity of their friends. Guilt related to sexual activity sometimes results in lack of planned birth control. When passion overwhelms intentions, the result may be conception. Often, there is minimal communication about birth control, as many teenagers are uncomfortable discussing contraception with either parents or partners. Sexually active teens also tend to use alcohol, which can break down normal restraints. Finally, television and movies foster sexual norms of unprotected promiscuity.

Unprotected sex has also led to increased rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Teenage girls, because of their less mature biological development and lower levels of protective antibodies, seem especially vulnerable to STIs. Attempts to protect teens through comprehensive sex-education programs include a greater emphasis on teen abstinence.

Teens with high rather than average intelligence more often delay sex. Religiosity, father presence, and participation in service learning programs are also predictors of sexual restraint.

## Sexual Orientation

- ▶ Lecture: Bisexuality
- ▶ Exercises: The Complexity of Sexual Orientation; Attitudes Toward Homosexual Persons
- ▶ Videos: Module 23 of *The Brain* series, 2nd ed.: *Sexual Preference: A Hormonal Possibility*; Module 25 of *Psychology: The Human Experience: Sexual Orientation and Activity*
- ▶ Instructor Video Tool Kit: *Homosexuality and the Nature-Nurture Debate*

38-5. *Summarize current views on the number of people whose sexual orientation is homosexual, and discuss the research on environmental and biological influences on sexual orientation.*

**Sexual orientation** is our enduring sexual attraction toward members of either our own sex (homosexual) or the other sex (heterosexual). Studies in both Europe and the United States suggest that

about 3 or 4 percent of men and 1 or 2 percent of women are homosexual. Estimates derived from the sex of unmarried partners reported in the 2000 U.S. Census suggest that 2.5 percent of the population is gay or lesbian. Such studies also tell us that sexual orientation is enduring. Women's sexual orientation tends to be less strongly felt and potentially more fluid and changing than men's. Women are somewhat more likely than men to feel and act on bisexual attractions.

There is no evidence that environmental influences determine sexual orientation. No links have been found between homosexuality and a child's relationships with parents, father-absent homes, fear or hatred of people of the other gender, levels of sex hormones currently in the blood, or childhood sexual experience. On the other hand, biological influences are evident in studies of same-sex relations in several hundred species, straight-gay differences in body and brain characteristics, genetic studies of family members and twins, and the effect of exposure to certain hormones during critical periods of prenatal development.

## Sex and Human Values

- ▶ Lecture: Fear of Intimacy Scale
- ▶ Exercise: Hendrick Sexual Attitudes Scale

38-6. *Discuss the place of values in sex research.*

Although research on sexual motivation does not attempt to define the personal meaning of sex in our lives, sex research and education are not value-free. Researchers' values should be stated openly, enabling us to debate them and to reflect on our own values. Sex at its human best is life-uniting and love-renewing.

## The Need to Belong

- ▶ Lectures: Social Ostracism; Does Social Rejection Literally Feel Cold?
- ▶ Exercises: The Need to Affiliate; Measures and Issues Related to the Need to Belong; Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale
- ▶ Feature Films: *March of the Penguins*; *Cast Away* and the Need to Belong; *The Mirror Has Two Faces* and the Looking-Glass Self
- ▶ Video: Program 24 of *Moving Images: Exploring Psychology Through Film: Social Rejection: The Need to Belong*

38-7. *Describe the adaptive nature of social attachments, and discuss both healthy and unhealthy consequences of our need to belong.*

Social bonds boosted our ancestors' survival rate. Adults who formed attachments were more likely to come together to reproduce and to stay together to nurture their offspring to maturity. Cooperation in groups also enhanced survival. People who feel supported by close relationships live with better health and at lower risk for psychological disorder and premature death. When relationships form, we often feel joy. Most people mention—before anything else—close relationships as making life meaningful. Even our self-esteem is a gauge of how valued and accepted we feel.

Attachments can keep people in abusive relationships as the fear of being alone may seem worse than the pain of emotional or physical abuse. When something threatens our social ties, negative emotions overwhelm us. When *ostracized*, people may engage in self-defeating or antisocial behaviors and underperform on aptitude tests. Ostracism elicits increased activity in the brain's *anterior cingulate cortex*, which is also activated by physical pain.

