

Chapter 9

Sexual Behavior

1. An Overview of Heterosexuality

- Explain what happened as a result of the sexual revolution.
- Describe current views on sexual behavior.
- Understand the prevalence of certain sexual behaviors today.

Section Outline

- **The Sexual Revolution: Changing Attitudes and Changing Behavior:**

Thanks in large part to the introduction of the birth control pill, women became freer to have sex without fear of pregnancy. The hippies of the youth counterculture of the 1960s emphasized *free love*, the idea that sexual intercourse and other forms of sex need not be delayed until marriage, and a popular slogan heard during the Vietnam antiwar movement was “make love, not war.”

- **Heterosexuality Today: Attitudes and Behavior:** Americans almost unanimously think that adultery (extramarital sex) and teenage sex are wrong, but that they are fairly evenly split on whether premarital sex is wrong, with 47 percent saying it is wrong and the remainder, 53 percent, saying it is not wrong at all.

- Certain aspects of our social backgrounds predict our views about premarital sex. In particular, women, older people, and those who are more religious are more likely than their counterparts to disapprove of it. Although many people think that males are much more sexually active

than females, the data shows that the gender differences in heterosexual contact are practically nonexistent.

Key Takeaways

- The sexual revolution liberalized some views about sexual behavior and increased participation in some forms of sexual behavior, particularly premarital sex.
- Gender, age, and religiosity predict attitudes about premarital sex.
- There are little or no gender differences today in the prevalence of various heterosexual behaviors, but men are more likely than women to have had at least two sex partners in the past year.

For Your Review

1. Do you think the sexual revolution was a good thing or a bad thing? Explain your answer.
2. Did it surprise you to learn that women and men are equally sexually active today? Why or why not?

Key Term

- **Sexual Revolution** -- A substantial change during the 1960s and 1970s in many aspects of Americans' sexual behavior and in how they thought about sex.

2. Teenage Sex and Pregnancy

- Describe how many teenagers have had sex.
- List several problems associated with teenage pregnancy and birth.
- Discuss how to reduce teenage pregnancy and help teenage mothers.

Section Outline

- **Teenage Sexual Activity:** Teenagers are much more sexually active today than they were before the sexual revolution. About 43 percent of never-married teens ages 15–19 of both sexes have had sexual intercourse, this percentage represents a drop from its highest point, in 1988, of 51 percent for females and of 60 percent for males. It is interesting to examine their reasons for still being virgins. The top reason for both sexes is religion and morals, followed by concern about a possible pregnancy and not having found the right person with whom to have sex.
- **The Problem of Teenage Pregnancy:** Most teenage pregnancies and births are unplanned and are part of a more general problem for all women in their childbearing years. About one-half of all pregnancies in the United States, or more than 3 million pregnancies annually, are unplanned. Approximately 40 percent of these unplanned pregnancies end in abortion, and about 10 percent end by miscarriage. Putting all these numbers together, about 1.6 million live births happen each year as a result of unplanned pregnancies
- **Trends in Teenage Pregnancy:** The bad news is that there are far too many teenage pregnancies. The good news is that the rate of teenage pregnancy has declined rather dramatically since the early 1990s. The teenage pregnancy rate is commonly expressed as the annual number of pregnancies per 1,000 women aged 15–19. In 2006, this rate was 71.5, equal to 7.15 percent of all women in this age bracket As high as these

rates are, and they are much higher than the rates in other Western democracies, the US teenage pregnancy rate is much lower now than it was in the early 1990s.

- **Correlates of Teenage Pregnancy:** Teenagers from poor or near-poor families are at greater risk for becoming pregnant. In addition to social class, two other important correlates of teenage pregnancy are race/ethnicity and geography.
- The pregnancy rates for black and Hispanic teenagers are almost three times greater than the rates for non-Hispanic whites.
- **Sexually Transmitted Diseases:** Almost 19 million new cases of STDs are diagnosed annually, and more than 65 million Americans have an incurable STD such as herpes. Although teens and young adults ages 15–24 compose only one-fourth of sexually active people, they account for one-half of all new STDs.
- **Reducing Teenage Pregnancy and Helping Teenage Mothers:** Most sexual behavior researchers believe that pleas for abstinence, as well as sex education programs that focus solely or almost entirely on abstinence, do not help to reduce teen sex and pregnancy. If this is true, they say, then the best strategy is to use a *harm reduction* approach. A harm reduction approach recognizes that because certain types of harmful behavior are inevitable, our society should do its best to minimize the various kinds of harm that these various behaviors generate.

Key Takeaways

- The United States has the highest rates of teenage pregnancy and birth of all Western democracies. However, these rates have declined substantially from the early 1990s.
- Pregnancies and births among teenagers incur higher health-care costs than those among older women. In addition, children of teenage mothers are at risk for several kinds of developmental, cognitive, and behavioral problems.
- A key strategy to reduce teenage pregnancies involves the provision and use of effective contraception at little or no cost. A key strategy to help teen mothers and their children involves second-chance homes and early childhood intervention programs.

For Your Review

1. Imagine that you became a parent at age 17. How would your life have been different from what it is now?
2. Many sexually active teenagers do not use contraception regularly. Why do you think they do not use it more often?

Key Terms

- **Early Childhood Intervention Programs (ECIP)** -- Programs that typically involve visits by social workers, nurses, and other professionals to the homes of children who are at risk for neurological, emotional, and/or behavioral problems during their childhood and adolescence.
- **Second-Chance Homes** -- Maternity group homes for unmarried teen

mothers.

3. Abortion

- Summarize the history of abortion and abortion law in the United States.
- Explain why there are regional differences in abortion rates.
- Describe some of the correlates of views on abortion.

Section Outline

- **A Brief History of Abortion:** Although early Christianity regarded abortion as murder, there was no general agreement regarding how old the fetus must be for an abortion to be considered murder. During the Middle Ages, most religious scholars thought abortion was not murder unless quickening (when a woman begins to feel the fetus moving) had occurred, which is usually about four to five months into a pregnancy. Pope Pius IX declared in 1869 that abortion was murder no matter how young the fetus was, and that remains the current belief of the Catholic Church. The US Supreme Court supported legal abortion in its famous and controversial 1973 decision, *Roe v. Wade*. This decision allowed all abortions during the first trimester (a roughly three-month period of pregnancy) and permitted states to regulate abortion during the second trimester to protect the mother's health, but states could still not prohibit abortion during this trimester. For the remaining trimester, states were allowed to prohibit abortion except when the mother's life or health was at stake.
- **Abortion Data:** The most important fact is that about 1.2 million abortions occur annually in the United States, down from a peak of 1.6 million abortions in 1990. About 90 percent of abortions are done during

the first trimester (approximately twelve weeks).

- **Public Views about Abortion:** The circumstances for which the public largely supports abortions are those where the physical health of the mother is at stake, where the pregnancy resulted from a rape or act of incest, or where the baby is likely to have a serious defect. The circumstances for which the public is divided on abortion are those where a woman wants an abortion for any other reason, including her wish not to have any more children.
- **Correlates of Public Views:** About 43 percent support legal abortion for any reason; using a common term for people who favor legal abortion, they are entirely *pro-choice*. It might make sense to think that women are more likely than men to favor legal abortion. However, there is no gender difference in this regard. Women are in fact slightly less likely than men to favor legal abortion.
- **Reducing Abortions and Making Them Safe:** Both sides of the abortion debate want to see abortions reduced. How then can this goal be achieved? The most promising strategy is to reduce unintended pregnancies, as discussed in the previous section on teenage pregnancy, through the consistent use of effective contraception. The reason for this strategy is simple: Almost all abortions result from unintended pregnancies, and if we can reduce unintended pregnancies, we will reduce the number of abortions.

Key Takeaways

- Abortion continues to be one of the most controversial issues in the United States. Many states have implemented laws and policies that make it difficult to obtain abortions.
- Several aspects of our social backgrounds predict views on legal abortion. In particular, religiosity is associated with opposition to legal abortion, while education is associated with approval of legal abortion.
- To reduce the number of abortions, it is necessary to reduce unwanted pregnancies. To ensure that abortions will be safe, they must be legal.

For Your Review

1. Do you favor or oppose legal abortion? Does your answer depend on the reasons for which a woman desires an abortion? Write an essay in which you explain your answer.
2. A major principle of sociology is that social backgrounds influence attitudes and behavior. Write an essay in which you illustrate this principle with regard to attitudes about abortion.

4. Prostitution

- Summarize the history of prostitution in the United States.
- List the reasons that lead many people to dislike prostitution.
- Explain the problems that streetwalkers experience and why these problems occur.

Section Outline

- **History of Prostitution:** Often called the world's oldest profession, prostitution has been common since ancient times. Ancient Greece featured legal *brothels* (houses of prostitution) that serviced political

leaders and common men alike. Prostitution was also common in ancient Rome, and in the Old Testament it was “accepted as a more or less necessary fact of life and it was more or less expected that many men would turn to prostitutes” During the Middle Ages and through the nineteenth century, prostitution was tolerated as a necessary evil.

- **Prostitution in the United States Today:** Prostitutes are not eager to be studied, and because their work is illegal, the federal government does not compile statistics on their numbers as it does for physicians, plumbers, teachers, and hundreds of other legal occupations. One well-analyzed estimate put the number of female prostitutes at 70,000 and further concluded that they engage in an average of 700 acts of prostitution with male customers annually, or almost 50 million acts of prostitution overall each year.
- **Dealing with Prostitution:** The social science question concerning laws against prostitution is whether these laws do more good than harm, or more harm than good. If they do more good than harm, they should be maintained and even strengthened; if they do more harm than good, they should be repealed. A growing number of scholars believe that the laws against prostitution do more harm than good, and they say that the best way to deal with prostitution might be to legalize and regulate it.

Key Takeaways

- Prostitution has existed since ancient times and continues to be common today around the world. The United States had legal brothels before 1920,

and legal brothels are found today in rural counties in Nevada.

- Many people oppose prostitution because they feel it is immoral or because they feel it degrades and victimizes women. Because prostitution usually involves consensual behavior, some scholars say it should not be illegal in a society that values a right to privacy.
- Some scholars also say that laws against prostitution do more harm than good and in particular account for the various problems that streetwalkers experience.

For Your Review

1. Do you think prostitution should become legal and regulated?

Why or why not?

2. The major difference between prostitution and sex resulting from a casual pickup involves whether money is exchanged.

Write an essay in which you first take the “pro” side on the following debate question, and then take the “con” side: that prostitution is worse than sex from a casual pickup.

Key Terms

- **Prostitution** -- The selling of sexual services.
- **Streetwalkers** -- Prostitutes who typically find their customers, or are found by their customers, on a street and who then have a quick act of sex in the customer’s car, in an alleyway or other secluded spot, or in a cheap hotel.

- **Call girls** -- Prostitutes who work as independent operators in their homes or fancy hotels and charge higher rates for their services.
- **Escorts** -- Prostitutes who work for escort agencies and may operate out of an apartment rented by their agency or come to a client's hotel room or other location.
- **Brothel workers** -- Prostitutes who work in brothels (houses of prostitution).
- **Massage parlor workers** -- Prostitutes who work in massage parlors.
- **Bar or casino workers.**

5. Pornography

- Explain why pornography is difficult to define.
- Describe evidence indicating that pornography is popular.
- Discuss whether pornography contributes to violence against women.

Section Outline

- **Public Opinion about Pornography:** Many people oppose pornography, but two very different groups have been especially outspoken over the years, as has been true about prostitution. One of these groups consists of religious organizations and individuals who condemn pornography as a violation of religious values and as an offense to society's moral order. The other group consists of feminists who condemn pornography for its sexual objectification of women and especially condemn the hard-core pornography that glorifies horrible sexual violence against women.
- **The Popularity of Pornography:** Pornography is so widespread and easy

to access on the Internet and elsewhere that many people must be viewing it, reading it, and in general “using” it. Various data and estimates for the United States support this assumption

- **Effects of Pornography:** Many scholars believe pornography does cause violence against women, but other scholars conclude that pornography does not have this effect and may even help reduce sexual violence by providing a sexual outlet for men. These divergent views reflect the complexity of the evidence from studies of pornography.

Key Takeaways

- Pornography is notoriously difficult to define. Just as beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, to quote the old saying, so is pornography.
- Pornography is a major industry in the United States and around the world and accounts for about \$13 billion in US revenues annually.
- A growing conclusion from the research evidence is that pornography does not lead to violence against women. In addition to this consideration, laws against pornography raise questions of freedom of speech.

For Your Review

1. Do you think all pornography should be legal for people age eighteen and older? Why or why not?
2. In your opinion, does pornography promote violence against women? Explain your answer.

Key Term

- **Pornography** -- Printed or visual materials that are sexually explicit and that are intended to arouse sexual excitement rather than artistic appreciation.