

9 Sexuality

Americans born in the 1980s and 1990s (commonly known as Millennials and iGen) were more likely to report having no sexual partners as adults compared to GenX'ers born in the 1960s and 1970s in the General Social Survey, a nationally representative sample of American adults (N = 26,707). Among those aged 20–24, more than twice as many Millennials born in the 1990s (15%) had no sexual partners since age 18 compared to GenX'ers born in the 1960s (6%) . . . Americans born early in the 20th century also showed elevated rates of adult sexual inactivity. The shift toward higher rates of sexual inactivity among Millennials and iGen'ers was more pronounced among women and absent among Black Americans and those with a college education. Contrary to popular media conceptions of a “hookup generation” more likely to engage in frequent casual sex, a higher percentage of Americans in recent cohorts, particularly Millennials and iGen'ers born in the 1990s, had no sexual partners after age 18.

—Twenge, Sherman, and Wells (2017, p. 433)

In the minds of many, love and sex are often closely connected. In fact, studies that explore people's attitudes about the role of sex in a dating relationship find that affection for the partner is the most frequently cited reason for having sex (e.g., Robinson & Jedlicka, 1982; Sherwin & Corbett, 1985), especially for women (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, & Kolata, 1994). This is hardly surprising in light of the fact that sexuality is perhaps the one feature that sets romantic relationships apart from other close relationships (Scanzoni et al., 1989). We can share intimate details with our friends and be strongly committed to our relationships with family members, but sex is something that is supposed to be shared specifically with the one(s) we love in a romantic way.

Attitudes About Sex: An Evolving Story

How do Americans feel about sex? The General Social Survey tracks attitudes about non-marital sex (i.e., premarital sex, sex among adolescents, extramarital sex, and same-sex relationships) on a near-annual basis. Responses from 33,380 adult Americans collected between 1972 to 2012 reveal trends toward greater overall acceptance of non-marital sex, with the greatest change occurring in the 2010s and thereafter (Twenge, Sherman, & Wells, 2015). However, this trend was not in the same direction for all questions. Although attitudes increased in permissiveness toward premarital sex, sex among adolescents, and same-sex relationships, they decreased—below 1970s levels—in acceptance of extramarital sex. See Table 9.1 for these trends.

How can we explain this increased permissiveness? It could indicate a time period effect (i.e., all people change), a generational/cohort effect (a new cohort drives change),

Table 9.1 Changes in Attitudes Toward Premarital Sex of American Adults From 1972–2012

<i>Sexual Attitudes</i>	<i>Sample size</i>	<i>1972–1974</i>	<i>1980–1984</i>	<i>1990–1994</i>	<i>2000–2004</i>	<i>2010–2012</i>	<i>d</i>
Premarital sex	33,267	2.47	2.73	2.79	2.79	3.05	0.47*
Teen sex	21,758	–	–	1.48	1.45	1.56	0.08*
Same-sex activity	32,006	1.60	1.60	1.73	2.09	2.49	0.72*
Extramarital sex	33,380	1.47	1.42	1.32	1.30	1.29	–0.24*

Response scale 1–4, where 1 = always wrong, 2 = almost always wrong, 3 = wrong only sometimes, and 4 = not wrong at all.

Cells with dashes indicate either that the question was not asked or that there were fewer than 100 participants. *d* difference in SDs comparing the early 1970s to the 2010s.

p < .05 or less, *t*-test comparison of early 1970s to 2010s.

Source: Adapted from Twenge et al. (2015).

or a developmental effect (i.e., Americans have aged) (Twenge et al., 2015). A statistical analysis isolated the impact of each factor and revealed that generational effects were driving changes in sexual attitudes and behaviors. Thus, it appears we are lurching toward more permissiveness in our sexual attitudes and greater acceptance of a wider range of non-marital sexual behavior not because of changes in culture or deepening wisdom of earlier generations, but because of the increased openness and optimism of today's young adults.

Sexual Behavior

A Brief History of Research on Sex

Despite its ubiquity in intimate relationships, sex is something Americans have historically approached with a sense of ambivalence. Many cultures consider sex a fact of life like eating and drinking (Mead, 1963), but in the American way, it is best done in an environment marked by darkness, drawn curtains, and hushed silence. Thus, it is not surprising that academic research on sex was slow in coming.

Collectively, we first learned about human sexual behavior through the work of Alfred Kinsey. A professor of zoology at Indiana University who specialized in the sexual behavior of the gall wasp, he was asked to deliver a lecture on the biology of sexual behavior for a colleague who had to leave town that day. Not wanting to deliver a lecture on the gall wasp to students in a course on human sexuality, and being a conscientious scholar, he went to the library to prepare for his lecture. Although he came across an abundance of research on the sexual behavior of all sorts of animals, he found virtually no research that was specific to the biology of *human* sexual behavior, and thus he decided to start his own research. He began by distributing questionnaires about sexual behavior to students in his classes as well as students in classes taught by supportive and friendly colleagues. He eventually expanded his efforts to include fraternities, parent-teacher associations, and just about any group willing to support his efforts. Several years and roughly 18,000 respondents later, Kinsey published his findings in a book titled *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). Five years later, he published a follow-up titled *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Kinsey, Pomeroy,

Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Together, both volumes have become widely known as the **Kinsey Report**.

The twin volumes provided such a provocative look into what goes on in bedrooms across the United States that they became the major compendium of everything we always wanted to know about sex. Despite its widespread popularity, however, Kinsey's work was not without its detractors. The primary message of the Kinsey Report—that sex was perfectly natural—was comforting and well received by most. More specific results invited controversy, though. For example, some took the finding that 50 percent of all men reported to have had extramarital affairs as a hint that the breakdown of the moral order was near and the end of the world was just around the corner. And some feared that the publication of such findings would further contribute to this breakdown. After all, reading about the prevalence of extramarital affairs might give men the idea that it is perfectly normal and thus drive even the most devoted suburban husband into infidelity.

Whether or not these fears were justified is not clear. What is clear, however, is that men and women differ markedly in their sexual motivation. Men's sexual motivation is stronger than that of women by any measure. Compared to women, men desire more frequent sexual intercourse, think about sex more often, have more intense sexual fantasies, masturbate more frequently, and are willing to make sacrifices for sex (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001). For women, sexual motivation is marked by a high degree of **erotic plasticity**. That is, their sexual response is more affected by cultural, social, and situational factors. As such, women's sexual motivation is often tied to a specific partner with whom they enjoy pleasurable and satisfying sex (Baumeister & Stillman, 2006). Once the partner is lost, sexual motivation is greatly reduced (Kinsey et al., 1953)

Sexual Behavior in the United States Today

Social scientists like to study attitudes because they help predict behavior. In line with that, Twenge et al. (2015) reported that the increased permissiveness in attitudes toward

Table 9.2 Changes in Sexual Behavior of American Adults from 1988–2012

<i>Sexual Behaviors</i>	<i>Sample size</i>	<i>1988–1989</i>	<i>1990–1994</i>	<i>1995–1999</i>	<i>2005–2009</i>	<i>2010–2012</i>	<i>d</i>
Total no. sex partners since 18	24,247	7.17	8.45	8.89	11.12	11.22	0.11*
With casual date/pick-up	3,795	27.6%	32.2%	30.9%	38.7%	37.9%	0.22*
With acquaintance	3,796	32.1%	30.0%	35.3%	30.7%	41.2%	0.21*
With others/ not regular partner	3,694	1.6%	2.2%	2.5%	7.5%	6.0%	0.20*
Paid for sex	24,774	–	8.4%	8.1%	8.2%	6.0%	–0.09*

Cells with dashes indicate either that the question was not asked or that there were fewer than 100 participants. *d* difference in SDs comparing the early 1970s to the 2010s.

p < .05 or less, *t*-test comparison of early 1970s to 2010s.

Source: Adapted from Twenge et al. (2015).

non-marital sex resulted in corresponding changes in sexual behavior, mostly unfolding in the 2010s. Six percent of the 2012 respondents said they were more likely to have sex with a person who was not their regular partner compared to only 1.6 percent who endorsed this item in 1988–1989. Interestingly, though, 2012 respondents were less likely to have paid for sex than were respondents in 1988.

Attitudes toward sex have loosened (Twenge et al., 2015), and behaviors are slowly following suit. But that tells us little about the ways in which we experience sex with our partners. Somewhat surprisingly, it seems that many of the problems couples had in the 1950s and 1960s (Masters & Johnson, 1966) persist to this very day. For example, 40 to 44 percent of men and women reported feelings of extreme physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction (Wylie, 2009), yet only 29 percent of the women reported always experiencing orgasms as a result of intercourse, compared to 75 percent of the men (Michael et al., 1994). Moreover, the most frequently cited “sexual problem” is still premature ejaculation and erectile dysfunction for men and lack of interest and relationship problems for women (Wylie, 2009). One possibility for this discrepancy may be a continued insistence on vaginal intercourse, at 85 percent for heterosexual males and 84 percent for heterosexual females (Wylie, 2009), as the preferred sex act.

Sexual Satisfaction

Sex Around the World

Much of what is true about sex in America also holds for sex around the world, as evidenced by a comprehensive study—the *Global Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors* (GSSAB) in which 27,500 adult men and women from 29 countries reported on their sexual behaviors and attitudes via survey and face-to-face and phone interviews (Laumann et al., 2006). Respondents revealed their feelings of sexual satisfaction, general happiness, physical and psychological health, relationship status, sexual practices, and sexual attitudes. (See Table 9.3 for a summary of the global variety of sexual practices.)

Worldwide, women reported a lower degree of sexual satisfaction than men—a pattern consistent with that found in the United States. Women specifically cited a lack of interest in sex (31 percent), an inability to achieve orgasm (22 percent), an inability to enjoy sex

Table 9.3 Highest Incidences of Sexual Practices from a Global Survey of Sexual Behaviors

<i>Sexual Practice</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Incidence</i>
Giving/receiving a massage	Greece/South Africa	77%
Giving oral sex	Austria	80%
Sexual fantasies	Switzerland	77%
Wearing sexy underwear	Poland	53%
Receiving anal sex	Japan	33%
Telephone sex	Greece	23%
Bondage/S&M	Austria	17%

Source: Adapted from Wylie (2009).

(21 percent), difficulties lubricating (20 percent), or painful sexual intercourse (14 percent) as interfering with their sexual satisfaction. However, among all respondents the degree of sexual satisfaction also depended on specific patterns of sexual interactions that vary along gender and the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism.

Common to all patterns, sexual satisfaction was positively correlated with happiness for both men and women. However, men and women from countries that place a premium on gender equality (for example, the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Western European countries, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa) expressed higher levels of sexual satisfaction than participants from countries marked by male-centered sexual interaction patterns (for example, Morocco, Egypt, Israel, Italy, Turkey, Malaysia, and Thailand). One reason for the lower levels of sexual satisfaction among the latter group may be that it seems to place a premium on the importance of sex, perhaps raising unrealistic expectations. Respondents from a third group that combined male-centeredness with collectivism (for example, China, Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, and Thailand) showed the lowest levels of sexual satisfaction, this perhaps due to the belief that individual gratification adds little to the values espoused by collectivistic cultures.

Sexual Satisfaction, Relationship Satisfaction, Intimacy, and Commitment

Gonzaga, Turner, Keltner, Campos, and Altemus (2006) suggest that romantic love and sex are independent and that love, rather than being a prelude to or basis for sex, enhances commitment and therefore long-term relationship stability. Sex, they found, was *negatively* correlated with commitment. That is, while love serves to ensure long-term commitment and stabilize relationships, sex is better viewed as a short-term mating strategy. Further, in the absence of love, sex actually functions as a *deterrent* to relationship stability. But what if the sex is great?

Many studies confirm that sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction are positively correlated and that this is true for both heterosexual and same-sex partners (Laumann et al., 2006; Sprecher, 2002; Schwartz & Young, 2009). What contributes to the concordance between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction? In addition to gender equality, frequency of sex is considered by many to be a predictor of sexual satisfaction (Laumann et al., 2006). That is, frequency may be correlated with satisfaction perhaps due to the fact that having more sex also increases receptivity, desire, and ability to achieve orgasm (Schwartz & Young, 2009). However, frequency of sex is not consistently associated with relationship satisfaction (Hicks, McNulty, Meltzer, & Olson, 2016), and the frequency of sex declines over time (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Greenblatt, 1983; James, 1981). It may be tempting to conclude that this decline is perhaps due to decreases in vitality and virility as a function of age alone. However, increases in other life commitments (Greenblatt, 1983) as well as pregnancy, childrearing, and job demands (Call, Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1992) may affect sexual frequency even more profoundly. However, once such stressors are removed, the decline in the frequency of sex levels off and may even rebound. Perhaps this is one reason for why older adults have sex with about the same frequency as younger adults. A recent survey (Lindau et al., 2007) indicated that adults aged 57 to 85 had sex about two to three times a month, and half of them disclosed they had had oral sex. To the extent that sexual activity declined, it was linked to deteriorating health and, more importantly, to the lack of a partner. Yet even older adults with diminished sexual function continue to consider sex to be an important part of their lives and their relationship (Hinchliff & Gott, 2004).

In addition to sexual frequency, other determinants of sexual satisfaction include what might be referred to as “cherishing” one another. These include communication intimacy, affection, cohesion, respect, and mutual goals (Schwartz & Young, 2009). In fact, one study found that the strongest predictor of sexual satisfaction was what they termed “emotional investment” (Waite & Joyner, 2001). For women, the link between relationship variables and sexual satisfaction is even more pronounced (Basson et al., 2003). That is, a woman’s sexual desire is less likely to be triggered by physiological drives for sexual fulfillment and much more likely to be triggered by relationship qualities such as partner tenderness and the lack of male anger. Numerous studies support this notion, highlighting the powerful impact of respect, fair treatment, and egalitarianism on women’s sexual satisfaction (Bridges, Lease, & Ellison, 2004; Schwartz & Young, 2009). Interestingly, egalitarianism benefits the sexual satisfaction of both men and women (Laumann et al., 2006; Schwartz & Young, 2009). Finally, the positive association among sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, love, and commitment also has been found to be true for premarital couples (Sprecher, 2002).



Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- One of the findings of the Kinsey Report was that 10 percent of all males were exclusively gay. How would you explain why this estimate is viewed as too high by some and too low by others? Can this matter be settled objectively, scientifically?
- The insistence on vaginal intercourse as the preferred sex act is thought to create problems in the way we experience sex. At the same time, we as a species are supposed to be adaptable, yet we persist in less than optimal approaches. What do you think is responsible for this situation?
- It seems that both the over-valuation and the under-valuation of sex result in lower sexual satisfaction. What might be the mechanism behind this phenomenon?
- Some research suggests that sex and commitment are negatively correlated (Gonzaga et al., 2006). Other research links the first sexual encounter between two partners with an increase in commitment (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). How could these seemingly contradictory findings be reconciled with each other?

Sexual Communication

The research on sex discussed thus far is largely descriptive in nature. Although it is informative with respect to many factual aspects of sex (frequency, satisfaction, etc.), it tells us little about why we have sex in the first place. Nor does it tell us how we go about having sex.

Flirtation

Sex can be initiated by something as direct as a request to “watch Netflix and chill” or perhaps more subtly via flirtation. The point of flirtation is to stimulate sexual interest, but its purpose is not necessarily to have sex.

Assume for the moment that two people flirt with the explicit purpose of communicating and stimulating sexual interest. How do they go about doing it? It is generally considered uncool to blurt out, "I find you very attractive and want to have sex with you right here and now!" If anything, such a blunt communication is likely to put the other person off and thus might well produce counterintentional results. As it turns out, people frequently employ more subtle, nonverbal cues when flirting with another. Among these nonverbal involvement cues are gaze, body posture, facial expressions, touch, and grooming gestures (Patterson, 1987). Some have argued that what sets these behaviors apart from other nonverbal behaviors, such as scratching and self-touching, are their propensity to signal submissiveness and affiliation (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1974; Givens, 1978). For example, an unsolicited and unexpected compliment in a bar is likely to be interpreted as flirtation, especially when the delivery of the compliment involves a level of effort, such as crossing the room (Downy & Damhave, 1991).

People flirt for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes they do it to communicate or stimulate sexual interest; on other occasions, they do it to pass the time or to find out if they are still able to stir sexual interest in another. Consequently, the pleasures derived from flirting can be manifold and may be somewhat independent of whether or not sex is the ultimate outcome. In fact, researchers (Hall, Carter, Cody, & Albright, 2010; Hall & Xing, 2015) have identified five distinct flirting styles. Those who believe men should make the first move while women passively await their advances tend to embrace the *traditional style*. Flirting in this style follows traditional gender roles. Similarly, the *polite style* focuses on propriety and generally follows a rule-governed approach to flirtation. It emphasizes proper manners and polite, nonsexual talk. Those who embrace the *physical style* of flirtation are comfortable with their sexuality and with using nonverbal, physical cues to express their desire. Further, they excel at both conveying their intent to others as well as at detecting flirtations from others. Similar to this group, people who use *playful* flirtation styles lack concern for tradition or politeness. Their instrumental approach highlights the fun of the behavior itself, and flirtation is used as a means of self-enhancement rather than for attaining a partner. Finally, *sincere* flirts seek to establish an emotional connection and to convey their genuine attraction to a potential partner. This is probably one of the most effective flirtation styles, and research on opening lines confirms that most people prefer innocuous or direct remarks to cute and flippant ones (Kleinke et al., 1986).

Initiating Sex

Flirting aside, a more realistic way to think about sexual communication might be in terms of interactions between two people that take place in a social context. From this perspective, we can look at sex as something that two people negotiate with the help of their sexual communication system. A sizeable part of this system is verbal in nature (Victor, 1980). Talking about past sexual experiences and simply voicing sexual interest can often suffice to initiate a sexual encounter. Expressing sexual preferences and fantasies as well as voicing sexual pleasure can shape the experience in important ways. However, such verbal expressions are often preceded or accompanied by a number of nonverbal signals, such as reducing interpersonal distance and increasing eye contact and touch (McCormick, 1979; Perper & Weis, 1987). During the early part of a relationship, men and women alike tend to rely heavily on nonverbal signals, ostensibly to fend off the possibility of rejection or its potential impact (Perper & Weis, 1987). At the same time, men and women often interpret the meaning of such symbols in vastly different ways. Men tend to think of women who

reduce interpersonal distance, maintain eye contact, and touch them as sexy, seductive, and promiscuous, and men thus experience a heightened level of sexual attraction. The same is not true for how women perceive the corresponding behaviors in males (Abbey & Melby, 1986; Perilloux, Easton, & Buss, 2012).

In light of the observation that men tend to over-perceive sexual intent on the part of women, it is perhaps not surprising that men are also more likely to initiate sex. This appears to be true for marital and cohabiting relationships (Brown & Auerback, 1981; Byers & Heinlein, 1989) as well as dating relationships (DeLamater & MacCorquodale, 1979), although there is evidence that women become more comfortable about initiating sex as a relationship matures (Brown & Auerback, 1981). Of course, the existence of sex differences in the likelihood to initiate sex raises an interesting question in terms of how the initiation of sex proceeds among gay and lesbian couples. Although it appears that the partner who is more emotionally expressive is the one who usually initiates sex in both gay and lesbian couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983), a recent study of sexual communication and repertoires suggests that there are in fact more similarities and very few differences between heterosexual and nonheterosexual couples (Holmberg & Blair, 2009).

How do we go about initiating sex? In dating couples, the initiation of sex is often more than just a matter of negotiation via the sexual communication system. The first time a couple has sex often has special meaning and significance. For one thing, it is usually accompanied by strong emotions and thus remembered in vivid detail for a long time. For another, the first time marks a significant turning point, as it generally results in an increase in commitment (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). Consequently, couples tend to give consideration to multiple factors before deciding to have sex.

Why do we have sex? The short answer to this question is that there are many reasons. One study (Meston & Buss, 2007) uncovered 237 different reasons for having sex, including love, lust, money, and pragmatic considerations. Further, these reasons were statistically clustered into four global categories that, together, include 13 sub-categories of reasons for having sex. The four global categories are (1) *physical reasons* (with the following four sub-factors: pleasure, stress reduction, desirability, and experience seeking), (2) *goal attainment* (with four sub-factors: resources, revenge, social status, and utilitarian), (3) *insecurity* (with the following three sub-factors: duty/pressure, self-esteem boost, mate guarding), and (4) *emotional reasons* (with two sub-factors: love/commitment and expression). Notice that sex stemming from love is only one of the 13 sub-factors in this taxonomy, suggesting that love and sex are relatively independent experiences. There are some marked differences in the kinds of reasons, depending on gender and relationship duration. For example, women, more than men, tend to cite affection for their partner as an important reason for having sex—a finding that was also reported by Michael and colleagues (1994). The same is true for sexually inexperienced couples, whereas arousal-related factors are more important for sexually experienced couples.

Whereas men are, by and large, more likely to initiate sex, women often find themselves in a position to have to resist sexual advances. Although this may sound like a stereotype, there are sound evolutionary reasons for women's reluctance to engage in sex. It may represent a form of error management by which women try to reduce the likelihood that they may produce offspring with a partner who does not improve their inclusive fitness (Haselton & Buss, 2000). Perhaps this is why, compared to men, women are both more *comfortable* saying no (Grauerholz & Serpe, 1985) and more *likely* to say no to a partner who wants sex (Clark, 1990; Clark & Hatfield, 1989). How do people go about telling their partners they don't want to have sex? One study (Perper & Weis, 1987) found two

general categories of rejection strategies. A strategy aimed at **avoiding proceptivity** entails avoiding or ignoring an unwelcome sexual advance. By using a strategy aimed at **incomplete rejection**, a woman may indicate that she is not ready to reciprocate at this time because it is too early in the day or the relationship, for example.

The preponderance of these two strategies illustrates that rejecting another's sexual advances is not an easy thing to do. People who find themselves in such a position are often motivated to avoid hurting another's feelings by directly rejecting attempts at initiating sex, although it appears that direct rejection is both more common and more acceptable in long-term relationships (Byers & Heinlein, 1989; Cupach & Metts, 1991). In married or cohabiting relationships, there is always tomorrow, and thus rejection, even when it is direct, is less threatening to both partners than it might be in more casual dating relationships. Of course, the use of an indirect rejection strategy is not without its downside. Because of their indirectness, such strategies can often be misinterpreted by the recipient as something other than rejection and thereby result in conflicted sexual interactions.

Sexual Pathways

Regardless of how one looks at the relationship between dating and sex, it is clear that being sexually active is a common reality in dating. On the other hand, it appears that there is no set way by which couples decide when the time has come. Instead, the decision to have sex depends in large part on whether a couple feels that the time is right, which itself is likely based on one's perception of "couplehood."

Extradyadic Sex

Although being part of a couple helps, there are many alternative pathways to sex. Some do not even include "couplehood," at least in the traditional sense. Although most couples consider sexual exclusivity part and parcel of a successful relationship, others do not. This is evidenced by the prevalence of **extradyadic relationships**. Some studies estimate the rate as high as 25 to 50 percent for married men and 15 to 26 percent for married women (Kinsey et al., 1948; Kinsey et al., 1953; Laumann et al., 1994). And when asked about having engaged in extramarital sex in the previous year, 6 percent responded in the affirmative (Twenge et al., 2015). Further, Schmitt and Buss (2001) estimate mate poaching—attempting to steal a person away from his or her partner—occurrences as high as 60 percent for American men and 53 percent for American women. Given the high proportion of individuals admitting to poaching, it should not be surprising that extradyadic relationships are prevalent and common.

Extradyadic sex is widespread and common not only in humans, but also in animal species that practice monogamy (Fisher, 2011). The prevalence of infidelity among humans has led researchers to modify their views on monogamy, referring to it instead as "social monogamy," in which couples practice all features of monogamy, such as childrearing and social behaviors, save for sexual fidelity (Fisher, 2011). This conceptualization of monogamy is more consistent with actual sex practices and behaviors observed by researchers.

The pervasiveness of infidelity has stimulated research on the evolutionary underpinnings of extradyadic sex (Haselton & Gangestad, 2006; Pillsworth & Haselton, 2006; Pillsworth, Haselton, & Buss, 2004; Fisher, 2011). According to this perspective, women pursue a dual mating strategy aimed at finding a male who will be a good provider for

their offspring *and* provide the best genetic material available. As a result, women in committed relationships are particularly likely to seek extradyadic sex with a man who has masculine features around the time of ovulation. In other words, women's and men's desire for sex outside of their relationship may be equally motivated by concerns with their inclusive fitness. Men benefit in this regard from having sex with many different women. Women benefit from having sex with men who are good providers and men who have good genes.

Evolutionary perspectives also suggest biological universals to explain infidelity. For example, as discussed in Chapter 3, women whose immune system genes (major histocompatibility complex) are similar to their partners are more likely to engage in infidelity (Garver-Apgar, Gangestad, Thornhill, Miller, & Olp, 2006). Walum and colleagues (2008) identified a biological predictor of "partner bonding." Men with one 334 allele scored lower on the bonding scale. Men with two 334 alleles scored even lower. Men carrying this allele were more likely to experience relationship disruptions and marital crises, and these outcomes were even greater in men with two 334 alleles. Thus, this genetic factor may mediate infidelity via the disruption of bonding and relationship maintenance. Discovering the possible evolutionary and biological mechanisms of extradyadic sex clearly responds to the universality of these behaviors but also introduces the question of how temperamentally fit we as a species are for exclusive and long-term monogamy.

Serial Monogamy

As popular sex-advice columnist Dan Savage has advocated, humans are not built to be exclusively monogamous (Oppenheimer, 2011). Perhaps he is not so far from a behavioral truth. Together with the prevalence of infidelity, divorce patterns worldwide suggest a pattern of **serial monogamy**, or moving from one monogamous relationship to the next. In fact, divorce, as tracked across 53 cultures from 1947 to 1989, falls into three patterns. Incidence of divorce is highest among (1) couples with only one child, (2) couples aged 25–29 who are at the peak of their reproductive capacity, and (3) couples who have been married for roughly 4 years (Fisher, 2011). It appears that for individuals who are of maximum reproductive capacity, relationships last just long enough to raise children past weaning (i.e., the worldwide average age of weaning is 4.2 years) before moving on to a new childbearing relationship. The impetus, whether conscious or not, is that individuals can improve their reproductive success (and with it their inclusive fitness) by increasing the genetic variability of their offspring.

Consensual Non-Monogamy (CNM)

In **consensual non-monogamy**, partners agree to extradyadic romantic and sexual relationships. That is, partners have explicit *non-monogamy agreements*. There are several different relational structures of CNM relationships, among them the *primary/secondary* model in which there is a main relationship—the primary partnership—with other relationships secondary to it. In *triads* and *quads*, three or four individuals comprise the primary partnership, while one individual who is equally involved with two partners comprises the *V-Structure* model (Mogilski, Memering, Welling, & Shackelford, 2017). Some common forms of CNM practices are open relationships, *polyamory*, and *swinging*. In **polyamory**, a couple agrees to participate in extradyadic romantic and sexual relationships, whereas in

swinging, couples agree to have sex with others (e.g., partner swapping, sex with multiple partners, etc.). This usually occurs in the context of parties and gatherings set up for this express purpose. And although swinging may conjure up images of raucous and hedonistic revelries, in reality swingers negotiate rules of engagement in which activities and expectations are mutually agreed upon, perhaps even via a written contract.

By some estimates, 4 to 5 percent of Americans identify themselves as practicing consensual non-monogamy (Moors, Conley, Edelstein, & Chopik, 2014). From a sociological perspective, polyamorous relationships are more prevalent in cultures with greater wealth and lower mortality rates (Schmitt, 2005) or contexts that favor short-term mating strategies. And to the degree that men are more likely than women to have an unrestricted **sociosexual orientation** (i.e., ability to have sex without commitment or intimacy, Baumeister et al., 2001), it should not be surprising that gay men are most likely to have CNM relationships that work to the primary partnership's satisfaction (Schwartz & Young, 2009).

Relative to individuals in exclusively monogamous relationships, those in polyamorous relationships experience greater openness in communication and higher levels of trust, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction (Mogilski et al., 2017; Moors et al., 2014). Those practicing CNM also report lower levels of jealousy and mate retention behaviors as well as positive feelings toward secondary partners (Moors et al., 2014). In fact, polyamory involves high levels of closeness and self-disclosure regarding extradyadic sexual desires and behaviors, with some characterizing it as an ethical and responsible non-monogamy (Anapol, 1997). Although these research results paint a glowing picture of polyamorous relationships, they are not without problems. For example, many of the benefits of CNM accrue asymmetrically to the primary partner, who is likely to be viewed as more supportive and desirable. Although secondary partners are considered more adventurous, they are also more likely to be considered a short-term partner (Mogilski et al., 2017) to whom fewer resources and mate retention strategies are given. Thus, positive gains in primary relationship satisfaction are frequently associated with satisfaction loss to secondary ones.

Why consensual non-monogamy? According to clinical psychologist Elizabeth Sheff (2016), CNM provides relief for “failed monogamists” who struggle mightily with faithfulness and fidelity—even with a partner whom they love. CNM offers these individuals a way to escape the guilt and shame associated with the betrayal and hurt caused by infidelity and subsequent failed relationships. Thus, instead of changing their stripes, some individuals may satisfy their social and sexual needs in an open and honest relationship format. Clearly, CNM relationships help individuals satisfy sexual or interpersonal needs not met by the primary relationship. Evidence in support of this is that secondary partnerships are frequently same-sex relationships. In a roundabout way, both exclusive monogamists and consensual non-monogamists are doing the same thing. Both are practicing pluralistic mating strategies that include both long-term and short-term strategies. For monogamists, short-term strategies may include infidelity or serial monogamy. In CNM, both long-term (primary relationship) and short-term (secondary relationship) strategies co-occur and are done so with transparency (Mogilski et al., 2017).

Before you decide to try out CNM based on these findings, you may want to consider research that suggests it is neither equally appealing to all, nor plausible for many. To the point, survey respondents who had *never engaged in* CNM relationships and who were *high* in avoidance were more likely to have positive attitudes toward CNM, while

those *high* in anxiety were more likely to have a negative view of it. Men also had more positive attitudes toward CNM (Moors et al., 2014). This pattern suggests that the perceived flexibility of open relationships appeals primarily to those who like to avoid commitment and who have an unrestricted sociosexual orientation. Likewise, survey respondents who were *in* CNM relationships were also more likely to be male. However, unlike those who had never engaged in CNM, consensual non-monogamists were *lower* in avoidance and were also likely to demonstrate secure attachment styles (Moors et al., 2014). Finally, research suggests that there is continuing social stigma attached to the practice of polyamory (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013), as the majority of Americans continue to value, prefer, and promote monogamy as the gold standard for intimate relationships.

Asexuality

According to the Asexual Visibility and Education Network “an asexual person is a person who does not experience sexual attraction.” Although there is no doubt they exist, it is less clear whether **asexuality** should be considered a sexual orientation. This is not an entirely academic issue because what constitutes the basis for asexuality matters when we try to estimate the number and proportion of asexuals. For example, when the National Survey of Family Growth poll defined asexuality as “never having had sex in one’s lifetime,” 5 percent of females and 6 percent of males endorsed this item (Poston & Baumle, 2010). However, when Bogaert (2006b) made a person’s subjective notion of their sexual attraction the basis of sexual orientation, the percentage of respondents who identified as lacking sexual attraction to any gender in a British sample dropped to just 1 percent.

It should be noted that asexual individuals do not perceive the absence of person-oriented sexual attraction as distressing. Nor does its absence preclude participation in romantic or affectional relationships with others. That is, asexual individuals may engage in romantic relationships, but generally have lower levels of sexual activity (0.2 per week versus 1.2 week) and participate in sexual activities in order to satisfy their partners (Bogaert, 2006b; Brotto, Knudson, Inskip, Rhodes, & Erskine, 2010). Understanding asexuality as a sexual orientation is a new and growing area of research exploration.

Other Pathways to Sex: Hookups and Friends With Benefits

Sexual pathways continue to evolve. Casual sexual relationships and experiences are by now widespread at least among college students (Rodrigue et al., 2015). Including hookups, there are five pathways that define casual sexual encounters: (1) one-time sexual encounters, (2) sex with a former romantic partner, (3) relationships based primarily on sex, (4) relationships based on intimate and sexual partnerships in which there is no intent to become a couple, and (5) sex with friends with the intent of maintaining friendship status (i.e., friends with benefits) (Rodrigue et al., 2015).

Hookups are, by now, quite common on college campuses. A term that once meant a “spontaneous get-together/getting together on the fly” now refers to a casual, usually one-time-only sexual encounter between acquaintances or even strangers (Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). Hookups can but need not include sexual intercourse, and prevalence rates among young adults are between 50 to 80 percent (Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003; Owen, Fincham, & Moore, 2010). An examination of college students’ accounts of what

compelled them to hook up reveals that one underlying factor may be social. Pluralistic ignorance fueled by campus sexual norms suggesting there is nothing wrong with it contributes in large part to participation in hookups (Paul & Hayes, 2002; Lambert et al., 2003). Generally, both men and women who had “hooked up” thought others were more comfortable with hookups than they were themselves (Lambert et al., 2003). However, this false consensus may also explain why some men and women felt that hooking up made them feel a part of the in-group and in synchrony with mainstream campus life (Lambert et al., 2003).

Consistent with this view, college students who felt lonely and had symptoms of depression at the start of the semester experienced positive gains in well-being after having engaged in penetrative hookups (Owen, Fincham, & Moore, 2011). Students who felt less lonely and less depressed at the start of the semester and who engaged in penetrative hookups felt worse than their classmates who did not hook up. Perhaps lonely students use hookups to feel a part of the in-group, while students who are already connected to friendship groups experienced dissonance.

Given the typical college campus’ social atmosphere, it is not surprising that alcohol plays a large role in hookups. And for women, its role is even greater. Perhaps women need the facilitative and disinhibiting assistance of alcohol because they are not completely convinced of the merits of hooking up. In fact, women generally enjoy hookups less than men, desiring instead more intimacy or long-term relationships (Paul & Hayes, 2002; Lambert et al., 2003; Owen et al., 2010; Allison & Risman, 2013). In one study (Owen et al., 2011), heavy alcohol consumption was associated with hookups involving penetration whereas moderate alcohol consumption was associated with hookups not involving penetration. Interestingly, those who did not use alcohol did not hook up. However, in spite of findings that alcohol frequently fuels casual sexual encounters, the strongest predictor of hooking up was whether or not an individual had hooked up before (Owen et al., 2011).

It is estimated that roughly 60 percent of college students have had sex with a friend, known as “**friends with benefits**” (Bisson & Levine, 2009). Research suggests that one of the primary attractions of this type of relationship is the ability to have commitment-free sex with a trusted and well-liked partner. Given that some key parameters of friendship are different from those of romantic relationships (e.g., friendships do not include exclusiveness, absorption, and passion), is it possible to navigate the blending of the two? Can individuals avoid the complications that sex might introduce into a platonic friendship? Communication would seem to be key to making this relationship work. However, although those who have sex with friends are concerned with the sexualization of their friendship, very few share their trepidations with each other or bother to negotiate the terms of their evolved relationship (Bisson & Levine, 2009).

Just as in hookups, having friends with benefits results in a similar pattern of gendered experiences and attitudes. Whereas both men and women seem equally committed to their friend relationship, motives for entering a sexual relationship differ. Women are more motivated to have sex with a friend out of a desire for a stronger emotional connection. Men are more likely to be motivated by sex itself. Further, while men are generally happy to see the sexual friendship continue, women are more likely to hope the relationship might either revert to a platonic friendship or evolve into a bona fide romantic relationship (Lehmiller, VanderDrift, & Kelly, 2011). It seems that the benefits of commitment-free sex are too often accompanied by complications and baggage that may challenge the core of the friendship.



Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Both women and men use nonverbal signs in the early stages of negotiating a sexual encounter, but it seems they perceive these signals differently. Where do you think this discrepancy is coming from?
- How does men's tendency to over-perceive sexual interest fit with researchers' depiction of men having an unrestricted sociosexual orientation and women having a restricted sociosexual orientation?
- Given the variety of sexual relationships and what we know about success rates of long-term monogamous relationships, why are we culturally bound to the idea of lifetime monogamous commitments? Why is relationship success still measured against the standard of long-term monogamy?

Same-Sex Attraction

Scientific understanding of sexual orientation and same-sex attraction progresses in spite of a political and moral climate often opposed to it. Although marriage equality is now the law of the land, bias still exists, with many countries holding even more extreme and intolerant attitudes toward non-heterosexuality. What does science tell us?

Sexual orientation emerges early. One of the most reliable correlates of adult homosexual behaviors is childhood gender role nonconformity (Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Bailey et al., 2016). Little boys who engage in gender nonconformity do things such as play with dolls, have long hair, and avoid rough and tumble play. Conversely, gender nonconforming girls may be found playing sports, dressing like boys, and avoiding girlish pursuits such as playing with dolls and wearing makeup. Gender nonconformity emerges as early as preschool, with most retrospective accounts of the awakening of same-sex interest as early as age 10 (Bailey et al., 2016). These findings and others like them suggest that explanations of non-heterosexuality cannot rest solely on social causes but rather must include biological factors and other epigenetic and developmental variables.

Biological Essentialism

Some who feel that sexual orientation is more than an arbitrary, culture-bound notion to distinguish among types of people have looked for biological mechanisms that might bring about heterosexual and same-sex preferences. To date, they have provided evidence that sexual orientation may be coded genetically, or determined by prenatal hormones and brain neuroanatomy. Evidence in support of **biological essentialism**, that is, the idea that same-sex preferences are inherited comes from studies that compared the incidence of homosexuality among monozygotic and dizygotic twins. One study of gay men (Bailey & Pillard, 1991) found that 52 percent of monozygotic (MZ) twin brothers were gay, compared to only 22 percent of dizygotic twin brothers. In a comparable study of lesbian women (Bailey, Pillard, Neale, & Ageyi, 1993), 48 percent of monozygotic twin sisters were gay, compared to only 16 percent of dizygotic twin sisters. These studies fall short of pointing to a genetic *marker* for homosexuality as MZ twins should have a much higher rate of concordance (Bailey et al., 2016). Further, although this and studies

like these confirm the impact of non-genetic factors in determining homosexuality, they nonetheless point to a genetic *influence*. After all, monozygotic and dizygotic twins share the same environment and learning experiences, but monozygotic twins also share the same genetic makeup.

Hormonal influences were among the earliest biological variables implicated in the development of sexual orientation. One of the oldest hypotheses held that gay men had too little and lesbian women had too much testosterone. However, this does not appear to be true for adult men and women (Gartrell, 1982). Instead, it appears that prenatal exposure to unusually high or low levels of androgens can masculinize or feminize the brain, which may then lead to same-sex preferences. However, this conclusion has been demonstrated only with rats and only with regard to their mating postures. Thus, the idea that human males prenatally exposed to unusually low levels of testosterone and human females prenatally exposed to unusually high levels of testosterone will develop homosexual preferences is somewhat speculative (Ellis & Ames, 1987; Bailey et al., 2016). In general, although support for the role of hormones is not strong, it is too soon to reject it as a potential explanation. These hypotheses await better techniques and methodologies to test them (Bailey et al., 2016).

Neuroanatomical differences in the brains of gay and heterosexual men constitute a third set of biological variables that have been implicated in the development of same-sex preferences. For example, some have pointed to differences in the hypothalamic structures of gay and heterosexual men (LeVay, 1991), whereas others have found differences in the anterior commissure (Allen & Gorski, 1992) and in the size of the suprachiasmatic nucleus (Swaab & Hoffman, 1990). However, before we start looking in our biology books for maps to locate these particular brain structures, we have to keep in mind the correlational nature of this evidence. It may be possible that these differences developed prenatally or during the early years of life and subsequently led to same-sex preferences. However, it is equally possible that these differences came about as a result of being gay to begin with.

Gay Brothers, but Not Lesbian Sisters: Impact of Environment on Development

If Anthony Bogaert could rewrite the script of the classic western *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (or at least its title), it would have to be called *Five or Six Brides for Seven Brothers*. According to his research on the “fraternal birth-order effect,” the greater the number of older *biological* brothers, the higher the probability that younger brothers will be sexually attracted to other men (Bogaert, 2006a). Each older brother, according to his research, increases the chances of same-sex attraction by 33 percent. By these calculations, the seventh brother would have a roughly 8 percent chance of same-sex attraction—a much greater probability than the 2 percent base rate for a first-born son and the general population. This has been one of the most consistent findings on male homosexuality (Bailey et al., 2016).

What contributes to this pattern? Blanchard and colleagues (Blanchard & Sheridan, 1992; Blanchard & Bogaert, 1996; Bogaert, 2003; Bogaert, 2006a) hypothesize that a maternal immune response to male fetuses may be at the root of this effect. For example, he found that older *adopted* brothers do not exert a birth-order influence on younger brothers, suggesting that this effect is driven by physiology and not context or environment. That is, an interaction of male-specific proteins secreted by male fetuses

in utero may change the maternal uterine environment for subsequent male fetuses. This explanation suggests that male fetal proteins trigger the release of maternal antibodies in response. The fact that no birth-order effect was found for girls and sisters—because female fetuses do not trigger the maternal immune response—also bolsters support for a physiological link. That is, the lack of a birth-order effect for sisters is consistent with research findings that mothers’ wombs do not “remember” female fetuses in the same way that they “remember” male fetuses (Gualtieri & Hicks, 1985). While the 33 percent per brother increase in probability is dramatic, researchers hasten to point out that the fraternal birth order accounts for just one in seven cases of homosexuality (other estimates are as high as 28.6 percent, Blanchard & Bogaert, 2004). Finally, the fraternal birth-order effect does not account for cases in which first-born sons are gay and cases in which monozygotic twins’ sexual orientation are discordant (Bailey et al., 2016).

Female Sexuality and Sexual Fluidity

A genetic study conducted on 5,799 3- and 4-year-old twin pairs found slightly different results. Knafo, Iervolino, and Plomin (2005) tested *fully* gender-atypical boys and girls (i.e., feminine boys and masculine girls) as well as *partially* gender-atypical boys and girls (high or moderately high in both masculinity and femininity). The results of their investigation revealed larger effects for shared environmental than for genetic influences for all groups *except for* the fully gender-atypical girls. That is, for masculine girls who were also low in femininity, genetics accounted for most of the variance. Thus, while female homosexuality may not be explained by the aforementioned brain and hormone explanations nor by the birth-order mechanism, it does not mean there are no heritable components to same-sex preferences in females. What is clear, however, is that there are multiple causal pathways to explain same-sex preferences and that explanations that consider *both* heritability and environment as well as the interaction of the two will most likely be fruitful in leading to a more accurate understanding of the etiology of same-sex preferences.

A further consideration is women’s erotic plasticity and the possible fluidity of sexual orientation. Savin-Williams (2016) contends that sexual orientation might be viewed as differences along a continuum rather than as discrete categories (e.g., heterosexual, lesbian, gay). In support of his position, Savin-Williams identifies “in-between” sexualities that run along a continuum from primarily straight to primarily gay/lesbian with in-between orientations such as “mostly straight,” bisexual, and “mostly gay/lesbian.” Knafo and colleague’s (2005) research presented prior is consistent with this conceptualization. Their identification of “*partially* gender atypical” children corresponds with this view.

Finally, Diamond’s (2003) **biobehavioral model** of sex and love provides a biologically based interpretation of the broad variety of affectional bonds observed in real-world relationships. The model builds on neuroscience breakthroughs identifying separate pathways and unique neural systems for the testosterone-based lust system and vasopressin- and oxytocin-driven attachment (e.g., Marazziti, Akiskal, Rossi, & Cassano, 1999; Fisher, 1989). The independence of these systems accounts for instances such as those in which children develop intense romantic infatuations (attachment system) with others in the absence of sexual desire (lust system). However, in addition to the independence of attachment from lust, both have also evolved in distinct ways.

Sexual desire is a “targeted” system in which desire or sexual orientation is specific and stems from both heritable and environmental determinants. The result is that individuals develop specific preferences for same- or opposite-sex partners. On the other hand, the attachment system is presumed to operate on a different genetic platform, one that is not targeted. That is, the adult attachment system is considered an outgrowth of the infant-parent attachment model that is *not* geared toward a specific gender/target and lacks an *affectional orientation* (Diamond, 2003). Insofar as attachment is linked to romantic attraction, we can experience romantic feelings toward either same-sex or opposite-sex individuals.

A final premise of the biobehavioral model is that the causal paths of love and desire are bidirectional: Love can lead to sex, but sex can also lead to love (Diamond, 2003). The reciprocal effect of love and sex is possible because oxytocin mediates attachment/pair bonding as well as sexual responsiveness. Thus, even commitment-free sex—such as occurs with friends with benefits—may trigger romantic feelings, and even love, via the repeated release of oxytocin. Although many of the premises of this model await empirical support, it comes much closer to describing the subtleties and nuances of sexual relationships, identities, and behaviors, and recognizing the causal pathways of the myriad biological and contextual factors and their interactions.

Research presented in this text provides a deeper understanding of human sexuality. Unfortunately, these new insights do not seem to be reflected in many U.S. sex education curricula. For example, according to the Guttmacher Institute’s (2016) Fact Sheet, only 22 states presently require sex and HIV education. Compared to 2006–2010, fewer teens in 2011–2013 received birth control instruction while more were taught abstinence only. See Table 9.4 for the outcomes of abstinence-only sex education compared to sex education that includes instruction on birth control.



Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- There are two social constructionist models of sexuality: one that places sexual orientation on a continuum anchored on each side by exclusive homosexuality and exclusive heterosexuality, respectively, and another one according to which homoeroticism and heteroeroticism are distinct and should not be merged into a bipolar continuum. Which model makes more sense to you, and why?
- Our neural systems for sexual desire and attachment have evolved to operate relatively independently of each other, yet to influence each other. What are the evolutionary advantages afforded by this development?
- Virtually all minority groups face prejudice, but homosexuality seems to elicit the most virulent response. What do you think is causing this situation?
- Table 9.4 contains some facts about sex education in the United States. Based on these facts, how successful would you say sex education is? Is there any reason to believe that sex education in its current form might reduce prejudice against gays and lesbians?

Table 9.4 Facts and Stats About Sex Education in the United States

Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidence of sexual intercourse by age 18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 in 10 teenaged women • 5 in 10 teenaged men • 1995–2002: 10% decline in incidence of sexual intercourse in teens aged 15–17 • U.S. teens’ levels of sexual activity comparable to Canadian, English, French, and Swiss teens; however, U.S. teens more likely to have shorter, more sporadic relationships and less likely to use contraceptives.
Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1990–2002: Overall decline in pregnancy rate in women aged 15–19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1990: 117 pregnancies per 1,000 teen women • 2002: 75 pregnancies per 1,000 teen women • U.S. still among highest in teen pregnancies in the developed world—twice as high as England, Wales, Canada; eight times higher than Netherlands and Japan
Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually, about 9 million new STIs occur in U.S. teens and young adults; rates in Canada and Western Europe much lower
Abstinence Only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2002: 1/3 of teens received no instruction on contraception • 2002: 21% of females and 24% of males received only abstinence only messages and no formal instruction on contraception; in 1995 only 8%–9% of teens received only abstinence instruction • No evidence that abstinence only programs delay teen sex; evidence suggests they may deter contraceptive use and increase unintended teen pregnancies and STIs
Sex Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 1995 and 2002, 14% of decline in teen pregnancies was due to teen abstinence or reduction in frequency of intercourse; 86% of the decline was due to an increase in contraceptive use • Evidence shows that comprehensive sex education programs that include both abstinence message and contraception instruction can delay onset of sexual activity, reduce number of partners, and increase contraceptive use • 2006: Not a single federally funded program that supports <i>both</i> abstinence and contraceptive education

Source: Guttmacher Institute (2006).

Summary

Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early work focused on patterns of sexual behavior and functioning • Review of sexual practices around the world • Current work focuses on sex as part of social interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topics include communication and sexual interaction • Reactions to rejection • How couples decide to have sex • Link between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction • Multiple pathways to sex that include a variety of nonmonogamous relationships • Same-sex relationships
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| Theories | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual communication theories: Explain the importance of verbal and nonverbal signals in communicating sexual intent • Biological essentialism: Biology and biological mechanisms as explanations for the origin of homosexuality • Biobehavioral model of sex suggests that love, sex, and romance can operate independently of each other |
| Research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive research suggests that sexual behaviors of Americans are relative conventional and unchanged until the 2010s <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual relations develop gradually and with a fair amount of exclusivity • Majority of couples begin sexual relations after they believe they are in love with one another or after about a month of dating • Current generation demonstrates more accepting attitudes and broader range of sexual behaviors • Correlational research suggests a positive relationship between sex and relationship satisfaction • Commitment and intimacy are positively correlated with sexual satisfaction • Extradynamic sex is prevalent and takes many forms • Consensually nonmonogamous relationships are frequently satisfying and are typified by openness, trust, and communication • Asexual individuals do not experience sexual attraction • Reasons for engaging in as well as outcomes of hookups and sex with friends differ for men and women • Research supports the notion that homosexuality is the result of an interaction of biology and nurture • Love can occur without sex, sex can occur outside of love, and we can love a same-sex other without being gay • Abstinence only programs not as effective at stemming teen sexual activity, unwanted pregnancies, and the transmission of STIs; combination of abstinence message along with instruction on contraception most effective |
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Key Terms

Kinsey Report: two-volume report of pioneering research on human sexuality published by Alfred Kinsey and colleagues.

Erotic plasticity: the extent to which sexual motivation is influenced by cultural, social, and situational factors.

Avoiding proceptivity: rejecting unwelcome sexual advances by ignoring or avoiding them.

Incomplete rejection: saying no to sex by postponing it until some condition is met.

Extradynamic relationships: sexual involvement with someone other than an established mate.

Serial monogamy: moving from one monogamous relationship to the next.

Consensual non-monogamy: a relationship in which partners agree to extradynamic romantic and sexual relationships.

Polyamory: Couples agreeing to engage in extradynamic romantic and sexual relationships.

Sociosexual orientation: individual differences in the tendency to have casual, uncommitted sexual relationships.

Asexuality: Lacking sexual attraction to any gender.

Hookups: a dating practice involving a casual, usually one-time-only sexual encounter.

Friends with benefits: a dating practice involving commitment-free sex with friends and acquaintances.

Biological essentialism: a theoretical position regarding sexual orientation that emphasizes the role of such biological factors as genes, hormones, and neuroanatomy.

Biobehavioral model of sex and love: theoretical model according to which attachment behavior and sexual behavior are controlled by separated, yet interacting, brain structures.

Oxytocin: a neurotransmitter involved in the regulation of the attachment system.