CHAPTER 9

Sexuality

Background on Women's Sexuality

Theoretical Perspectives

Biases

Androcentric emphasis
Heterosexist bias
Biological framework
Essentialism
Social constructionism

Female Sexual Anatomy

• mons pubis
• labia majora
• labia minora
• clitoral hood
• clitoris
• vagina

Sexual Responses

General Phases

Masters & Johnson

• excitement phase
  vasocongestion
• plateau phase
• orgasmic phase
• resolution phase

Gender Comparisons in Sexual Responses

• similar phases
• similar psychological reactions
• women can reach orgasm as quickly as men when the clitoral region is directly stimulated
• women more likely to have multiple orgasms
• differences related to external factors

**Sexual Desire**
Hormones
Social factors
Cultural factors
Gender Differences
  Compared to women, men:
  • think about sex more frequently
  • men want sexual activities more frequently
  • men initiate sexual activities more frequently
  • men are more interested in sexual activities without a romantic commitment
  • prefer a greater number of sexual partners

Explaining Gender Differences
  Physiology
  Concern about pregnancy
  Male-normative standards

**Sexual Attitudes and Behavior**

*Attitudes About Female and Male Sexuality*
  Nonmarital intercourse
  Men typically have more permissive attitudes than women do
  Sexual double standard
  Cultural differences

**Sexual Scripts**
  Men as initiators
  Women resist or comply
  Varying the script
  Violating the script
  Rape

**Sex Education**
  Parents and Sex Education
Mothers give "the talk"
Certain topics never discussed
Mixed messages
Ethnic differences
Schools and Sex Education
"organ recital"
"Just say no"
Comprehensive Model
• addresses information, values, attitudes, and emotions
• strategies for informed choices
• contraceptives
• teenagers who participate in these comprehensive programs typically postpone sexual relationships until they are older and have a lower pregnancy rate, compared to those in the abstinence-only programs
Most parents agree with the comprehensive approach
The Media
Magazines – narrowly defined sexual scripts
Many images, not very accurate
Mixed messages

*Sexual Behavior in Heterosexual Adolescents*
Age at puberty
Academic performance
Parent-child relationships
Exposure to sexually-explicit media
Poverty
Alcohol and drug use
Ethnicity
Peer pressure
Defining values
Negative first experiences
Coercion

*Sexual Behavior in Heterosexual Adults*
Problems with surveys
Meta-analyses
• men report greater number of sexual partners
• masturbation more common for men

**Communication About Sexuality**
- Uncomfortable talking about sex
- Nonverbal communication
- Indirect verbal messages
- Unclear messages
- Women's sexual assertiveness
- Sexual self-disclosure

**Lesbians and Sexuality**
- Defining sexuality
- Nongenital physical contact
- Genital sexual activity
- Communication
- Mapping unknown territory

**Older Women and Sexuality**
- Estrogen
- Frequency of genital sexual activity
- Importance of closeness and intimacy
- Sexual inactivity
- Cultural expectations & biases

**Sexual Disorders**

**Low Sexual Desire (hypoactive sexual desire disorder)**

**Female Orgasmic Disorder**

**How Gender Roles Contribute to Sexual Disorders**

1. Many people believe that men should be sexual and aggressive, whereas women should be asexual and passive; people therefore believe that women don’t need to enjoy sexual activity.

2. Our culture emphasizes the length, strength, and endurance of a man’s penis. When a man focuses on these issues, he probably won’t think about how to make the interactions pleasurable for his partner.

3. Because of the emphasis on male sexuality, researchers know how physical illness and drugs affect men's sexual responses. However, they know much less about their effects on female sexuality.
4. Women are hesitant to appear selfish by requesting the kind of sexual activity they enjoy, such as tender caresses or clitoral stimulation. Stereotypes suggest that women should give rather than request.

5. Physical attractiveness is emphasized more for females than for males, so women may focus on their physical appearance, rather than on their own sexual pleasure.

Self-objectification

*Therapy for Sexual Disorders*

- Sensate focus
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy
  - Cognitive restructuring
- Feminist approach
  - Address from a broad social perspective rather than focusing on biological aspects
  - Incorporate gender equality, tenderness, emotional closeness, and communication

*Birth Control and Abortion*

- Adolescent Birth Rates
- Outcomes & Decisions

*Birth Control Methods*

- Abstinence
- Tubal ligation
- Vasectomy
- Oral contraceptives
- Condom
- Diaphragm and spermicidal cream
- Spermicidal creams

Withdrawal & rhythm methods less than 80% effective

*Who Uses Birth Control?*

- Social class
- Ethnicity
- Level of education
- Personality characteristics

*Obstacles to Using Birth Control*
1. Parents and educators often avoid discussing birth control with young people because they “don’t want to give them any ideas.”
2. Some young women cannot obtain contraceptive services, so they use less reliable forms of birth control.
3. Many young women have sexual intercourse without much planning.
4. People may not think rationally about the consequences of sexual activity.
5. Traditional women believe that, if they were to obtain contraception, they would be admitting to themselves that they planned to have intercourse and are therefore not “nice girls.”
6. People often believe that birth control devices will interrupt the lovemaking mood, because they are not considered erotic or romantic.
7. Many young women are pressured to have sexual intercourse, often with a much older man.

**Contraception and Family Planning in Developing Countries**

- Contraception
- Female Literacy
- Family Planning
- Lack of Access

**Abortion**

- Before 1973
- *Roe v. Wade*
- Abortion Rates
- Safety

Psychological Reactions to Abortion

- Relief
- Negative feelings
- Individual differences
- No long-term effects

Factors related to Psychological Adjustment

- Early abortion
- Self-efficacy
- Support

Children Born to Women Who Were Denied Abortions

- fewer friends
• respond poorly to stress
• maternal lack of interest
• psychological treatment
• marital difficulties
• drug problems
• work conflicts
• trouble with legal system

Alternatives to Abortion

  Adoption
  Motherhood