

## **Social Psychology, Social Exchange, & Sexuality**

The study of human sexuality has advanced only by fits and starts, and even today it has won only partial and grudging respect from the scientific community at large. Research on sex is a hodge-podge of diverse methods, fragmentary theories, and intriguing findings that are often subject to competing explanations. Many scientists remain skeptical of sexuality research for a variety of reasons. The federal granting agencies remain reluctant to support research into sexuality even though many major national problems are associated with sexuality, including teen pregnancy and unwanted pregnancy, AIDS and other venereal diseases, and sexual victimization and coercion.

Despite these handicaps, a lively and devoted core of sexuality researchers has steadily contributed a growing volume of research findings. One need only to compare how well sex is understood in the year 2000 with the state of knowledge a century earlier to see how far we have come.

Perhaps ironically, social psychology has played only a minor part in the growth of sexuality research, at least until recently. One need only glance through any of the major textbooks on sexuality to verify that most of the coverage is devoted to biological aspects of sexuality, clinical aspects such as sexual problems, and technical matters. Our field looks upon sex as a natural, biological function that sometimes suffers from disturbances, and as a set of skills to perform.

Although biological, clinical, and technical aspects of sex are important, it is also helpful to examine sex as a social phenomenon: As a group of behavior patterns that people engage in together, under the influence of social pressures, and indeed as ways that people relate to one another. In particular, it is subject to many of the main principles that regulate other forms of sexual behavior. Put down your sexuality textbook and look instead at a textbook in social psychology, and you can quickly see that many of the chapters in that book—attitudes, relationships, self, aggression, influence, prejudice, decision-making—are potentially quite relevant to sex.

However, the link between social psychology and sex remains in large part a matter of unfulfilled potential. A variety of research has begun to rely on specific ideas or approaches within social psychology to explain sexual behavior, but this merger remains in its infancy. This book contains an assortment of that kind of work, but there is as yet no general or systematic attempt to build this understanding into a coherent whole.

Thus, the book this chapter is drawn from makes no pretense of trying to offer an overview of research on sexuality. It is devoted specifically to the links between social psychology and sexuality. It offers a sample of how social psychologists have begun to look into the area of sexuality to extend and test their theories.

We are not the first to call for more attention to the social dimension of sex. The authors of the influential "Sex in America" survey, the NHSLS (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994) argued forcefully that a better understanding of the social factors affecting sex was the most pressing need. Their research is widely regarded as the most important and useful contribution to American sexuality in the last decade and perhaps even since Kinsey's pioneering work, and so their opinions are worth noting. In their view, the biggest gap in current knowledge about sex was something that social psychology seems well poised to fill.

## Sexual Science Today

Let us take a broad look at the field of sexuality today, as a research enterprise. What do our studies tell us about sex? To appraise any field of study, it is necessary to consider several factors. Foremost among them are the ideas or theories and the methods.

The field of sexuality is weak on theories and ideas. This was the clear conclusion of a special issue of the *Journal of Sex Research* in 1998 devoted to assessing the status of theory in sexual science. Most telling was an article by Weis (1998). He went through the field's two most prominent journals, article by article, and examined the state of theorizing. He concluded that three quarters of them just reported data with little or no discussion of theoretical meaning. Indeed, a large number of them did not even make a pretense of having ideas to test: They merely described their methods and results.

It would be rash to say that there are no major theories or ideas in the field of sexuality. There are some. But these have to some extent polarized the field without providing a strong basis for progress in knowledge. Another article in that special issue of the *Journal of Sex Research*, by the highly esteemed husband-and-wife research team of John DeLamater and Janet Hyde (1998), described how two large theoretical approaches have dominated thinking about sexuality. Every student of sexuality should have a basic grasp of these two approaches.

One of these views is described as "social constructionist." The term social constructionism came into broad use after the publication, in 1967, of Berger and Luckmann's book *The Social Construction of Reality*. This book rebelled against the common view that reality consisted ultimately of atoms and molecules and other phenomena that are the province of the natural sciences. They emphasized that social processes also create a form of reality and indeed one that is much more important to people's everyday experiences. In particular, the social construction of reality depends on language and on the shared understandings that language makes possible. Berger and Luckmann certainly recognized the existence of physical reality, of chemicals and physical particles, but they also emphasized the importance of shared meanings.

Applied to sex, this approach has emphasized that sexuality is largely something that is learned and shaped by culture, socialization, and situational influences. What people do sexually, and even what they desire, is regarded as something that is heavily dependent on the social context. This approach emphasizes differences between different cultures or different historical eras to argue that culture exerts a strong influence on sex. It is not surprising that social constructionism dominated the study of sex in the decade following Berger and Luckmann's book, because that decade coincided with the height of the sexual revolution and the sexual revolution seemed to provide dramatic evidence that cultural, historical events could produce sweeping changes in sexual behaviors and attitudes.

Feminists in particular were drawn into the social constructionist camp, partly because the dramatic changes of the sexual revolution were most apparent in female sexuality. Feminists undertook an interpretation of a broad range of social behavior as reflecting men's oppression of women, and sex fit right into this analysis. They saw feminism as including the need to liberate female sexuality from the exploitative, oppressive influence of male-dominated society.

Ranged against the social constructionist approaches are what DeLamater and Hyde (1998) called "essentialist" views. These views have treated sexuality as an innate part of the

human being, emphasizing biological and evolutionary determinants. The role of culture was downplayed. Genes, hormones, and other biological processes are regarded as central determinants of human sexuality.

The essentialist approach to sex has gained considerable clout and excitement with the application of evolutionary theory (e.g., Buss, 1994; Symons, 1979). Central to this approach is that human beings are descended from those ancestors who were most successful in passing on their genes by reproducing. Crucially, the argument emphasizes that human sexual motivation today reflects the natural selection in bygone millennia: The forms of sexual desire and sexual behavior that produced the most successful offspring are the ones that dominate the human gene pool (and the human psyche) today. Gender differences in sex drive are linked to the differences in reproduction that demand more prudence and responsibility from women than men, insofar as women cannot produce a viable offspring with zero effort or contribution beyond the first five minutes of pleasure.

The contrast between the two approaches can be easily appreciated in the ongoing debate about the causal roots of homosexuality. Are homosexuals born that way, such as by having a "gay gene," or does homosexual orientation derive from socializing and influential experiences (or even personal choice)? Essentialists will lean toward the former explanation; social constructionists toward the latter. Many other aspects of sexuality, such as promiscuity, deviant tastes such as fetishism, and so-called sex addiction, are likewise susceptible to either essentialist or constructionist interpretations.

With two large theoretical approaches, one might think that the field of sexuality would be relatively well off. Yet these two approaches do not function the way theories do in most fields. They are quite difficult to prove or disprove. Many findings can be fit into either theory. Certainly there is some interesting work that attempts to test predictions based on one or the other theory. But for many researchers and many topics, the broad nature-culture debate is not focused enough to offer specific predictions that can be tested with the methods currently available.

That brings us to methods. Research on sexuality has come a long way since the early part of the 20th century, when almost no systematic information was available and a handful of clinical case studies were the main source of knowledge. Undoubtedly the greatest single step forward was the research by Alfred Kinsey and his group (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Kinsey himself was a biology professor who had spent most of his career studying wasps. When he was asked to teach a course on (human) marriage and sexuality at Indiana University in the late 1930s, he was shocked at how little scientific evidence was available about the topic. To remedy this, he began asking his students systematic questions about their experiences, and soon he proceeded to conduct in-depth interviews with people from all walks of life about their sexual histories, including both behaviors and feelings. Kinsey was not able to assemble a sample that would resemble the American population as a whole, but he obtained detailed information from thousands of people. The reports he published in human sexuality created a sensation. The first one sold more than 200,000 copies in its first two months. The long-awaited second one, whose release on "K-Day" made front-page news, reached 200,000 sales in a few weeks. Both drew criticism from all sides, including Congressional hearings to ascertain whether Kinsey was part of a Communist plot. He died shortly thereafter, "an exhausted and broken man" (Petersen, 1999, p. 228).

Some of Kinsey's numbers are now recognized as misleading, insofar as he did not collect a systematic sample. For example, he concluded that a third of men had reached orgasm through homosexual contact at least once, but this high number probably reflects the fact that he actively sought out homosexuals to interview (because their experiences were especially unknown to science). Still, the approach he championed-that we should find out the facts and report them with as little moralizing and evaluative judging as possible-has been an inspiration to generations of sexuality researchers ever since.

Today there is a steady flow of scientific information about sexuality, including several major journals devoted entirely to research on that topic. Still, the quality of the work and the soundness of its findings are not uniformly high. Research is hampered by a lack of federal funding, by pragmatic difficulties such as the reluctance of research participants to disclose personal material or perform sex acts in the laboratory, and the rising tendency of research watchdogs to prevent researchers from studying anything that might upset people or intrude into their private doings.

Sex is therefore not on the same par as other social behaviors, in terms of research possibilities. Helping, aggression, first impressions, prejudice, cooperation, task performance, intelligence, and most other topics can be studied without great difficulty and with great precision in laboratory work. Sex is much more difficult. Hardly any studies include overt sexual behavior that is directly measured or observed.

Three levels of research methods have therefore become used in the sexuality area. The first involves hypothetical questions: Would you have sex with a certain person under certain circumstances? Would you object if your partner performed a certain act with someone else? Would you expect to have sex with someone if this or that criterion were met, or after a certain amount of time? Would you rather do this or that?

These hypothetical methods furnish intriguing findings but must be regarded with extreme caution. People are often unable to furnish accurate guesses about what they would actually do. Outside the sexual realm, several researchers have compared actual versus hypothetical responses, and at least on some occasions the differences are large. Milgram (1963) found that people were much more willing in reality than hypothetically to obey instructions to deliver painful and dangerous electric shocks to another person. West and Brown (1975) found that people were vastly more generous and helpful in their hypothetical answers than in actual behavior.

The second level of work relies on self-report. Interviews and questionnaires ask people what sexual behaviors they have performed. In some cases people are asked to keep a diary to report on their sexual acts or feelings on a daily basis.

The self-report method is probably the most commonly used one in sexuality research, and its popularity is likely to continue. It is certainly better than the hypothetical method, because asking people what they have done is closer to reality than asking them what they might do under some imaginary circumstance.

Yet self-report suffers from a variety of flaws too. Self-reports are not entirely reliable, especially when one is dealing with such powerful material as sex. People selectively forget sexual behaviors they regret having performed (Downey, Ryan, Roffman, & Kulich, 1995). They may inflate or undercount certain activities simply because they want to conform to the societal standard of what is good and desirable. (For example, on nearly all surveys men report having had more sex partners and more sex than women-but this is not logically possible.) Surveys can also run into trouble by relying on volunteers, because

people who refuse to volunteer for sex research are generally different (in particular, they tend to have less sexual experience) than people who do volunteer. Ask yourself: Would you be willing to respond to a long series of personal questions about your sex life and experiences? Your level of willingness probably tells something about yourself, including how comfortable you are with your own sexuality.

The third level consists of objective information, based on observations of sexual behavior that are not dependent on self-report. A broad range of methods is included in this category. Research may explore whether people actually engage in sexual behavior with someone. It may measure people's physical responses while watching erotica (such as by means of electrodes on the genitals). It may examine how they respond to a sexually inappropriate remark.

The objective, behavioral measures do not guarantee good science, but they are generally superior to hypothetical questions and self-reports. Their main drawbacks are practical. Researchers may want to learn about the causes of rape, for example, but it is unrealistic to expect that full-fledged rape can actually be studied in the laboratory. Self-report and hypothetical questions are a much more viable way to learn about rape, despite their drawbacks.

For the present, all these methods are likely to continue to be used. Any social science can be judged by the strength and diversity of its methods. The study of sex could certainly be improved by more and better research methods, but for now it is likely to continue with what it has been using. The important thing is for people who read the research reports to keep in mind what the limitations of these methods are and to think about how solid the conclusions can be.

### **A Social Exchange Theory of Sex**

As we have seen, the field of sexuality could benefit from new ideas and new theories. This section will offer one such theory. It takes a basic approach from social psychology and spells out implications of applying this to sex. This must be recognized as a preliminary effort, and so these conclusions should not be mistaken for proven truths or established facts. Rather, the goal is to offer a way of thinking about the social nature of sex. This approach can then be contrasted with others and can be adjusted according to research findings. In plain terms, it is offered here in the spirit of "playing with ideas." As you read the articles in the rest of this book, you may ask yourself from time to time whether this approach could explain the findings in the articles.

The basis for this theory is social exchange theory, a style of analysis developed by sociologists and psychologists around the middle of the 20th century. Homans (1950, 1961) and Blau (1964) analyzed human interactions in terms of the costs and benefits that each participant derives. People may interact because they seek benefits such as help, money, friendship, social support, protection, or a few laughs. They may avoid interactions because they fear costs such as physical harm, exploitation, embarrassment, rejection, or anxiety. What two people say or do together may reflect their respective pursuit of various rewards. Ideally, both people gain more benefits than rewards from an interaction.

A crucial point of social exchange theory is that supply and demand principles regulate social behavior. For example, people may desire praise, and their pursuit of praise will be different depending on how easily they can obtain praise. A given person's praise also

varies in value as a function of how rare it is: Someone who almost never says a kind word to anyone can get a strong reaction with a simple compliment, whereas someone who routinely compliments everybody cannot easily produce such a strong response. Beyond praise, even simple human contact can be either scarce or abundant. People who walk the streets of New York City, for example, have often developed habits of avoiding eye contact or any sort of interactions, simply because the amount of social interaction with so many different people would be overwhelming if you allowed yourself to be open to it. In contrast, prisoners in solitary confinement have been known to speak into toilets (the water in the pipes transmits the sound waves to other cells, where other prisoners can hear and reply) or to tap Morse code messages on walls, simply to have any shred of communication with another human being.

Social exchange analyses were applied to love and sex by Waller and Hill (1951). They proposed the "principle of least interest," which means that whoever is less in love has more power in the relationship. If you have been in a relationship where you loved the other person far more than that person loved you, you probably recall that you were willing to do and put up with a great deal. In contrast, if you were the one who was less in love, you most likely would have been far less accommodating, and the other person would be the one to do what you wanted.

A more recent social exchange analysis of sex by Baumeister and Tice (2000) emphasized another key point: Sex is a resource that women give to men. Put another way, men have a strong desire for sex, and women control the men's opportunities to get it, so men must offer women other resources in order to obtain sex. Sex is a female resource. It is something women have and men want, and so men must offer women something in exchange for it.

The view that women give sex to men is consistent with Waller and Hill's (1951) principle of least interest—if we assume that men want sex more than women. By this view, women may desire sex, but men desire it more, and so ultimately the woman is doing something for the man (or giving something to him) in the act of sex. Hence to make the social exchange work, he has to give her something in return. If women wanted sex more than men, then the men would be doing the women a favor by having sex with them, and the women would owe the men something in exchange.

Claiming that women give sex to men entails that the two genders are not really equal partners in bed. This may seem contrary to recent political and ideological views that have sought to depict male and female sexuality as essentially the same. By the social exchange view, when a man and a woman make love, even if they both perform the same acts (e.g., oral sex) and both enjoy orgasms, the transaction is not quite an equitable sharing. Instead, she has given him something of value, to a much greater extent than what he has given her.

To be sure, this social exchange approach is compatible with aspects of both evolutionary and feminist (or constructionist) thought, and so it is not a rival theory that will require people to choose one or the other. Evolutionary analyses emphasize that males desire to copulate with many females and must often offer them something in return (e.g., Symons, 1979). Moreover, the female orgasm is a relatively recent development in evolution, raising the suspicion that males in most species desire and enjoy sex more than women. Evolutionary analyses also emphasize the principle of "female choice," which holds that males of many species have a broad range of sexual desire but the female is the one who ultimately decides whether sex takes place or not. The principle of female choice dramatizes how males

must offer the female something to induce her to change her initially skeptical or negative attitude into a positive one, so that the couple can have sex.

Despite these compatibilities with evolutionary thinking, the social exchange theory is essentially a social and cultural theory rather than an evolutionary one. It emphasizes current social conditions, such as supply and demand and a fluctuating set of norms and standards for how much sexual activity the woman will permit the man in exchange for what degree of commitment or expenditure he offers her.

The social exchange approach can also be integrated with important aspects of feminist thought. Feminists have long sought to regard sex in the broader context of "gender politics," which means the power relations between men and women. The social exchange analysis of sex offers a compelling reason that men may have sought to oppress women in political, economic, legal, and other spheres: The more desperate women are for such basic resources, the more they would presumably be willing to exchange sex for them. In plain terms, a needy woman will be more likely to offer a man sex at bargain rates. For example, at many points in history some women have been willing to be a kept mistress of a married man. By that arrangement, he would pay her rent and other expenses, in exchange for which he would be permitted to have sex with her from time to time. Such arrangements are probably more common when women are prevented by job discrimination and other barriers from supporting themselves. In contrast, when women can earn good money and support themselves by regular work, the supply of potential kept mistresses is probably much reduced.

Despite these convergences, the social exchange theory does differ from feminist approaches in some crucial respects. For feminists, men use sex along with other things to pursue their ultimate goal of keeping power over women. In other words, power is the goal, and sex is only a means. In contrast, this social exchange analysis emphasizes sex as the uppermost thing men want from women, and gaining power is a strategy men will use to try to improve their access to sex. Thus, sex is the goal, and power is the means.

What is it that women want in exchange for sex? There is certainly more than one answer. Men may offer a woman money, status, respect, or other resources. Simply being permitted to interact with elite individuals is a resource that many people covet, and women can gain such access by offering sex. The phenomenon of groupies, for example, consists of young women who are able to interact with famous celebrity musicians—who otherwise would be far out of the women's reach—by having sex with them. More generally, women can interact with men of a higher social status if the women offer sex.

Commitment may be another important thing that men can offer women in exchange for sex. Throughout much of history, men's main opportunity for regular sex was through marriage, and it was necessary to marry in order to obtain sex. Marriage entailed a lifetime commitment to share the man's possessions, home, and earnings with the woman (and not with anyone else outside their family). To be sure, sex was not all the woman brought to a marriage. By and large, wives have done the majority of housework and child care, and in many societies women have contributed a greater share of the food than the men. Still, unmarried men can usually pay someone to do their housework, whereas paying for sex has a variety of drawbacks including high expense and risks. Hence sex becomes a major reason that men get married. Grandmother was right: If he can get the milk for free, he is less eager to buy the cow.

Another interesting and relevant question is whether the woman really gives up anything of value by having sex. The transaction appears one-sided: She gets something from him but gives up nothing. If anything, she gains too, insofar as she gets sexual pleasure and the satisfaction of her own sexual desires.

Yet there does seem to be a sense of giving something up. (Indeed, the phrase "give it up" is sometimes used to describe women's participation in sex.) Also, women sometimes feel exploited or used in sex, and this implies that they have taken some loss in the transaction, as opposed to simply having failed to get the best possible price. It would be interesting to know what it is about bad sexual experiences that makes them bad.

As already noted, the original social exchange theorists claimed that social rewards lose their value whenever they are given out too freely. So the woman's capacity to command a high price for sex is a limited resource, in a sense, and the more lovers she has, the less value there is. In that sense, she does give up something of value each time she goes to bed with a new partner. No single partner makes much of a difference (well, beyond the first), but as they accumulate they collectively make her sexual favors less of a compliment.

Furthermore, a woman's sex appeal is limited in time, even if it does not obviously diminish by being used by her to get what she wants, or even by being given away freely. She is young and beautiful for only a short part of her life. So in that sense she needs to be getting a good bargain for sex, because in reality she only makes a relatively small number of deals. By the time she reaches the age of fifty, or perhaps even forty, she gets fewer offers.

Women's situation thus pushes them in both directions, or perhaps more precisely away from both extremes: A woman who never has sex has failed to capitalize on a major asset, but a woman who has sex too frequently and freely depreciates her asset's value. As we shall see, the social exchange analysis will suggest several other ways in which women are pulled or pushed in opposite directions in terms of sex, and so the net result is likely to be that adult women maintain a profound ambivalence about sex and will have widely mixed feelings about it.

Is this social exchange analysis a useful theory for analyzing sexual behavior? One way to evaluate it is to see how well it fits an assortment of sexual behaviors. The next few sections will explore some of them.

## Prostitution

The most obvious form of social exchange of sex occurs in prostitution. The essence of prostitution is that one person gives another money and gets sex in return. Although in some parts of the world (and even some U.S. cities) prostitutes accept credit cards, cash is still probably the most common form of payment. In any case, the exchange is clear: Money transfers from one person to another, as a condition of having sex. The two people may never see each other again, but in theory each has gotten something of value.

It is probably not very controversial to analyze prostitution in exchange terms, because that is its very nature. It is however worth pointing out that there is a severe gender imbalance. Women hardly ever pay men for sex. Men pay female prostitutes for sex. Male prostitutes also cater mainly to male customers.

This one-sided pattern supports the view of sex as something that men obtain from women, rather than the reverse. Some women can earn a living, even perhaps a pretty good one, by giving men sex in exchange for money. In contrast, hardly any men are able to earn



money by having women pay them to have sex. For a woman to pay a man for sex would be contrary to the principle that sex is a female resource. The one-sided nature of prostitution thus fits the social exchange theory.

### Rape and Sexual Coercion

Whereas prostitution involves following an explicit set of rules about exchanging for sex, rape involves violating those rules. From this perspective, rape and sexual coercion occur when men try to obtain sex by force, without giving the woman anything in exchange. Rape thus resembles theft or looting of property: Using force to take something from someone else without giving the appropriate value in return.

Several features of rape augment this view. For one, sexually coercive men tend to view gender interactions as based on rules and scripts that are somewhat exploitative and sometimes ignored. In particular, they sometimes endorse the view that men are justified in using force to obtain sex if the woman has encouraged the man or led him on (Kanin, 1985).

Courtship rape patterns also suggest that the sexually coercive males have an implicit concept of exchange. On the face of it, it seems surprising that many rapes occur between people who have been dating for a substantial period of time and have become emotionally intimate. Yet a national survey found that the most commonly reported category of men who had forced women into sex against their will was "someone you were in love with at the time," a category that in fact accounted for nearly half the total (Laumann et al., 1994). It seems reasonable to assume that a man and woman who are in love are not strangers or first dates and that some ongoing relationship exists between them. If rape or sexual coercion occurs, it is presumably because the woman refuses to have sex despite this intimate relationship (which is of course her right). Why then would a man force her at this point? He may well feel that he has invested a substantial amount of time, energy, and expense into wooing her and that her refusal of sexual intercourse is an unfair refusal to give him what he has earned.

The asymmetry of rape is also consistent with the exchange analysis. Recent work suggests that women engage in sexual coercion against male victims less often than men coerce women, although the difference is not as large as has often been thought (Anderson & Struckman-Johnson, 1998). Yet the degree of trauma in male versus female victims is far from equal, and in fact most men who are victims of female sexual coercion recover well and look back on the incident as a relatively minor, unimportant event, even if distasteful. Social exchange theory explains why male victims might suffer less anguish than female ones. Because sex is not a male resource, the male victims have not lost anything of value, as it were. The women do lose, and therefore, are more upset.

If we emphasized social exchange as the only reason for sex, then women would seemingly never coerce men, but this is clearly false. Sometimes women do desire sex and are willing to use pressure and force to gain cooperation from reluctant men. A milder version of the social exchange analysis would allow such incidents to occur but would insist that they lack one dimension of trauma that is central to male rapes of women, namely forcible theft of the female resource. When a woman forces a man to have sex against his will, she does not take a resource from him in the same way that a male rapist takes something from a woman, according to social exchange. Hence the greater trauma of the female victim.

## Sex Partners and Social Status

Research on mating and sex partners has long observed that couples are not usually equals in all respects. Typically the man has higher income, status, education, or other resources than the woman (e.g., Bernard, 1982). The difference is usually fairly slight, because people generally mate with people from their own network. Still, it is common for the husband to outrank his wife slightly on various measures of status. Men are typically a little better educated, have more money, come from a higher ranking family, and so forth, than their wives.

Social exchange analysis can explain this inequality. This returns to the point made earlier that a man and woman are not quite equal partners in bed. People must offer each other various rewards in order to attract each other. But since sex is a female resource, it is one of the rewards a woman offers a man, rather than vice versa. Therefore the man has to offer her more in return.

Put another way, sex is not an act of equal contribution by men and women. The woman contributes something more than the man, namely the female resource of sex itself. If everything else is completely equal, then the man has benefited more than the woman by the act of sex. In contrast, if he has more to offer, such as being a slightly higher ranking person according to the values prevailing in society, then that superiority may make up for the difference.

Yet another way to express this point is that people want to mate with the most desirable partners they can attract. Because sex is a female resource, a woman can attract someone better than she could if she were a man with exactly the same social status. She can offer him her education, socioeconomic status, and everything else about who she is-plus sex. Sex is not part of what he gives her, and so the other parts of what he offers (again, education, socioeconomic status, and so forth) have to be that much better, in order to make the deal equitable.

Meanwhile, having sex has consequences for status as well. Insofar as the exchange principle holds and women give sex to men, then having many sex partners will add to men's status but detract from women's. Because men gain by sex whereas women give up something of value, men will look better if they have a high number whereas women look better if they have a low number of partners. This has certainly been the traditional stereotype, according to which a man with many lovers is regarded as having been especially successful, whereas a woman with many partners is derogated as a slut. There is some evidence that these attitudes persist today. Regan and Dreyer (1999) investigated the reasons people gave for engaging in casual sex. Men were significantly more likely than women to say that they would seek such sexual escapades in order to increase their status in the eyes of their friends. In fact, women hardly ever said that engaging in casual sex improved their status.

It also seems likely that the differential implications for status explain the persistent finding that men report having more sex partners than women, even though that is logically impossible: In a population that is half male and half female, men must on average have exactly the same number of heterosexual partners as women. Recent evidence has concluded that the gender discrepancy in reported tallies of partners reflects different cognitive strategies, such as the fact that men count more borderline actions (e.g., oral sex) as

qualifying as sex, and that men estimate and round upwards whereas women try to count and selectively forget some experiences (Brown & Sinclair, 1999; Sanders & Reinisch, 1999; Wiederman, 1997). Thus, men count their sex partners in ways that furnish higher tallies whereas women do it in ways that yield lower tallies, which suggests that men are motivated to claim high numbers while women desire to report low tallies (Baumeister & Tice, 2000).

The fact that men report more sex partners than women is also relevant to the notion that the value of having sex with a particular woman is gradually debased as she accumulates many partners. As I explained in the introductory exposition of exchange theory, any commodity is seen as more valuable when it is rare, and this applies to each woman's sexual favors. As she grants them more widely, the scarcity is lost, and so the value of her sexual favors is diminished. Each woman is therefore motivated to have (or at least claim to have had) a low number of sex partners, so that going to bed with her will continue to be a rare and special event for the fortunate man. Furnishing a low tally of prior sex partners would support this strategy. (At the extreme, for example, a prostitute or slut cannot confer much of value by having sex with someone.) No such concerns apply to the man, of course, because there is no sense in which he confers value by having sex with someone. Hence there is no corresponding motivation for the man to claim a low number of partners. If anything, the opposite contingency applies, according to which he gains prestige by having sex with the most valuable women. Having had intercourse with dozens of prostitutes, for example, would not confer much credit to him, whereas having had sex with a series of virgins or other highly selective women will.

### Courtship

Processes of courtship conform to the social exchange analysis. To be sure, courtship is not a monolithic or unidimensional process, and many factors are at work. Courtship may involve seeking a desirable parenting partner or reliving one's personal neuroses, among many other goals.

Still, sexual negotiations are one important aspect of sex. A social exchange analysis' offers a perspective that can help predict and explain how they proceed. The central point is this: In courtship, the male is typically trying to induce the female to have sex with him.

The basic asymmetry in sexual persuasion is well documented. Men want to have sex earlier in the relationship than women. McCabe's (1987) large study of Australian couples found that at all stages of relationships, men wanted more sexual intimacy than they were getting, whereas women did not. For example, a typical couple would spend some time at a stage in which they both enjoyed heavy petting, and the man wanted to move along to oral or genital intercourse but the woman said no.

Given this asymmetry, it generally falls to the man to try to persuade the woman to have sex, rather than vice versa. For the man, courtship is in substantial part a prolonged campaign to persuade the woman to have sex with him.

In order for the social exchange to result in sex, the man has to invest more resources than the woman does, because sex would constitute an important contribution by her. That is why it falls to the man to pay for dinner, bring flowers, buy the movie tickets, and so forth. Sex is something that she gives him, and so he must first give her some other things in exchange.

What men and women dislike in each other during courtship is often a matter of violating the terms of fair exchange. Buss (1989) studied anger between men and women and drew revealing conclusions. Men object to women who extract resources from them but then fail to come through with sexual favors. The infamous "cockteaser" was disliked not simply for being sexually desirable but for getting the man to spend money (as well as time and other resources) in the hope that she will consent to sex, only to refuse him in the end. Meanwhile, women object most strongly to men who fail to fulfill their part of the bargain too. In particular, some men will falsely say they love the woman or pretend to want to marry her in order to obtain sex, but after bedding her they reveal that they did not really want a lasting relationship or commitment.

Thus, social exchange theory says there is some validity to the stereotypical complaints. Men might say "I paid for her dinner but she didn't give me anything," upset that the woman let him spend his money on her but failed to give sex in return. His indignation seems based on the assumption that they had already made a contractual agreement that he would buy her food in exchange for her letting him have sex.

Women, meanwhile, might worry that "After we had sex, he never called me." Most adult women are very competent at operating a telephone, and so one might ask why she does not call him if she wants to talk, but that misses the point. She consented to sex on the assumption that he wanted a lasting relationship and would continue paying attention to her, and in her view if he fails to call her, he has not fulfilled his part of the bargain. The broader threat is that he simply obtained sex from her and then skedaddled. She wanted to give sex only in exchange for lasting intimacy. In a sense, by failing to call her, he has cheated her out of sex.

Sex, at least the heterosexual kind, is typically understood as something that happens between a man and a woman. Social exchange theory, however, links the couple's actions to what other people are doing as well. In a sense, each small community has a standard going rate that specifies how much a man should invest in exchange for obtaining sex. Clearly the going rate varies widely. In some times and places, a man had to make a lifetime commitment to share all his wealth and earnings with the woman and to forego having sex with anyone else (at least in principle), in order to be permitted to have sex with the woman. At other times and places a much smaller investment of his resources has been considered sufficient. Still, the crucial point is that each couple's sexual negotiations take place with some reference to what everyone else is doing and what the standard going rate is.

As a result, each couple's sexual activity constitutes a relatively good "deal" for one person and a bad "deal" for the other. If the man gets to have sex with the woman without investing the resources or making the commitment that is typical, then he has gained a significant benefit, while the woman has been "cheap" and may regard herself as having been taken advantage of. In contrast, if he has to invest more than usual in order to have sex, then she has done well. It is a fair deal for both only insofar as it conforms roughly to the going rate in that community—in other words, the woman yielded the appropriate amount of sexual favors in return for the man's investment of an appropriate amount of other resources including money, attention, and commitment.

To be sure, these market calculations may be disguised and even subsumed by other factors. If the man is in love with the woman, he may be perfectly willing to marry her before they have sex, even though most other couples in their community have sex after a few dates. Likewise, the woman may give sex more readily than the norm because she loves the man or

simply because she has high sexual desire and does not want to hold back in order to get the full measure of what most women in her community can expect. Nonetheless, each couple's activity is probably affected to some degree by the norms and standards, to the extent that they are accurately understood.

It is interesting to note, however, that these may not be accurately understood in many cases. Cohen and Shotland (1996) found that most men and women misperceived the sexual norms on their own campus, specifically overestimating the sexual activity of others. More precisely, most men and women assumed that they themselves would wait longer to have sex than the average man or woman would. It may therefore be that most couples carry out their negotiations under the assumption that sex has a cheaper average "price" than it actually does. In other times and places, this may have been the other way around. For example, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, virginity until marriage was the norm and the public expectation, whereas in fact many couples started having intercourse prior to marriage (although mainly when they were engaged). The secrecy surrounding premarital sex may therefore have created a false impression of a sexual price that was higher than the reality.

Most theories about sex make some reference to local norms and standards. There is after all little dispute that couples regulate their sexual behavior according to what their peers and fellows consider appropriate. The social exchange theory differs from the others in explaining why people should care about what the norms and standards are, however, and indeed why young people may be so curious about what other couples are doing. The concern arises from the need to negotiate a fair or advantageous exchange: Fairness depends on what the going rate in the local mating marketplace is. For other theories, the interest in conforming to others has to be understood as simply a helpful way of dealing with uncertainty or as an instance of the more general pattern of conformity among young people.

Possibly the two theories can be distinguished by examining the relative importance of norms for heterosexual negotiations, as opposed to other kinds of sexual activity. Masturbation, for example, does not involve social exchange, so the social exchange theory would predict that people would not determine their masturbatory behavior based on what other people are doing. Homosexual couples may also lie outside the normal processes of social exchange (possibly except for cases in which butch-femme roles recreate the exchange), and so they too may be less likely to conform their sexual behavior to what other couples are doing.

### Gender Differences in Sex Drive

We return to the central point in the social exchange theory of sex, which is that sex is a female resource. Why? Why do men give women resources in exchange for sex, instead of vice versa? Women like sex too, so why don't they pay men for sex, or at least buy dinner and try to coax their pants off?

The principle of least interest provides a likely answer. Whoever wants the relationship less has more power in it. It applies perfectly well to sex: Whoever wants it more has to do the persuading.

Thus, the whole structure of social exchange seems based on the premise that women want sex less than men. If women wanted sex more than men, sex would essentially be a favor that men do for women. Women would owe the men gratitude for sex and probably

would have to be giving them things in return. Women would be spurred on to take chances and perform heroic feats so as to have something to offer men, in exchange for sex.

But they don't. The men do all those things. According to social exchange theory, female sexual desire is weaker and/or less frequent than male sexual desire. The greater desire of males makes them willing to offer women resources in exchange for it.

Is this tenable? Baumeister and Catanese (2000) reviewed a great deal of published research findings to ascertain whether men desire sex more than women. The basis for the approach was to imagine two women (or two men), one of whom had a stronger sex drive than the other. How would a social scientist expect the two women's behavior to differ, given their difference in sex drive? Logically, one would likely expect that the woman with the stronger drive, as compared with the other woman, would think about sex more, have more sexual fantasies, desire more frequent sex, desire more sex partners, masturbate more, be less willing or able to live without sex, and show other, similar signs of high motivation. Given those seemingly straightforward predictions about how to recognize a difference in sex drive, the next step was to compare men versus women on each dimension. We searched the literature for any and all studies that reported data on both men and women.

The picture painted by many dozens of published studies was clear and consistent: Men desire sex more than women. On every dimension we investigated, men showed signs of higher sexual desire. Men think about sex more than women. Men have more frequent sexual fantasies than women. Men report being sexually aroused more often than women. Men desire sex more often than women in nearly all phases of relationships, from first dates to twenty-year marriages. Men like a greater variety of sexual practices than women. Men have more favorable attitudes toward most sexual activities than women, and men also like both their own and their partners' genitals more than women like them (Ard, 1977; Beck, Bozman, & Qualtrough, 1991; Eysenck, 1971; Laumann et al., 1994; Leitenberg & Henning, 1995; McCabe, 1987; Oliver & Hyde, 1993; Reinholtz & Muehlenhard, 1995).

Men desire more partners than women, and men actually report more partners than women. Although the last finding is logically implausible (because most sex acts involve one man and one woman), it probably reflects distorted counting based on the greater desire among men for multiple partners. When different numbers of sex partners are logically possible, such as in homosexual activity, in extramarital activity, or in fantasy, the gender differences are often quite large (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Laumann et al., 1994; Lawson, 1988).

Masturbation is a fairly straightforward indication of strength of sex drive, and men masturbate considerably more than women (Arafat & Cotton, 1974; Asayama, 1975; Laumann et al., 1994; Sigusch & Schmidt, 1973). Moreover, among people who do not masturbate, women are more likely than men to say the reason is lack of interest or desire (Arafat & Cotton, 1974). Living without sex is much more difficult for men than for women, even when the individual is firmly committed to celibacy (such as among Catholic priests and nuns, for whom celibacy is a sacred obligation; see Murphy, 1992). Girls reach puberty before boys, but boys commence sexual activity at a younger age than girls, and so the interval between being sexually capable and becoming sexually active is shorter at both ends for boys (Asayama, 1975; Knoth, Boyd, & Singer, 1988; Laumann et al., 1994; Lewis, 1973; Wilson, 1975). In adulthood, men seek and initiate sex more than women, whereas women decline and refuse sex more than men (Brown & Auerback, 1981; Byers & Heinlein, 1989; Clark & Hatfield, 1989; LaPlante, McCormick, & Brannigan, 1980; O'Sullivan & Byers,

1992). Men sacrifice more resources to get sex, whether this involves spending money for sexual stimulation or putting one's career or marriage at risk in order to have a brief sexual fling. Last, men rate their sex drives as stronger than women rate theirs (Mercer & Kohn, 1979).

Taken together, these findings make it safe to say that men desire sex more than women. Certainly women desire sex too. Also, these are only averages, and there is plenty of variability within each gender, so undoubtedly there are many women who desire sex more than many men. For the purposes of social exchange theory, however, the crucial fact is simply that one person desires it more-because that person is therefore at a disadvantage. Because men want sex more than women, men will find themselves in the position of having to persuade or induce women to take part, generally by offering women something else in return.

Is this difference the product of socialization and cultural roles, or of biologically innate differences? Our tentative answer is that it is probably a combination of both. It seems undeniable that culture has suppressed female sexuality more strongly than men's, such as in the way that girls are socialized to resist sex and preserve their "virtue." (The different pressures are evident even in the simple fact that sexual restraint is more widely associated with virtue for women than men.) On the other hand, even when society encourages women to enjoy sex (such as in marital intercourse), when high standards of sexual restraint are the same for both men and women (such as among Catholic clergy), or when pressures and warnings have been primarily directed at men (such as with masturbation), the evidence still indicates that women desire sex less than men. At present, therefore, it seems most plausible to suggest that socialization tends to capitalize on and exaggerate differences that are already innately there.

### Sex as Benefit

If sex is a female resource, then obtaining sex is a desirable outcome for men but not for women. Sedikides, Oliver, and Campbell (1994) surveyed a sample of students about the costs and benefits they perceived for romantic relationships. Consistent with exchange theory, they found that men said that sex was an important benefit of romantic relationships, and women did not. Thus, although romantic relationships increase sexual experience for both men and women, only the men see this as a benefit that they gain.

If sex is not a benefit for women, is it a cost? Sedikides et al. (1994) did not find that either gender rated having sex as a cost. To be sure, this finding may reflect the relative youth of their sample, and older people may be more likely to rate it as a cost. For example, Beck, Bozman, and Qualtrough (1991) found that most women past the age of 25 reported having engaged in sex when they did not feel any desire, and they did this usually in order to please a relationship partner, which indicates that sex is indeed sometimes an activity that women perform out of duty rather than desire.

Still, the fact that women did not describe sexual activity as one of the costs of romantic relationships fits well with the gender difference in sex drive and with the social exchange theory's principle of least interest. Women desire and enjoy sex too - their desire is merely less insistent than men's desire. Because sex is more widely available to women than to men, sex is not perceived by women as a benefit of romantic relationships, but because it is a positive outcome, it is not a cost either.

A darker side of this exchange was suggested by research on unrequited love. In unrequited love, one person wants a love relationship but the other does not. If the woman desires the relationship, the man may exploit her feelings in order to obtain sex from her. In contrast, if it is the man who desires the relationship, the woman would be less likely to see this as an opportunity to get sex, according to social exchange theory. Some evidence consistent with this was reported by Baumeister and Wotman (1992), who found that only women reported sexual exploitation as one of the costs of unrequited love.

### Suppression of Female Sexuality

Although the social exchange theory is partly based on the idea that women's sexual desires are not as strong or frequent as men's, so that the men want sex more than the women (which is why the men have to give something in exchange), this does not mean that all differences in sexual patterns are natural or innate. In fact, we think the relatively weak female sex drive is a product of both nature and culture. Nature may have created some difference to start with, but culture increases it.

This view of gender differences is explicitly based on a mixture of nature and culture. Nature makes the genders somewhat different to start with, and culture either exaggerates or downplays the differences. Our modern society is clearly now in a stage of downplaying them and minimizing them, and our culture seems increasingly annoyed that the differences (e.g., in salary and achievement and time spent with children) refuse to disappear. In contrast, at many times in history culture sought to exaggerate the differences between men and women, assigning them to very separate spheres and life paths.

So how does this suppression come about? There are actually a couple main theories. One is that men suppress women's sexuality. Several reasons have been suggested why men might do this (e.g., Buss, 1994; Sherfey, 1966). One is that men want to possess women and ensure sexual fidelity, so that men can be sure that the children their wives bear are not those of another man. Another is that progress in civilization requires the suppression of female sexuality, because if human women carried on like female chimpanzees copulating dozens of times per day and exhausting every male in sight-there would be chaos rather than peace and order. A third explanation is that men envy women's greater capacity for sex and feel insecure about having to satisfy them, so they stifle women to make themselves feel good. A fourth explanation is that suppressing female sexuality is part of the broader male project of keeping women in an inferior, subjugated position in society.

A very different explanation could be put forward on the basis of social exchange theory, however. By this approach, women might seek to suppress each other's sexuality. The basis for this is rooted in the idea of sex as a female resource and in simple supply-and-demand principles. Men must give women resources in exchange for sex, and each community has its marketplace according to which there are standards for how much each man must give. As with any resource, scarcity increases the price. Women are in a position comparable to a monopoly: They have control over something that others want, and like other monopolies, they will be tempted to restrict the supply so as to fetch a higher price. This pattern, after all, is the main reason that most countries try to prevent a company from getting a monopoly.

Thus, the two main theoretical approaches differ as to whether women or men are the main agents responsible for the suppression of female sexuality. Baumeister and Twenge



(2000) reviewed a broad variety of evidence in the attempt to ascertain whether men or women play the main role in putting pressure on girls and women to restrict their sexual activities. Our findings pointed consistently toward the social exchange (female resource) theory. They can be briefly summarized here.

One important source of evidence concerns the direct influences on adolescent girls to restrain their sexuality. These influences are almost exclusively female. Mothers communicate a significant amount with their teenage daughters about sexual morality, pregnancy, and related topics, whereas fathers communicate very little about such topics (DeLamater, 1989; Du Bois-Reymond & Ravesloot, 1996; Libby, Gray, & White, 1978; Nolin & Petersen, 1992), and closeness and communication with the mother appeared to keep the daughter from becoming promiscuous, whereas a comparable relationship with the father was irrelevant (Kahn, Smith, & Roberts, 1984; Lewis, 1973). A girl's female peers and friends have a significant influence on her sexual activity (and one that restrains her from going too far), whereas her male peers and friends have little or no influence (Billy & Udry, 1985; Du Bois-Reymond & Ravesloot, 1996; Rodgers & Rowe, 1990). The boyfriend is the only male who has been shown to have significant influence on the young woman's sexuality, but his influence is generally in the opposite direction (i.e., he tends to encourage more sexual activity; Du Bois-Reymond & Ravesloot, 1996). In short, the data on adolescent females find no evidence of male influences contributing significantly to suppress sexuality, whereas the female influences are important and significant.

Likewise, studies of adult women suggest that the main restraining influences on sex are female. Women consistently express stronger disapproval than men of premarital sexual activity among women (King, Balswick, & Robinson, 1977; Robinson & Jedlicka, 1982). Women anticipate that their female friends will disapprove of their sexual adventures and are sometimes inclined to conceal them from their female friends as a result (Carns, 1973).

The "double standard" of sexual morality is particularly relevant to the suppression of female sexuality. The essence of the double standard is that certain sexual activities are acceptable for men but not for women, and so in effect women's sexuality is constrained in ways that men's is not. A meta-analysis by Oliver and Hyde (1993) found that in all studies that investigated this question, women supported the double standard more than men. Although recent data have had difficulty confirming that people continue to endorse a double standard, people still believe that unnamed other people still hold it. Millhausen and Herold (1999) asked young women who they thought would judge a woman more harshly than a man for sexual experiences, and far more respondents said women (than men) were the harsher judges of sexually active women.

In some cultures, female sexuality is suppressed by stronger measures than gossip and a bad reputation. Surgical procedures are used, including subincision (cutting off the clitoris) and infibulation (sewing the vagina shut). Although Western feminists have taken the lead in denouncing these practices, it is mainly women who support, enforce, and administer them. Thus, the mother or grandmother decides whether the daughter will have the operation; the operation is performed by a woman, with no men present; the female peer group mocks and derogates girls who have not yet had the surgery; and the practices are defended and supported by women more than men (Boddy, 1989; Greer, 1999; Hicks, 1996; Lightfoot-Klein, 1989; Williams & Sobieszcyk, 1997). There is some evidence that men oppose the practice and prefer women who can enjoy sex more (Shandall, 1967, 1979; also Greer, 1999; Hicks, 1996).

These and other findings suggest that the suppression of female sexuality has been shaped by social exchange. Women are better off when sex is scarce and men have few outlets for sexual satisfaction, because men will offer women more under those circumstances than they will offer when sexual gratification is widely and freely available. It is rational for women to try to restrict men's sexual opportunities, and one effective way to do this is to enforce norms and informal pressures that hold women in general back from sexual indulgence.

This analysis of the cultural suppression of female sexuality puts the individual woman in a position of conflict. Each individual woman can gain an advantage by going farther than other women in sex, but the cause of all women collectively is best served by sexual restraint. Thus, a woman can gain more attention from men by being willing to offer more sex than other women will offer, and in this way she may be able to get her pick of the most desirable men (including possibly stealing another woman's man). Her own sexual desires may also contribute to pushing her to take part in sexual activities. Yet she is also better off if women in general exhibit sexual restraint, and so her loyalty to the female cause (along with pressure from other women) may induce her to hold back. This dilemma is similar to the "Commons dilemma," in which the best interests of the group are opposed to the best interests of the individual. The term "commons dilemma" comes from common grazing grounds shared by all shepherds. Each individual shepherd may benefit by making maximum use of this common grazing area, but collectively everyone is better off if everyone exercises restraint, because if too many sheep graze on the common grounds, the grass will be unable to replenish itself and the resource will be destroyed. Individual shepherds thus face an ongoing conflict between their private, immediate self-interest and doing what is best for the group in the long run.

### The Sexual Revolution

One of the great events of the 20th century was the liberalizing of sexual attitudes and behaviors. This change is commonly called the "Sexual Revolution." Most treatments consider it to have begun soon after the middle of the century and to have wrought its major changes in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with some retreat occurring in the 1980s and 1990s. To be sure, more careful treatments have argued that there were perhaps multiple sexual revolutions, beginning perhaps early in the 20th century when the automobile and urban life enabled young people to spend time together in couples away from chaperones (e.g., Petersen, 1999).

Why did the Sexual Revolution happen? A major social event is likely to have had multiple causes. Undoubtedly one important factor was the invention of the birth control pill, which gave women unprecedented advantages in convenience and reliability of contraception. Yet this alone seems insufficient to explain the full set of changes. For one thing, some forms of reasonably effective contraception had been available for decades if not centuries. For another, some forms of sexual activity (such as oral sex) do not require contraception.

The social exchange theory of sex can make some contribution to understanding the sexual revolution by viewing it as essentially a market correction. In very simple terms, the market price for sex was reduced, and women became willing to offer sex to men at a much more widely affordable price. Whereas previously the majority of women had expected a man to make a lifetime commitment of financial support and sexual fidelity before they went

to bed with him, after the sexual revolution many women began to offer sexual favors for a much briefer and more transient commitment, such as a couple of dates, gifts or meals, or a nonbinding declaration of feeling affection for her.

The Sexual Revolution was hardly forced upon women. Instead, most evidence indicates that women changed more than men (Arafat & Yorburg, 1973; Bauman & Wilson; 1974; Birenbaum, 1970; Croake & James, 1973; DeLamater & MacCorquodale, 1979; Sherwin & Corbett, 1985; Schmidt & Sigusch, 1972). Women's attitudes became more positive toward sex, toward their own bodies, and toward greater permissiveness. Many women embraced their new freedom to engage in sex as a form of liberation.

Yet women also appear to have suffered more than men from the new sexual freedom. An early sign was an issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1980 reporting on a readers' poll that elicited a surprising (to the editors, at least) outpouring of women's negative feelings about the Sexual Revolution and the negative effects it had on women's lives (Petersen, 1999). More systematic data followed, such as careful and systematic national polls that asked people about the greater sexual freedom (Smith, 1994). Although both women and men expressed doubts about whether the new permissiveness was a good thing, women were consistently and significantly more negative about it.

Thus, women changed more than men, but they also came to express doubts and regrets about those changes. The female resource theory helps explain the negative attitudes: The Sexual Revolution greatly reduced what women could expect from men in exchange for sex.

Moreover, the previous section suggested that the suppression of female sexuality is largely enforced by and for women. The Sexual Revolution was clearly a defeat for whoever was trying to suppress female sexuality, because female sexuality became much more liberal and active after that Revolution. If women were suppressing each other's sexuality, then the cause of women suffered a setback.

Why would women have permitted the Sexual Revolution to take place, if it resulted in a weaker bargaining position for them? One answer is that the substantial changes in women's position in society made it far less urgent to go on suppressing each other's sexuality. Nancy Cott (1979), who offered an early form of the social exchange analysis of sex, noted that women during Victorian times had relatively few rights and opportunities, and so effectively sex was the main resource they had with which to make a good life for themselves. Under those circumstances, it was imperative for each woman to get as much as possible in exchange for her sexual favors.

By 1960, however, things had changed dramatically. Women had acquired a broad range of rights and opportunities-political, financial, legal, educational, occupational, and more. Women therefore had opportunities to make decent lives for themselves without having to rely exclusively on using sex to induce a man to make a lifetime commitment. Maintaining sexual scarcity so as to keep the price of sex high was therefore far less necessary for modern women than it had been for previous generations of women, and it became possible to relax the pressures and restraints.

In short, women have spent most of history in a vulnerable, relatively weak position. They had few rights and opportunities, and sex was the main asset they controlled. Under those circumstances, it made rational sense for women to maintain pressure on each other to restrict the availability of sexual gratification to men. As society changed and women gained greater rights and opportunities, however, sex ceased to be their only meal ticket, and

eventually the point was reached where women could afford to make sex more readily available outside of marriage. The Sexual Revolution constituted that "market correction" in the price of sex. Yes, the change toward greater sexual permissiveness did weaken women's position in one respect, but women could afford to accept a lower price for sex because they had gained other resources.

### Mate Shortages

Most sex acts in human history have involved one man and one woman who were having a lasting relationship with each other. That pattern of mating has important implications for the operation of principles of supply and demand with regard to sex. As it happens, our species tends to produce about equal numbers of males and females, and so one-to-one mating works fairly well on the whole.

In some circumstances, however, an imbalance may develop, resulting in an oversupply of one gender vis-a.-vis the other. If decisions were made based on a democratic vote, then the majority gender would have more power. But the mating market is not democratic, and it operates by supply and demand rather than majority rule. Hence, whatever gender is in the minority gains greater power. These processes have been studied in an important work by Guttentag and Secord (1983), who compared many instances of unequal sex ratios across different cultures and historical periods.

Let us start with the obvious fact: If one gender is in the majority, then many of its members will be unable to secure a monogamous mate. For example, if a given college campus has twice as many men as women, then it will be far easier for the women than for the men to get a regular dating partner (or a date at all!). Many more men than women will be alone on Saturday night, or at least will be reduced to spending the time with members of their own gender. Under those circumstances, the men must compete with each other aggressively to attract female attention, and to keep a girlfriend a man must do what she wants. In contrast, if a different campus has twice as many women as men, the competitive pressures will fall more heavily on the women than the men, and each man will have much less trouble or exertion keeping his girlfriend. It is she who will have to do what he wants, in order to keep him from moving on to another woman. (Certainly there are other factors at work, but on average there will be a big difference between the dating environment on those two campuses, and anyone who moves from one to the other will be likely to recognize the contrast.)

According to the social exchange analysis, women control the "supply" of sex while men furnish the "demand." When men outnumber women, the demand will greatly exceed the supply. As with any economic resource, this will make the price high. Guttentag and Secord (1983) found ample evidence of such patterns. When men were in the majority, such as in the American Wild West (where there were dozens of men for every woman), the price of sex was high. Opportunities for premarital and extramarital sex were rare, and a man had to make a serious, long-term commitment to a woman (typically marriage) before he could have sex with her. Community standards were quite prudish. Similar patterns have been found in societies that practiced female infanticide, because that produces a shortage of women. Even today, places such as China have a shortage of women because many couples have abortions when they discover their fetus is female, and sexual morality in China is quite prudish and restrictive.

In contrast, when women are in the majority, the supply of sex is greater relative to the demand. In such cases, the price goes down. Men can get sex outside of marriage, and women have little power to demand commitment or even respectful treatment from men in exchange for sex. In simple terms, sex is free and easy when there are more women than men. Such permissive patterns have been observed after major wars, for example, when large numbers of young men have been killed and there are not enough men to go around. To some extent they arise even during a major foreign war, because the men are away in the military forces and too few remain at home to date the women. The relative shortage of men in modern African-American communities may contribute to similar patterns.

Even the financial aspects of mating change with the sex ratio. Petersen (1999) reported that during World War Two, the shortage of men on American college campuses drove women to advertise for prom dates, sometimes offering to furnish the car and pay all the expenses—a sharp reversal of the usual sex roles. More generally, Guttentag and Secord (1983) concluded that whether a marriage is settled by a dowry (money contributed by the bride's family) or the bride-price (money contributed by the groom's family) depends on the culture's traditional sex ratio. If there is usually a surplus of women, then the dowry becomes large and important, and penniless women will have a hard time finding a husband. If there is usually a shortage of women, however, the bride-price pattern prevails, and the man's family must contribute money.

There is one interesting difference between the dowry and the bride-price, however, as Guttentag and Secord (1983) noted. The bride-price is essentially a sum of money paid by the groom's family to the bride's family, much as if they are purchasing a wife for their son. In contrast, the dowry does not go to the groom's family but rather to the young couple, as a kind of financial endowment to help them get started in life. Guttentag and Secord said they found almost no evidence of any customs that suggest that a woman's family will purchase a husband for her from the man's family. This asymmetry fits neatly into the social exchange analysis. One does not "purchase" a man because he has no inherent value in the sexual sense. Women are the suppliers of sex, and so only women have inherent value. One may augment a woman's value by offering a dowry, as a way of encouraging the man to select her rather than another woman. The dowry resembles a bribe or kickback (to the young man) more than a purchase price (paid to his family). To put this another way, a family cannot make any money selling its sons, even when husbands are in short supply, but when wives are scarce a family can profit by "selling" its daughters.

## Pornography

Pornography may also merit consideration in terms of social exchange. Indeed, the frequently repeated charge that pornography "exploits" women seems to suggest an economic analysis, just as natural resources are "exploited" for profit by entrepreneurs.

The basic pattern of pornography resembles that of prostitution: Men are the main consumers and furnish the money that makes the industry profitable. To be sure, most pornography features both men and women, which may seem like an exception to the principle that sex is essentially a female resource. Still, it seems fair to argue that the male consumers of pornography regard the female stars as the crucial ones. For example, if one examines the box packages for pornographic video cassettes, it is immediately apparent that the women are the main attraction: Nearly all videos feature the female stars, and only occa-

sionally is a male star even included. Gay male films are an exception, of course, but those lie outside the heterosexual transaction dynamics, and indeed very few heterosexual men like to watch male homosexual pornography. They do, however, often love to watch female homosexual pornography, to the extent that most feature-length videos include at least one lesbian scene.

Thus, the pornography industry essentially relies on the same fundamental transaction that we have found throughout: Men exchange resources to get sexual stimulation from women. The only major difference is that many purveyors of pornography are men, and so the men may end up taking the profits, but this is not relevant, and it is doubtful that pornography consumers care whether the profits go into male or female hands (just as with prostitution): Their goal is simply to get sexual stimulation, for which a woman is the central and essential ingredient.

A more complex aspect to pornography was suggested by Nancy Cott's (1979) early articulation of a social exchange model of sex. As she put it, pornography (like prostitution) is essentially a low-cost substitute for genuine sexual gratification, and in that sense it threatens women's monopoly over sex—which is why women are likely to oppose pornography as if it were a threat to women in general. This is, after all, a common problem encountered by monopolies of any resource when they try to drive up the price by restricting the supply: Cheap substitutes become available and undercut their monopoly. Thus, if the oil-producing nations were to restrict the world supply of oil to the point where it became extremely expensive, it is likely that many places would turn to other sources of power. This is OPEC's worst nightmare, that the high cost of oil will spur the development of other energy sources and render oil obsolete, so that the oil producers would find themselves out of business. With sex, it hardly seems likely that pornography will actually replace desire for women in general, but there is still legitimate reason to worry that as men can find some degree of sexual gratification from pornography, they will become less dependent on women, and women's ability to get the best possible exchange value for their own sexual favors will be reduced.

### Infidelity

Both men and women generally desire their partners to be faithful to them, and sexual jealousy appears to be an almost universal aspect of human relationships (Reiss, 1986). Efforts to decide whether men or women are "more jealous" or "more possessive" have been inconsistent and inconclusive, and possibly the question does not have a meaningful answer when phrased in that way. For example, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that women seemed to be more sexually possessive than men, but this was largely due to the greater vulnerability and dependency that attended the role of a housewife who does not work outside the home. A housewife who lost her husband would not be able to support herself, and so she had good reason to fear her husband's interest in other women, but this fear seems rooted in rational economic circumstances rather than in some innate gender difference in possessiveness.

Although both men and women are sexually possessive to similar degrees, there are some interesting differences in the way these feelings are experienced and expressed. These may be relevant to the social exchange analysis of sex.

First, it appears that men place greater emphasis on the physical aspects of infidelity, namely the sex act itself. Buss, Larsen, Westen, and Semmelroth (1992) asked people whether they would be more upset if their partner had sexual intercourse with another person without emotional intimacy-or formed an intimate emotional attachment without ever having sexual intercourse. Women objected more to the emotional attachment, whereas men objected more strongly to the sex act itself. That finding fits the basic pattern that sex is a female resource: The man seems to feel he loses something when his female partner has sex with someone else, regardless of the emotional attachment to the other person. When a man is unfaithful, his female partner does not lose as much, unless there is an emotional attachment.

Consistent with that analysis, there has been a clear asymmetry to the penalties for infidelity throughout much of history. Specifically, sexual infidelity by women has been punished much more stringently than comparable actions by men (e.g., Bullough & Brundage, 1982). To some extent, this may simply follow from the difference in power. Men have held greater political power than women, and so men could make the laws, and perhaps men made laws to excuse their own behavior while punishing women. This does not seem to be a fully satisfactory explanation, however, for a variety of reasons-including that fact that today, even though men still make most of the laws, it is irrefutably clear that these man-made laws target men more than women for sexual offenses. Men are arrested for sexual crimes far more often than women (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1998).

The social exchange analysis is therefore useful as an additional way of understanding the tendency to punish women more severely than men for sexual infidelity. If sex is a female resource, then a wife's infidelity gives away something that belongs to the family and deprives the marriage of that value-in a way that a husband's infidelity does not. The husband does not deprive his wife of anything especially valuable when he has sex with a lover, whereas the unfaithful wife is regarded as depriving her husband of something valuable.

Converging support for this analysis comes from evidence about the gender of the interloper. Many men say that they would not mind their female partner having sex with another woman, even though they would not tolerate her having sex with another man. From the perspective of social exchange, the male lover takes something from the wife that a female lover does not take, and so the cuckolded husband only loses something of value if the wife has sex with another man.

To be sure, there are other possible explanations for the husband's objecting to male rather than female lovers. A man might say, "I don't care if she has sex with another woman, because that would be no threat: I can give her something that no woman can give her." That analysis breaks down, however, when one looks at the data about women's preferences. Wiederman and LaMar (1998) found that women objected more strongly to their male partner having sex with another man than with another woman.

In other words, both men and women preferred to have their partners to have sex with another woman than with a man. Why is the male interloper more threatening to both? The social exchange answer is that, in sex, men take and women give. A male lover thus takes something from your partner, regardless of whether your partner is male or female.

## Sex in Abusive Relationships

Domestic violence has gained recognition as a significant social problem. This takes many forms, the most common perhaps consisting of battering between siblings (e.g., Wiehe, 1991), but the present focus is on violence between husbands and wives. Both husbands and wives have been found to engage in spousal aggression, and indeed domestic violence is perhaps the only form of aggression in which women are as frequently aggressive as men (Archer, 2000; Arias, Sarnios, & O'Leary, 1987; Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; Breslin, Riggs, O'Leary, & Arias, 1990; O'Leary, Barlirig, Arias, Rosenbaum, Malone, & Tyree, 1989; Straus, 1980). Although women may initiate aggression as often as men, women suffer far more severe injuries (and deaths) at the hands of their spouses than men do (Archer, 2000).

A sample of violent, abusive relationships was studied by DeMaris (1997) with an eye to understanding how sexual relations were affected. One might assume that violence and abuse are signs of a bad relationship and that "making love" would be correspondingly uncommon in these cases, but DeMaris did not find this. Although conflict itself is apparently detrimental to sex, in that couples do not have sex during times of argument, the overall rate of sex in violent marriages appears to be above that in nonviolent marriages. Nor does this high rate of sex appear to be a matter of making up after fights. Rather, Demaris concluded that sex in violent relationships appears to be a matter of "extortion," in which the victim feels pressure to give sex to the violent partner as a way of appeasing that person.

The notion of giving sex is of course central to the social exchange analysis of sex. Still, social exchange emphasizes that women give sex to men. Is there a corresponding asymmetry in sexual appeasement in violent relationships? Yes. DeMaris found that rates of sexual intercourse were higher than average in relationships containing a violent husband. No such effect for wifely violence was found, however.

Apparently, then, female victims can placate their male abusers by offering sex, whereas male victims cannot placate their female abusers with sex. Sexual bribery is thus unidirectional, consistent with the social exchange analysis.

## Conclusion

It is clear that many patterns of sexual behavior can be understood in terms of social exchange. Specifically, it is useful to understand sex as a female resource in the sense of a commodity that women control and men desire, so that men must offer women some other resource or commodity in return for sex.

There are many meanings of sex, and social exchange is only one of them. Undoubtedly many sexual decisions and negotiations have little to do with sex as a form of social exchange, and it would be foolish to propose social exchange as offering a comprehensive explanation of all sexual behavior. Still, social exchange fits a substantial part of sexual activity across a broad range of situations and relationships.

The social exchange analysis is not, strictly speaking, a rival theory that competes with other approaches to sexuality, because it is compatible with many of them. The two main theoretical frameworks in the sexuality area are constructionist (usually feminist) theory and evolutionary theory, and social exchange is compatible with both of them. This compatibility is probably a good thing, because in the long run the goal of advancing



sexuality theory may be best served by linking together a composite of contributions from multiple theoretical perspectives, instead of seeking to establish a single theory as the victor by discrediting and disproving all other theories. Social exchange can thus offer a useful addition to the way psychology and other fields understand sex.

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