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NINTH EDITION

SOCIETY

the basics

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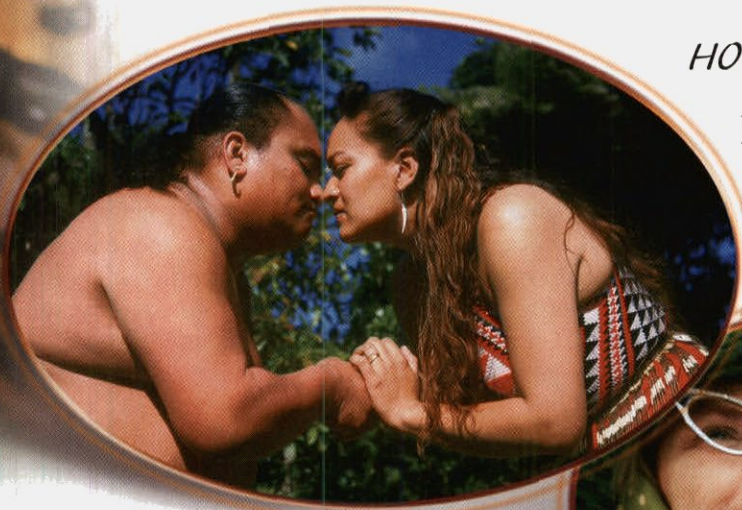
CHAPTER 6

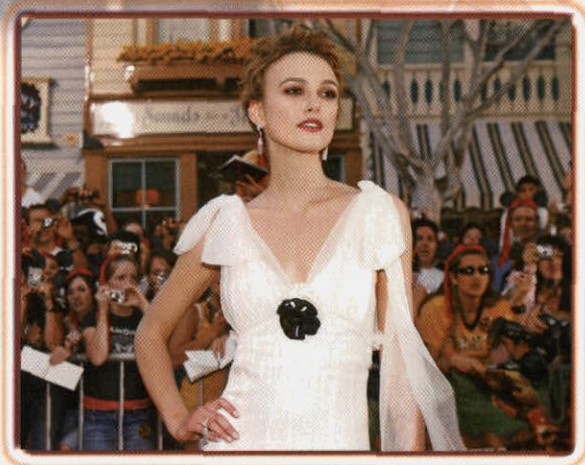
Sexuality and Society

WHAT was the sexual revolution, and how did it change U.S. society?

WHY do societies try to control people's sexual behavior?

HOW does sexuality play a part in social inequality?





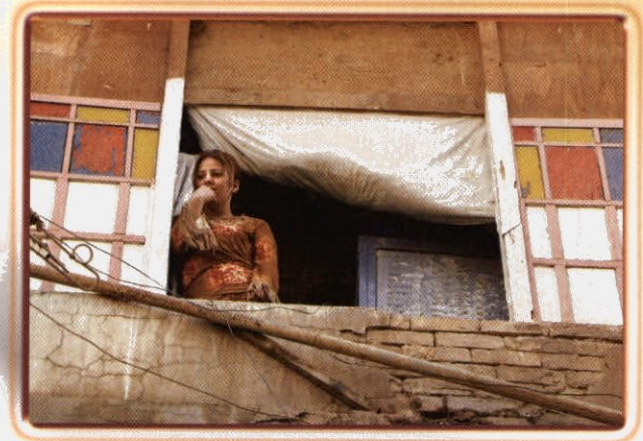
If you think sex is simply a matter of biology, think again. Sexuality is constructed by society and is an important part of our everyday lives.

Dust swirls from the street as the crowded bus pulls to the curb in downtown Baghdad, and twenty-five-year-old Ali is the first one out the door. He hurries for several blocks past vendors and open stores and then turns down a narrow alley. Halfway along the dark passageway, he walks through a small, open door. This is Abu Abdullah's, a popular brothel in Iraq's capital city. Ali has come to buy sex.

Ali lives in a small village 40 miles west of the city. He is not married. "I don't have enough money to get married," he explains, "so I come here." Abdullah's charges him \$1.50 for fifteen minutes alone with a woman.

Under the rule of Saddam Hussein, prostitution was outlawed and severely punished. Women convicted of selling sex were subject to death by beheading. But all that changed after the invasion by the U.S.-led coalition in 2003. Prostitution laws are now rarely enforced, and businesses such as Abdullah's have opened throughout the city.

Asked about the changes since the fall of Saddam Hussein, Ali shrugs his shoulders, smiles, and says "Now we have freedom." But not everyone agrees that such freedom is a good thing. Many Iraqis believe that the spread of prostitution, as well as the opening of "adult cinemas" and the easy availability of pornography over the Internet, is weakening their society. Some blame the United States for causing what they see as moral decline (Caryl, 2003). 🍌



The debate about the proper place for sex in Iraqi society will go on for years to come. Much the same discussion is also taking place in the United States, where people disagree about a number of issues, including the pros and cons of prostitution and pornography and how much sex in movies and on television is too much.

This chapter examines the importance of sex to society and presents what researchers have learned about patterns of sexual behavior. As you will see, sexual attitudes are quite diverse around the world, and here in the United States, beliefs about sex have changed dramatically over the past century. Today, we continue to debate a number of social issues involving sexuality, including gay rights, teen pregnancy, prostitution, and date rape.

Understanding Sexuality

How much of your day does *not* involve thoughts that have something to do with sexuality? If you are like most people, the answer is "not very much," because sexuality is not just about having sex. Sexuality is a theme found almost every-

where—on campus, in the workplace, and especially in the mass media. The sex industry, including pornography and prostitution, is a multibillion-dollar business. Sexuality is an important part of how we think about ourselves as well as how others evaluate us. In truth, there are few areas of social life in which sexuality does not play some part.

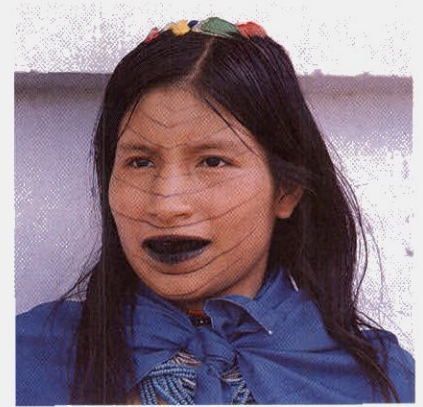
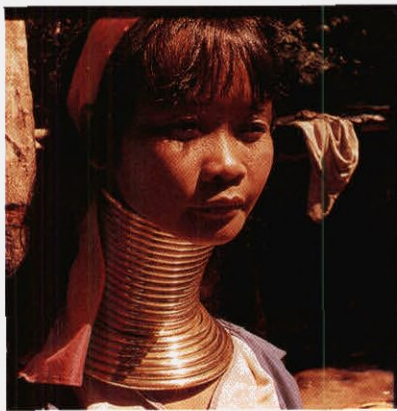
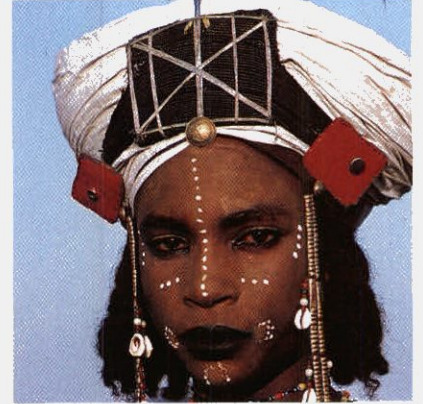
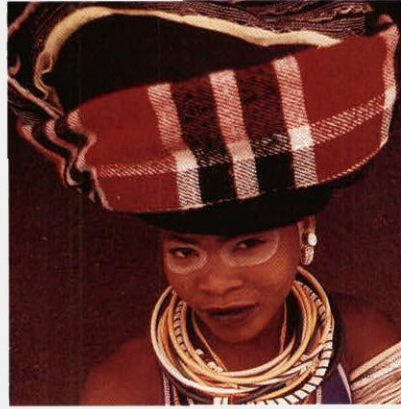
Even so, U.S. culture has long treated sex as taboo; even today, many people avoid talking about it. As a result, although sex can produce much pleasure, it also causes confusion, anxiety, and sometimes outright fear. Even scientists long considered sex off limits as a topic of research. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that researchers turned their attention to this vital dimension of social life. Since then, as this chapter explains, we have discovered a great deal about human sexuality.

SEX: A BIOLOGICAL ISSUE

Sex refers to *the biological distinction between females and males*. From a biological point of view, sex is the way humans reproduce. A female ovum and a male sperm, each

GLOBAL: People accentuate their “gender markers” to give off sexual messages and provoke a response from the other sex. For example, women have longer necks than men. In Burma, women begin stretching their necks with brass rings early in childhood, trying to reach a maximum of 32 rings (a goal rarely achieved). Women also have larger lips than men, and lips also become larger and slightly redder when sexually aroused. Thus, women use lipstick (typically red) and enlarge

their lips by coloring beyond the lip line. In some African societies, women go to the extreme of inserting plates in their lips. Finally, women have smaller feet than men, so women typically choose smaller (and often uncomfortable) shoes. In China, women went to the extreme of foot binding (beginning in childhood), which was sexually arousing to many men, who caressed (or even sucked on) women’s deformed feet.



We claim that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, which suggests the importance of culture in setting standards of attractiveness. All of the people pictured here—from Morocco, South Africa, Nigeria, Myanmar, Japan, and Ecuador—are beautiful to members of their own society. At the same time, sociobiologists point out that, in every society on Earth, people are attracted to youthfulness. The reason is that, as sociobiologists see it, attractiveness underlies our choices about reproduction, which is most readily accomplished in early adulthood.

containing twenty-three chromosomes (biological codes that guide physical development), combine to form a fertilized embryo. To one of these pairs of chromosomes, which determines the child’s sex, the mother contributes an X chromosome and the father contributes either an X or a Y. A second X from the father produces a female (XX) embryo; a Y from the father produces a male (XY) embryo. A child’s sex is determined biologically at the moment of conception.

The sex of an embryo guides its development. If the embryo is male, testicular tissue forms and starts to produce testosterone, a hormone that triggers the development of male genitals (sex organs). If little testosterone is present, the embryo develops female genitals.



Look at the six photos above. Do you think that what people in any society consider beautiful is more a matter of biology or culture? Explain your answer.

SEX AND THE BODY

Some differences in the body set males and females apart. Right from birth, the two sexes have different **primary sex characteristics**, namely, *the genitals, organs used for reproduction*. At puberty, as people reach sexual maturity, additional sex differentiation takes place. At this point, people

NOTE: Students may confuse transsexuals (people feeling that they are the other sex) with transvestism (wearing clothing appropriate to the other sex). Similarly, bisexuality (attraction to people of either sex) is sometimes confused with androgyny (having physical characteristics of both sexes).

NOTE: Transsexualism is also called transgenderism.



The film *Transamerica* was the first widely seen Hollywood production about transsexuality. This story of a man who wishes to become a woman (played by Felicity Huffman) demonstrates that such a transformation involves much more than surgery. Imagine for a moment all the “complications” you would have to deal with if you were planning to change your sex.

develop **secondary sex characteristics**, *bodily development, apart from the genitals, that distinguishes biologically mature females and males*. Sexually mature females have wider hips for giving birth, milk-producing breasts for nurturing infants, and soft, fatty tissue that provides a reserve supply of nutrition during pregnancy and breast feeding. Sexually mature males typically develop more muscle in the upper body, more extensive body hair, and deeper voices. Of course, these are general differences; some males are smaller and have less body hair and higher voices than some females.

Keep in mind that sex is not the same thing as gender. *Gender* is an element of culture and refers to the personal traits and patterns of behavior (including responsibilities, opportunities, and privileges) that a culture attaches to being female or male. Chapter 10 (“Gender Stratification”) explains that gender is an important dimension of social inequality.

DIVERSITY: Cross-dressers differ from transvestites in that the former cross-dress to conform to their self-image and the latter cross-dress with the goal of sexual arousal.

NOTE: Many animals have fascinating mating rituals. The male scorpion repeatedly stings the female while they mate; she typically consumes him afterward. All animal mating rituals are wired and triggered by chemical signals.

Intersexual People

Sex is not always as clear-cut as just described. The term **intersexual people** refers to *people whose bodies (including genitals) have both female and male characteristics*. An older term for intersexual people is *hermaphrodite* (a word derived from Hermaphroditus, the child of the mythological Greek gods Hermes and Aphrodite, who embodied both sexes). A true hermaphrodite has both a female ovary and a male testis.

However, our culture demands that sex be clear-cut, a fact evident in the requirement that parents record the sex of their child at birth as either female or male. In the United States, *some people respond to intersexual people with confusion or even disgust*. But attitudes in other cultures are quite different: The Pokot of eastern Africa, for example, pay little attention to what they consider a simple biological error, and the Navajo look on intersexual people with awe, seeing in them the full potential of both the female and the male (Geertz, 1975).

Transsexuals

Transsexuals are *people who feel they are one sex even though biologically they are the other*. Tens of thousands of people have experienced the feeling of being trapped in a body of the wrong sex and a desire to be the other sex. Most become *transgendered*, meaning that they begin to disregard conventional ideas about how females and males should look and behave. Many go one step further and undergo *gender reassignment*, surgical alteration of their genitals, usually accompanied by hormone treatments. This medical process is complex and takes months or even years, but it helps many people gain a sense of becoming on the outside who they feel they are on the inside (Gagné, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997).



In 2001, San Francisco became the first city with a health plan for city employees that includes paying the cost of gender reassignment surgery (which can cost more than \$50,000). Would you support enacting similar policies in other places? Why or why not?

SEX: A CULTURAL ISSUE

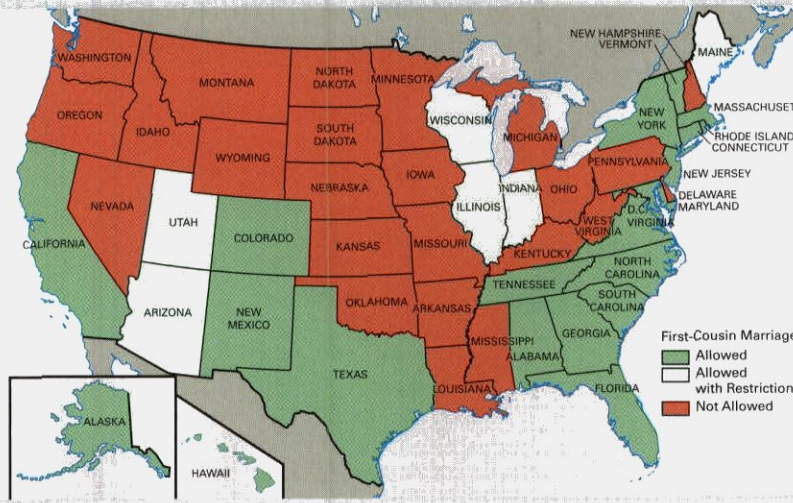
Sexuality has a biological foundation. But like all other elements of human behavior, sexuality is also very much a cultural issue. Biology may explain some animals’ mating rituals, but humans have no similar biological program. Although there is a biological “sex drive” in the sense that people find sex pleasurable and may seek to engage in sexual activity, our biology does not dictate any specific ways of being sexual any more than our desire to eat dictates any particular foods or table manners.

THE MAP: There is no simple explanation for the pattern shown here. The interesting fact is that the country is fairly evenly divided on the issue.

NOTE: The incest taboo limits kinship confusion. A few years back, Rolling Stone Bill Wyman's (then age 58) son, Stephen (age 32), announced his intention of marrying the mother (age 45) of his father's ex-wife (age 24). This union would have made Stephen stepfather to

his former stepmother, and Bill stepgrandfather to his former wife. Bill would also be his son's son-in-law and the father of his father-in-law!

NOTE: Regarding incest, we use the term "kissing cousins" in a positive way, and even evolutionist Charles Darwin married his first cousin. Studies show just slightly elevated risk of genetic disorder among offspring of first cousins (Hobson, 2002).



SEEING OURSELVES

NATIONAL MAP 6-1 First-Cousin Marriage Laws across the United States

There is no single view on first-cousin marriages in the United States: Twenty-four states forbid such unions, twenty allow them, and six allow them with restrictions.* In general, states that permit first-cousin marriages are found in New England, the Southeast, and the Southwest.

* Of the six states that allow first-cousin marriages with restrictions, five states permit them only when couples are past child-bearing age.

Source: "State Laws regarding Marriages" (2006).

Cultural Variation

Almost every sexual practice shows considerable variation from one society to another. In his pioneering study of sexuality in the United States, Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues (1948) found that most couples reported having intercourse in a single position: face to face, with the woman on the bottom and the man on top. Halfway around the world, in the South Seas, most couples *never* have sex in this way. In fact, when the people of the South Seas learned of this practice from Western missionaries, they poked fun at it as the strange "missionary position."

Even the simple practice of displaying affection varies from society to society. Most people in the United States kiss in public, but the Chinese kiss only in private. The French kiss publicly, often twice (once on each cheek), and Belgians kiss three times (starting on either cheek). The Maoris of New Zealand rub noses, and most people in Nigeria don't kiss at all.

Modesty, too, is culturally variable. If a woman stepping into a bath is disturbed, what body parts does she cover? Helen Colton (1983) reports that an Islamic woman covers her face, a Laotian woman covers her breasts, a Samoan woman covers her navel, a Sumatran woman covers her knees, and a European woman covers her breasts with one hand and her genital area with the other.

Around the world, some societies restrict sexuality, and others are more permissive. In China, for example, societal norms so closely regulate sexuality that few people have sexual intercourse before they marry. In the United States, at least in recent decades, intercourse before marriage has become the norm, and some people choose to have sex even without strong commitment.

THE INCEST TABOO

When it comes to sex, do all societies agree on anything? The answer is yes. One cultural universal—an element found in every society the world over—is the **incest taboo**, a norm forbidding sexual relations or marriage between certain relatives. In the United States, the law, reflecting cultural mores, prohibits close relatives (including brothers and sisters, parents and children) from having sex or marrying. But in another example of cultural variation, exactly which family members are included in our society's incest taboo varies from state to state. National Map 6-1 shows that twenty-four states outlaw marriage between first cousins; twenty-six states do not.

Some societies (such as the North American Navajo) apply incest taboos only to the mother and others on her side of the family. There are also societies on record (including ancient Peru and Egypt) that have approved brother-sister marriages among the nobility to keep power within a single family (Murdock, 1965, orig. 1949).

Why does some form of incest taboo exist everywhere? Part of the reason is biology: Reproduction between close relatives of any species increases the odds of producing offspring with mental or physical problems. But why, of all living species, do only humans observe an incest taboo? This fact suggests that controlling sexuality between close relatives is a necessary element of *social* organization. For one thing, the incest taboo limits sexual competition in families by restricting sex to spouses (ruling out, for example, sex between parent and child). Second, because family ties define people's rights and obligations toward one another, reproduction between close relatives would hopelessly confuse kinship; if a mother and son had a daughter,

January 31, 2006

Children, Media and Sex: A Big Book of Blank Pages

By JANE E. BRODY

In last summer's prize-winning R-rated film *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, a barely pubescent boy is seduced into oral sex by two girls perhaps a year older, and his 6-year-old brother logs on to a pornographic chat room and solicits a grown woman with instant messages about "poop."

Is this what . . . teenage children are watching? If so, what message are they getting about sexual mores, and what effect will it have on their behavior?

The journal *Pediatrics* addressed the topic last July in a supplemental report, "Impact of the Media on Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors." It is an important and, sad to say, much neglected subject. . . . "Although a great deal is known about the effects of mass media on other adolescent behaviors, such as eating, smoking and drinking, we know basically nothing about the effects of

mass media on adolescent sexual behaviors," the report's principal investigator, S. Lilia Escobar-Chaves of the [University of Texas] Center for Health Promotion and Prevention Research, concluded.

But to hazard a guess based on clear evidence that media representations influence teenage eating, smoking and drinking habits, adolescents are almost certainly affected—negatively—by sexual references and images from television, in movies and video games, in music, in magazines and on Web sites. . . .

Despite the advent of V-chips, movie ratings and televised warnings of appropriateness for young people, American teenagers have no trouble getting access to graphic sexual presentations. And no one restricts what they hear in popular songs. The effect of abstinence-only education pales by comparison with the many graphic messages that portray sexual activity—especially unprotected sex

outside of marriage—to be a part of our culture as normal and acceptable as eating a Big Mac or drinking a Coke. . . .

Television is the best-studied medium, and the average teenager watches it for more than three hours a day. Two-thirds of youngsters 8 to 18 have TVs in their bedrooms, and two-thirds live in homes with cable TV, providing unsupervised access to sex talk and scenes.

The sexual content of TV is pervasive and increasing. A Kaiser Family Foundation study found that "the shows most watched by adolescents in 2001–2002 had 'unusually high' amounts of sexual content compared with TV as a whole: 83 percent of programs popular with teens had sexual content, and 20 percent contained explicit or implicit intercourse." . . .

The foundation study found that "characters involved in sexual behavior in TV programs rarely experience any

would the child consider the male a father or a brother? Third, by requiring people to marry outside their immediate families, the incest taboo integrates the larger society as people look beyond their close kin when seeking to form new families.

The incest taboo has long been a sexual norm in the United States and throughout the world. But in this country, many other sexual norms have changed over time. In the twentieth century, as the next section explains, our society experienced both a sexual revolution and a sexual counterrevolution.

Sexual Attitudes in the United States

What do people in the United States think about sex? Our culture's attitudes toward sexuality have always been something of a contradiction. Most European immigrants arrived with rigid ideas about "correct" sexuality, typically

limiting sex to reproduction within marriage. The early Puritan settlers of New England demanded strict conformity in attitudes and behavior, and they imposed severe punishment for any sexual misconduct, even if it took place in the privacy of the home. *Efforts to regulate sexuality* continued well into the twentieth century: As late as the 1960s, for example, some states legally banned the sale of condoms in stores. Until 2003, when the Supreme Court struck them down, thirteen states had laws banning sexual acts between partners of the same sex; "fornication" laws, which are still on the books in eleven states, can be used to punish heterosexual intercourse among unmarried couples.

But this is just one side of the story. As Chapter 2 ("Culture") explained, because U.S. culture is individualistic, many believe in giving people freedom to do pretty much as they wish, as long as they cause no direct harm to others. The idea that what people do in the privacy of their own homes is *their* business makes sex a matter of individual freedom and personal choice.

negative consequences.” . . .

Furthermore, only 3 percent of sex scenes observed involved protection against disease and unwanted pregnancy.

What little is known about the effects of television sex on teenage attitudes and behavior comes primarily from a national telephone survey conducted twice, in 2001 and again in 2002. . . .

The research indicated that adolescents who watched shows with sexual content tended to overestimate the frequency of certain sexual behaviors and to have more permissive attitudes toward premarital sex.

As for movies, two studies that analyzed the content of top movie videos rented by young people revealed a large amount of sexual content, mostly sex among unmarried partners.

The effects of such viewing have been minimally studied. In a 2001 study of sexually active black girls ages 14 to 18, those who were exposed to X-rated

movies were more likely to have multiple sexual partners, to have sex more often, to test positively for chlamydia and to be less likely to use contraception.

The music videos aimed at teenagers are rife with sexuality or eroticism, much of it explicit, the report noted. But the effects of this exposure have yet to be studied. Likewise, nothing of a scientific nature is known about the effects of magazines, advertising or video or computer games on adolescents’ attitudes and behavior toward sex.

As for the Internet, one national survey of 10- to 17-year-olds found that one in five had “inadvertently encountered explicit sexual content, and one in five had been exposed to an unwanted sexual solicitation while online.”

The report called for better studies to assess the effects of sexuality in the mass media on adolescent beliefs and behavior, especially studies that measure over time how the cumulative effects of sexual

content in different media affect teenage sexuality.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. What might account for the fact that there has been so little study of how the mass media may affect young people’s sexual behavior?
2. Do you agree with the article’s claim that the mass media present sexual activity to young people as being “as normal as drinking a Coke”? Why or why not?
3. Would you support regulating the presentation of sexual activity in the mass media? Why or why not?

Adapted from the original article by Jane E. Brody published in *The New York Times* on January 31, 2006. Copyright © 2006 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted with permission.

When it comes to sexuality, is the United States restrictive or permissive? The answer is both. On one hand, many people in the United States still view sexual conduct as an important sign of personal morality. On the other hand, sex is more and more a part of the mass media—one recent report concluded that the number of scenes in television shows with sexual content had doubled in the last ten years (Kunkel et al., 2005). “In the *Times*” suggests that, despite concerns that sexual content in the mass media may be harmful to young people, we have yet to learn very much about this issue. Within this complex framework, we turn now to changes in sexual attitudes and behavior over the course of the past century.



On balance, do you think the mass media encourage young people to engage in sexual activity? Explain.

THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

Over the past century, the United States witnessed profound changes in sexual attitudes and practices. The first indications of this change came in the 1920s as millions of people migrated from farms and small towns to rapidly growing cities. There, living apart from their families and meeting new people in the workplace, young men and women enjoyed considerable sexual freedom, one reason the decade became known as the “Roaring Twenties.”

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Great Depression and World War II slowed the rate of change. But in the postwar period, after 1945, Alfred Kinsey set the stage for what later came to be known as the *sexual revolution*. In 1948, Kinsey and his colleagues published their first study of sexuality in the United States, and it raised eyebrows everywhere. The national uproar resulted mostly from the fact that scientists were actually studying sex, a topic many people were uneasy talking about even in the privacy of their homes.

POP CULTURE: The author of the famous Kinsey studies was the topic of the recent movie, *Kinsey*, which described his groundbreaking research into human sexuality.

NOTE: Another documented dimension of the sexual revolution is a wider range of sexual practices. Laumann et al. (1994) report that in recent decades, a larger share of adults engaged in oral and anal sex.

SOCIAL SURVEY: In a survey of 18,000 people in 27 nations, adults

reported having sex, on average, 96 times per year (a bit less often than twice a week). The survey found people in the U.S. claiming to have sex most often (average: 137 times per year) and people in Japan claiming to have sex least often (37 times per year) (Durex Global Sex Survey, 2000).

DISCUSS: Why was the legalization of abortion in 1973 another important dimension of the sexual revolution?



Over the course of the last century, social attitudes in the United States have become more accepting of human sexuality. What do you see as some of the benefits of this greater openness? What are some of the negative consequences?

Kinsey also had some interesting things to say. His two books (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey et al., 1953) became best-sellers because they revealed that people in the United States, on average, were far less conventional in sexual matters than most had thought. These books encouraged a new openness toward sexuality, which helped set the sexual revolution in motion.

In the late 1960s, the sexual revolution truly came of age. Youth culture dominated public life, and expressions such as “if it feels good, do it” and “sex, drugs, and rock ’n’ roll” summed up the new, freer attitude toward sex. The baby boom generation, born between 1946 and 1964, became the first cohort in U.S. history to grow up with the idea that sex was part of people’s lives, whether they were married or not.

Technology also played a part in the sexual revolution. The birth control pill, introduced in 1960, not only prevented pregnancy but also made sex more convenient. Unlike a condom or a diaphragm, which has to be applied at the time of intercourse, the pill could be taken anytime during the day. Now women as well as men could engage in sex without any special preparation.

Because women were historically subject to greater sexual regulation than men, the sexual revolution had special significance for them. Society’s traditional “double standard” allows (and even encourages) men to be sexually active but expects women to be virgins until marriage and faithful to their husbands afterward. The survey data in Figure 6–1 show the narrowing of the double standard as a

result of the sexual revolution. Among people born between 1933 and 1942 (that is, people who are in their sixties and seventies today), 56 percent of men but just 16 percent of women report having had two or more sexual partners by age twenty. Compare this wide gap with the pattern among those born between 1953 and 1962 (people now in their forties and fifties), who came of age after the sexual revolution. In this category, 62 percent of men and 48 percent of women say they had two or more sexual partners by age twenty (Laumann et al., 1994:198). The sexual revolution increased sexual activity overall, but it changed women’s behavior more than men’s.

Greater openness about sexuality develops as societies become richer and the opportunities for women increase. With these facts in mind, look for a pattern in the global use of birth control shown in Global Map 6–1 on page 154.

THE SEXUAL COUNTERREVOLUTION

The sexual revolution made sex a topic of everyday discussion and sexual activity more a matter of individual choice. However, by 1980, the climate of sexual freedom that had marked the late 1960s and 1970s was criticized by some as evidence of our country’s moral decline, and the *sexual counterrevolution* began.

Politically speaking, the sexual counterrevolution was a conservative call for a return to “family values” and a change from sexual freedom back toward what critics saw as the sexual responsibility valued by earlier generations. Critics of the sexual revolution objected not just to the idea of “free love”

SOCIAL SURVEY: The Laumann data for a younger cohort born between 1963 and 1972, after the sexual revolution was well along, indicate the gap is smaller still: 62% of men and 51% of women report having five or more sexual partners by age 20 (Laumann et al., 1994:198).

NOTE: Alfred Kinsey found that of women born before 1900, only 8% had sexual intercourse before age 20; for women born between

1910 and 1929, the share rose to 22% (Davis, 1971:333).

DIVERSITY: In Laumann's study, 54% of men but only 19% of women claimed to "think about sex daily" (cited in Elmer-DeWitt, 1994:64).

SOCIAL SURVEY: Asked whether their last sexual encounter included oral sex, 27% of men and 19% of women said yes (Laumann et al., 1994).

but to trends such as cohabitation (living together without being married) and unmarried couples having children.

Looking back, the sexual counterrevolution did not greatly change the idea that people should decide for themselves when and with whom to have a sexual relationship. But whether for moral reasons or concerns about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), more people began choosing to limit their number of sexual partners or not to have sex at all.

Is the sexual revolution over? It is true that people are making more careful decisions about sexuality. But as the rest of this chapter explains, the ongoing sexual revolution is evident in the fact that there is now greater acceptance of premarital sex as well as increasing tolerance for various sexual orientations.

PREMARITAL SEX

In light of the sexual revolution and the sexual counterrevolution, how much has sexual behavior in the United States really changed? One interesting trend involves premarital sex—sexual intercourse before marriage—among young people.

Consider first what U.S. adults *say* about premarital intercourse. Table 6-1 shows that about 35 percent characterize sexual relations before marriage as "always wrong" or "almost always wrong." Another 17 percent consider premarital sex "wrong only sometimes," and about 45 percent say premarital sex is "not wrong at all." Public opinion is more accepting of premarital sex today than a generation ago, but our society clearly remains divided on this issue.

Now let's look at what young people *do*. For women, there has been marked change over time. The Kinsey studies reported that for people born in the early 1900s, about 50 percent of men but just 6 percent of women had premarital sexual intercourse before age nineteen. Studies of baby boomers, born after World War II, show a slight increase in premarital sex among men but a large increase—to about one-third—among women. The most recent studies, targeting men and women born in the 1970s, show that 76 percent of men and 66 percent of women had premarital sexual intercourse by their senior year in high school (Laumann et al., 1994:323-24). Although a significant minority of young people choose abstinence, or not having sexual intercourse, premarital sex is widely accepted among young people today.

Finally, keep in mind that young people can be sexually active without having intercourse. In recent years, the share of young people engaging in oral sex has increased. In many cases, oral sex is chosen rather than intercourse because it does not involve the risk of pregnancy and because some people see it as less than "going all the way." At the same time, however, oral sex can transmit diseases. A recent government study found that only 20 percent of today's teens

DIVERSITY SNAPSHOT

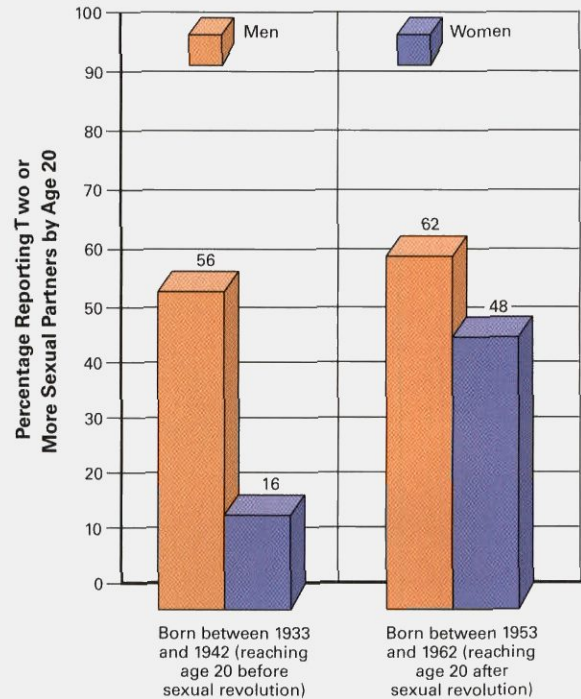


FIGURE 6-1 The Sexual Revolution: Closing the Double Standard

A larger share of men than women report having had two or more sexual partners by age twenty. But the sexual revolution greatly reduced this gender difference.

Source: Laumann et al. (1994:198).

TABLE 6-1

How We View Premarital and Extramarital Sex

Survey Question: "There's been a lot of discussion about the way morals and attitudes about sex are changing in this country. If a man and a woman have sexual relations before marriage, do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all? What about a married person having sexual relations with someone other than the marriage partner?"

	Premarital Sex	Extramarital Sex
"Always wrong"	26.3%	79.9%
"Almost always wrong"	8.8	11.9
"Wrong only sometimes"	17.3	4.9
"Not wrong at all"	45.1	2.1
"Don't know"/No answer	2.5	1.2

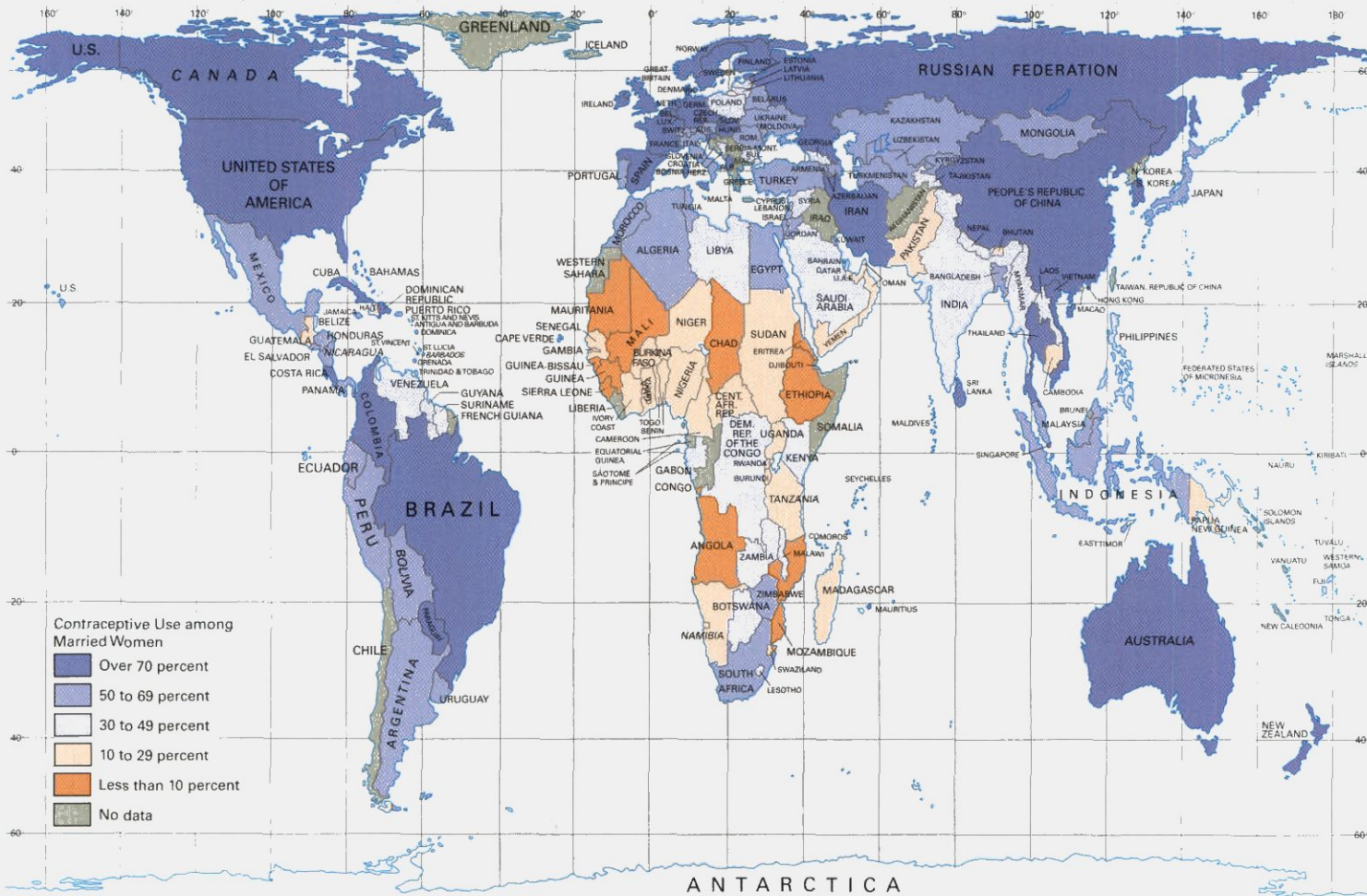
Source: *General Social Surveys, 1972-2004: Cumulative Codebook* (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, 2005), p. 291.

RESOURCE: The companion reader, *Seeing Ourselves*, 7th ed., features a contemporary excerpt on “Sex in America: How Many Partners Do We Have?” by Robert T. Michael et al.

DIVERSITY: Part of the sexual folklore of the U.S. is the idea that minorities are more sexual than whites. Why is this? Data from the Laumann et al. (1994) study show that although African Americans

have first intercourse about a year earlier, there are no significant differences among adults in this regard.

GLOBAL: Although many people think of the French as more sexual and the British as less so, survey results indicate that the share of adults reporting having five or more sexual partners is about the same. More U.S. adults make this claim than French or British adults (cited in Elmer-DeWitt, 1994:64).



WINDOW ON THE WORLD

GLOBAL MAP 6-1 Contraceptive Use in Global Perspective

The map shows the percentage of married women using modern contraception methods, including barrier methods, contraceptive pill, implants, injectables, intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUDs), and sterilization. In general, in what way do high-income nations differ from low-income nations? Can you explain this difference?

Source: Data from United Nations Development Programme (2005).

have sexual intercourse before reaching the age of fifteen, but half had at least one sexual experience involving oral sex (National Center for Health Statistics, 2005).



Does a pledge of abstinence require that someone not engage in oral sex? Explain your view.

SEX BETWEEN ADULTS

Judging from the mass media, people in the United States are very active sexually. But do popular images reflect reality? The Laumann study (1994), the largest study of sexuality since Kinsey’s groundbreaking research, found that frequency of sexual activity varies widely in the U.S. population. One-third of adults report having sex with a partner a few times a year or not at all, another one-third have sex

SOCIAL SURVEY: “About how often did you have sex during the last 12 months?” (GSS 2004, *N* = 2,242; *Codebook*, 2005:1696)

“Not at all”	19.8%	“About once a week”	16.8%
“Once or twice”	7.1%	“2 or 3 times a week”	16.8%
“About once a month”	10.7%	“More than 3 times a week”	6.6%
“2 or 3 times a month”	16.2%	DK/NR	5.9%

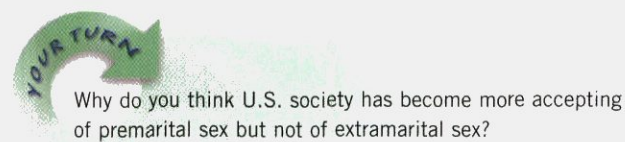
once or several times a month, and the remaining one-third have sex with a partner two or more times a week. In short, no single stereotype accurately describes sexual activity in the United States.

Despite the widespread image of “swinging singles” promoted on television shows such as *Sex and the City*, it is married people who have sex with partners the most. In addition, married people report the highest level of satisfaction—both physical and emotional—with their partners (Laumann et al., 1994).

EXTRAMARITAL SEX

What about married people having sex outside of marriage? This practice, commonly called “adultery” (sociologists prefer the more neutral term *extramarital sex*), is widely condemned. Table 6–1 shows that more than 90 percent of U.S. adults consider a married person having sex with someone other than the marital partner to be “always wrong” or “almost always wrong.” The norm of sexual fidelity within marriage has been and remains a strong element of U.S. culture.

But actual behavior falls short of the cultural ideal. The Laumann study reports that about 25 percent of married men and 10 percent of married women have had at least one extramarital sexual experience. Or stating this the other way around, 75 percent of men and 90 percent of women have remained sexually faithful to their partners (Laumann et al., 1994:214; NORC, 2005:1702).



SEX OVER THE LIFE COURSE

Patterns of sexual activity change with age. In the United States, most young men become sexually active by the time they reach sixteen and women by the age of seventeen. By the time they reach their mid-twenties, more than 90 percent of both women and men reported being sexually active with a partner at least once during the past year.

The picture begins to change by about age fifty, after which advancing age is linked to a decline in the share of people who are sexually active. By age sixty, about 15 percent of men and 40 percent of women say they have not been sexually active in the past year. By age seventy, half of women claim not to be sexually active; by age eighty, half of men say the same (Laumann et al., 1994). Contrary to pop-

DISCUSS: The U.S. ambivalence about sex was evident in the public response to the Clinton sex scandals. Liberals defended Clinton against what they saw as our tradition of oppressive Puritanism; conservatives, on the other hand, condemned Clinton as embodying 1960s permissiveness. What do students think?

Q: “Love is the delusion that one woman differs from another.” H.L. Mencken

DIVERSITY SNAPSHOT

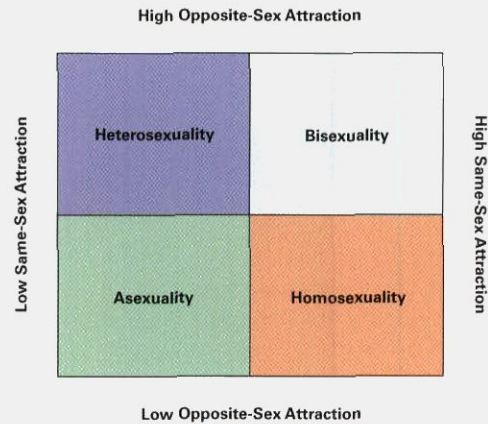


FIGURE 6–2 Four Sexual Orientations

A person’s level of same-sex attraction and opposite-sex attraction are two distinct dimensions that combine in various ways to produce four major sexual orientations.

Source: Adapted from Storms (1980).

ular stereotypes, these data show that sexual activity is a normal part of life for most older adults.

Sexual Orientation

In recent decades, public opinion about sexual orientation has shown a remarkable change. **Sexual orientation** is a person’s romantic and emotional attraction to another person. The norm in all human societies is **heterosexuality** (*hetero* is a Greek word meaning “the other of two”), meaning sexual attraction to someone of the other sex. Yet in every society, a significant share of people experience **homosexuality** (*homo* is the Greek word for “the same”), sexual attraction to someone of the same sex. Keep in mind that people do not necessarily fall into just one of these categories; they may have varying degrees of attraction to both sexes.

The idea that sexual orientation is often not clear-cut points to the existence of a third category: **bisexuality**, sexual attraction to people of both sexes. Some bisexual people are attracted equally to males and females; many others are attracted more strongly to one sex than the other. Finally, **asexuality** is no sexual attraction to people of either sex. Figure 6–2 places each of these sexual orientations in relation to the others.

It is important to remember that sexual attraction is not the same thing as sexual behavior. Many people have experienced some attraction to someone of the same sex,

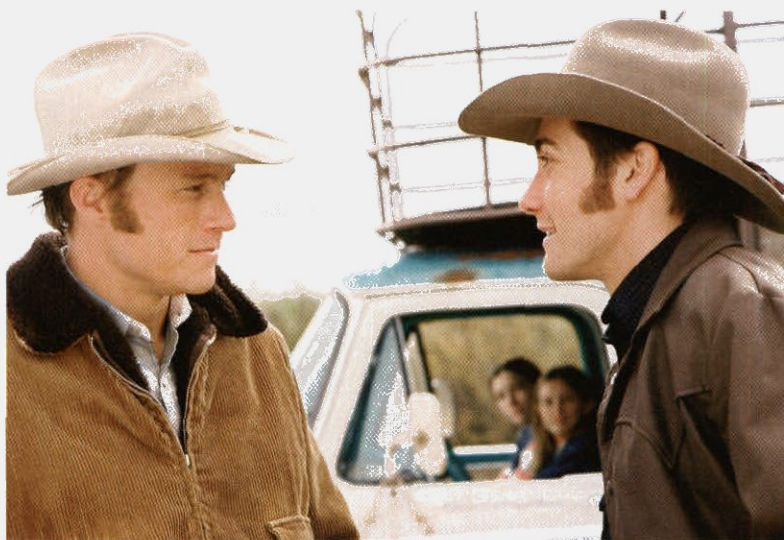
RESOURCE: J. M. Carrier looks at “Homosexual Behavior in Cross-Cultural Perspective” in the Macionis and Benokraitis reader, *Seeing Ourselves*.

DISCUSS: Does homosexuality have a biological basis? If so, some worry, the existence of a gay gene might prompt selective abortion of fetuses thought to be homosexual or even surgery to “correct” the brains of gay men and lesbians (Zicklin, 1992).

NOTE: Gay couples earn more, on average, than married heterosexual couples. For example, married women ages 35 to 44 with a college degree averaged \$21,500 in 2000 versus \$28,500 for lesbian women in a committed relationship.

POP CULTURE: Homosexuality has become a part of pop culture with television shows including *Queer as Folk*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, and *The L. Word*.

The recent film *Brokeback Mountain*, the story of two young men who have a close, lifelong relationship, was widely characterized as a “gay cowboy movie.” However, in the film both young men have relationships with women as well as with each other, so it is probably more correct to say that it is a “bisexual movie.” Do you think people have more trouble understanding—and accepting—bisexuality than homosexuality? Why or why not?



but far fewer ever actually engage in same-sex behavior. This is in large part because our culture discourages such actions.

In the United States and around the world, heterosexuality is the norm because, biologically speaking, heterosexual relations permit human reproduction. Even so, most societies tolerate homosexuality. Among the ancient Greeks,



For a summary of recent research on sexual orientation, go to <http://www.davidmyers.org/Brix?pageID=62>

upper-class men considered homosexuality the highest form of relationship, partly because they

looked down on women as intellectually inferior. As men saw it, heterosexuality was necessary only so they could have children, and “real” men preferred homosexual relations (Kluckhohn, 1948; Ford & Beach, 1951; Greenberg, 1988).

WHAT GIVES US A SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

The question of how people come to have a particular sexual orientation is strongly debated. The arguments cluster into two general positions: sexual orientation as a product of society and sexual orientation as a product of biology.

Sexual Orientation: A Product of Society

This approach argues that people in any society attach meanings to sexual activity, and these meanings differ from place to place and over time. As Michel Foucault (1990, orig. 1978) points out, for example, there was no distinct category of people called “homosexuals” until a century ago, when scientists and eventually the public as a whole began defining people that way. Throughout history, many people no doubt had what we would call “homosexual

experiences.” But neither they nor others saw in this behavior the basis for any special identity.

Anthropological studies show that patterns of homosexuality differ greatly from one society to another. In Siberia, for example, the Chukchee Eskimo perform a ritual during which one man dresses like a woman and does a woman’s work. The Sambias, who dwell in the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea, have a ritual in which young boys perform oral sex on older men in the belief that eating semen will make them more masculine. The existence of such diverse patterns in societies around the world seems to indicate that for human beings, sexual expression is socially constructed (Murray & Roscoe, 1998; Blackwood & Wieringa, 1999).

Sexual Orientation: A Product of Biology

A growing body of research suggests that sexual orientation is innate, or rooted in human biology in much the same way that people are born right-handed or left-handed. Arguing this position, Simon LeVay (1993) links sexual orientation



The American Psychological Association posts answers to commonly asked questions about sexual orientation at <http://www.apa.org/topics/orientation.html>

to the structure of a person’s brain. LeVay studied the brains of both homosexual and heterosexual

men and found a small but important difference in the size of the hypothalamus, a part of the brain that regulates hormones. Such an anatomical difference, he claims, plays a part in shaping sexual orientation.

Genetics may also influence sexual orientation. One study of forty-four pairs of brothers, all homosexual, found

GLOBAL: The share of the homosexual population reported by Laumann and his colleagues corresponds to other recent cross-national research. This seems to support the position that there is a biological foundation to sexual orientation.

NOTE: Census 2000 reported 249,037 same-sex households in the U.S., or slightly more than one-half of 1% of all households.

that thirty-three pairs had a distinctive genetic pattern involving the X chromosome. Moreover, the gay brothers had an unusually high number of gay male relatives—but only on their mother’s side. Such evidence leads some researchers to think there may be a “gay gene” located on the X chromosome (Hamer & Copeland, 1994).

CRITICAL REVIEW Mounting evidence supports the conclusion that sexual orientation is rooted in biology, although the best guess at present is that both nature and nurture play a part. Remember that sexual orientation is not a matter of neat categories. Most people who think of themselves as homosexual have had one or more heterosexual experiences, just as many people who think of themselves as heterosexual have had one or more homosexual experiences. Explaining sexual orientation, then, is not easy.

There is also a political issue here with great importance for gay men and lesbians. To the extent that sexual orientation is based in biology, homosexuals have no more choice about their sexual orientation than they do about their skin color. If this is so, shouldn’t gay men and lesbians expect the same legal protection from discrimination as African Americans?

YOUR LEARNING What evidence supports the position that sexual behavior is constructed by society? What evidence supports the position that sexual orientation is rooted in biology?

HOW MANY GAY PEOPLE ARE THERE?

What share of our population is gay? This is a hard question to answer because, as noted earlier, sexual orientation is not a matter of neat categories. In addition, people are not always willing to discuss their sexuality with strangers or even family members. Sex researcher Alfred Kinsey estimated that about 4 percent of males and 2 percent of females have an exclusively same-sex orientation, although he pointed out that most people experience same-sex attraction at some point in their lives.

Some social scientists put the gay share of the population at 10 percent. But the Laumann survey shows that how homosexuality is defined makes a big difference in the results (Laumann et al., 1994). As Figure 6–3 shows, around 9 percent of men and 4 percent of women between the ages of eighteen and fifty-nine reported engaging in homosexual activity *at some time* in their lives. The second set of numbers in the bar graph shows that fewer men and even fewer women had a homosexual experience during childhood but not after puberty. And 2.8 percent of men and 1.4 percent

RESOURCE: An excerpt on “Understanding Sexual Orientation” by Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy, and Clyde Martin is among the classics in the Macionis and Benokraitis reader, *Seeing Ourselves*.

SOCIAL SURVEY: Results of a recent international survey showing share of adult respondents who claim that homosexuality is wrong: U.S., 42%; Mexico, 41%; U.K., 21%; France, 13%; the Netherlands, 9%; Spain, 5% (cited in Fetto, 2002a:16).

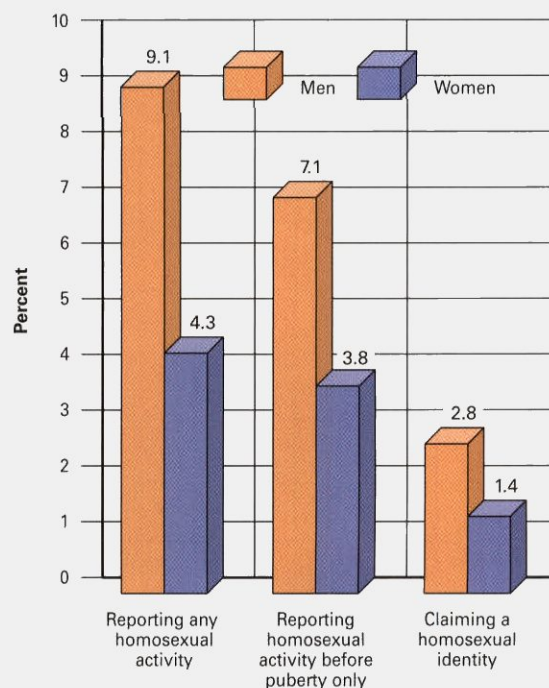


FIGURE 6–3 Share of the U.S. Population That Is Homosexual

The percentage of people who are classified as having a homosexual orientation depends on how this concept is operationalized. Research suggests that 2.8 percent of adult men and 1.4 percent of adult women claim a homosexual identity.

Source: Adapted from Laumann et al. (1994).

of women defined themselves as “partly” or “entirely” homosexual.

In the Laumann survey, less than 1 percent of U.S. adults described themselves as bisexual. But bisexual experiences appear to be fairly common (at least for a time) among younger people, especially on college and university campuses (Laumann et al., 1994; Leland, 1995). Many bisexuals do not think of themselves as either gay or straight, and their behavior reflects elements of both gay and straight living.

THE GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The public’s attitude toward homosexuality has been moving toward greater acceptance. Back in 1973, about three-fourths of U.S. adults claimed that homosexual relations were “always wrong” or “almost always wrong.” Although that percentage changed little in the 1970s and 1980s, by 2004 it had dropped to 60 percent (NORC, 2005:292). Among college students, who are generally more tolerant of homosexual relationships than the population as a whole,

NOTE: Since the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy was enacted in 1993, about 9,500 people have been dismissed from the armed forces on grounds of sexual orientation. Estimated cost of replacing them: about \$200 million.

NOTE: Research by Craig Little and Andrea Rankin (2001) shows that alcohol and marijuana use are significant predictors of sexual activity among eighth graders. Boys, they conclude, initiate sexual

activity as a status-seeking effort, and girls do so to gain approval from partners and peers.

DIVERSITY: The Youth Risk Behavior Survey reports these shares of U.S. high school students to be sexually active: Non-Hispanic white: 32.0%; Hispanic: 35.0%; Non-Hispanic black: 47.4% (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006).

STUDENT SNAPSHOT

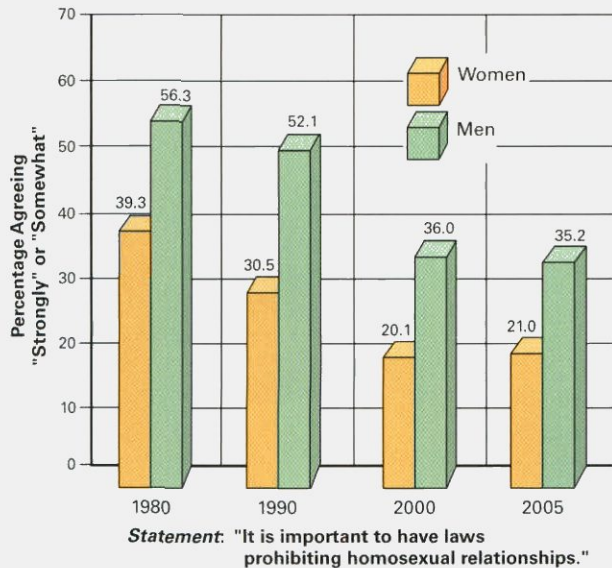


FIGURE 6-4 Opposition to Homosexual Relationships: Attitudes of First-Year College Students, 1980–2005

The historical trend among college students is toward greater tolerance of homosexual relationships, a view held by a large majority.

Sources: Astin et al. (2002) and Pryor et al. (2005).

we see a similar trend. In 1980, about half of college students supported laws prohibiting homosexual relationships; by 2005, as Figure 6–4 shows, less than one-third felt the same way (Astin et al., 2002; Pryor et al., 2005).

In large measure, this change was brought about by the gay rights movement, which arose in the middle of the twentieth century. Up to that time, most people in this country did not discuss homosexuality, and it was common for companies (including the federal government and the armed forces) to fire anyone who was accused of being gay. Mental health professionals also took a hard line, describing homosexuals as “sick” and sometimes placing them in mental hospitals, where it was hoped they might be “cured.” It is no surprise that most lesbians and gay men remained “in the closet,” closely guarding the secret of their sexual orientation. But the gay rights movement gained strength during the 1960s. One early milestone for the movement occurred in 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association declared that homosexuality was not an illness but simply “a form of sexual behavior.”

The gay rights movement also began using the term **homophobia** to describe *discomfort over close personal in-*

teraction with people thought to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Weinberg, 1973). The concept of homophobia, “fear of sameness,” turns the tables on society: Instead of asking “What’s wrong with gay people?” the question becomes “What’s wrong with people who can’t accept a different sexual orientation?”

In 2004, a number of cities and towns began to allow gay couples to marry, although these unions were later invalidated. But gay marriage is now legal in the state of Massachusetts, and civil unions (marriage by another name) are legal in Vermont and Connecticut. At the same time, seventeen states have enacted laws that forbid gay marriage and prohibit recognizing such marriages performed elsewhere.



What changes in laws regarding gay marriage do you expect over the next ten years? Why?

Sexual Issues and Controversies

Sexuality lies at the heart of a number of controversies in the United States today. Here we take a look at four key issues: teen pregnancy, pornography, prostitution, and sexual violence.

TEEN PREGNANCY

Because of the risk of pregnancy, engaging in sexual activities—especially intercourse—demands a high level of responsibility. Teenagers may be biologically mature enough to conceive, but many are not emotionally secure enough to appreciate the



Visit the Web site of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy at <http://www.teenpregnancy.org>

consequences of their actions. Surveys show that there are nearly 1

million U.S. teen pregnancies in the United States each year, most of them unplanned. This country’s rate of births to teens is higher than that of all other high-income countries and is twice the rate in Canada (Darroch et al., 2001).

For young women of all racial and ethnic categories, weak families and low income sharply increase the likelihood of becoming sexually active and having an unplanned child. To make matters worse, having unplanned children raises the risk that young women (as well as young fathers-to-be) will not finish school and will live in poverty (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2002).

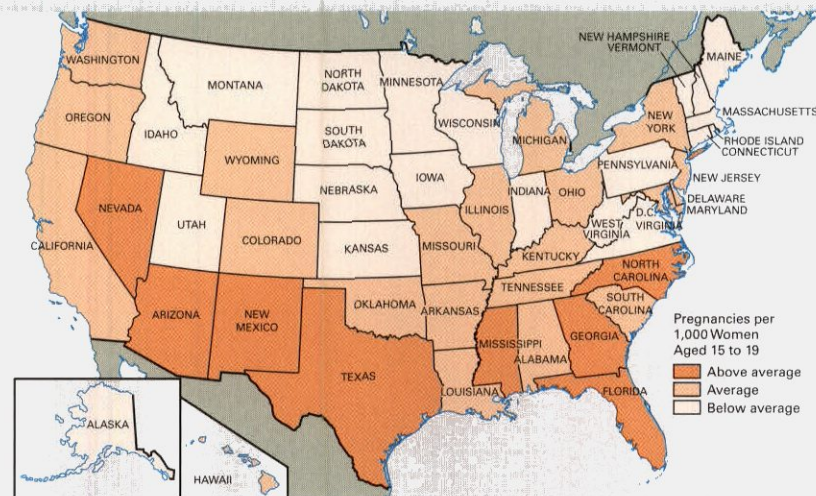
Did the sexual revolution raise the rate of teenage pregnancy? Perhaps surprisingly, the answer is no. The rate of

NOTE: Although the rate of pregnancy among teenage girls between ages 15 and 20 has gone down, the pregnancy rate for younger girls has gone up. The reason is girls and boys are becoming sexually active at a younger age.

THE MAP: Generally, teen birth rates are higher in states that have lower average incomes. Compare this map and National Map 8-1 on page 234.

DISCUSS: Ask how the class distinguishes between “erotic” and “pornographic” material. Can we balance conservative moral concerns, liberal support for freedom of expression, and feminist opposition to the patriarchal dimensions of pornography?

GLOBAL: A clear case of ethnocentrism is that the Japanese child pornography industry—the biggest in the world—almost never uses Japanese girls; they “import” other Asian women.



SEEING OURSELVES

NATIONAL MAP 6-2
Teenage Pregnancy Rates
across the United States

The map shows pregnancy rates for 2000 for women aged fifteen to nineteen. In what regions of the country are rates high? Where are they low? What explanation can you offer for these patterns?

Source: Alan Guttmacher Institute (2004).

pregnancy among teens in 1950 was higher than it is today, partly because people back then married at a younger age. Because abortion was against the law, many pregnancies led to quick marriages. As a result, there were many pregnant teenagers, but almost 90 percent were married. Today, by contrast, the number of pregnant teens has fallen, but about 80 percent of these women are unmarried. In a slight majority (57 percent) of such cases, these women keep their babies; in the remainder, they have abortions (29 percent) or miscarriages (14 percent) (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2004). National Map 6-2 shows pregnancy rates for women between the ages of fifteen and nineteen throughout the United States.

PORNOGRAPHY

Pornography is *sexually explicit material intended to cause sexual arousal*. But what is and is not pornographic has long been a matter of debate. Recognizing that different people view portrayals of sexuality differently, the U.S. Supreme Court gives local communities the power to decide for themselves what type of material violates “community standards” of decency and lacks “redeeming social value.”

Definitions aside, pornography is very popular in the United States: X-rated videos, telephone “sex lines,” sexually explicit movies and magazines, and thousands of Internet Web sites make up a thriving industry that takes in more than \$10 billion each year. The vast majority of consumers of pornography are men.

Traditionally, people have criticized pornography on *moral* grounds. National surveys confirm the concern of 60 percent of U.S. adults that “sexual materials lead to a breakdown of morals” (NORC, 2005:293). Today, however,

pornography is also seen as a *political* issue because most of it degrades women, portraying them as the sexual playthings of men.

Some critics also claim that pornography is a cause of violence against women. Although it is difficult to prove a scientific cause-and-effect relationship between what people view and how they act, the public shares a concern about pornography and violence, with almost half of adults holding the opinion that pornography encourages people to commit rape (NORC, 2005:293).

Although people everywhere object to sexual material they find offensive, many also value the principle of free speech and the protection of artistic expression. Nevertheless, pressure to restrict pornography is building from an unlikely coalition of conservatives (who oppose pornography on moral grounds) and liberals (who condemn it for political reasons).

PROSTITUTION

Prostitution is *the selling of sexual services*. Often called the “world’s oldest profession,” prostitution has existed throughout recorded history. In the United States today, about one in seven adult men reports having paid for sex at some time (NORC, 2005:1701). Because most people think that sex should be an expression of intimacy between two people, they find the idea of sex for money disturbing. As a result, prostitution is against the law everywhere in the United States except for parts of rural Nevada.

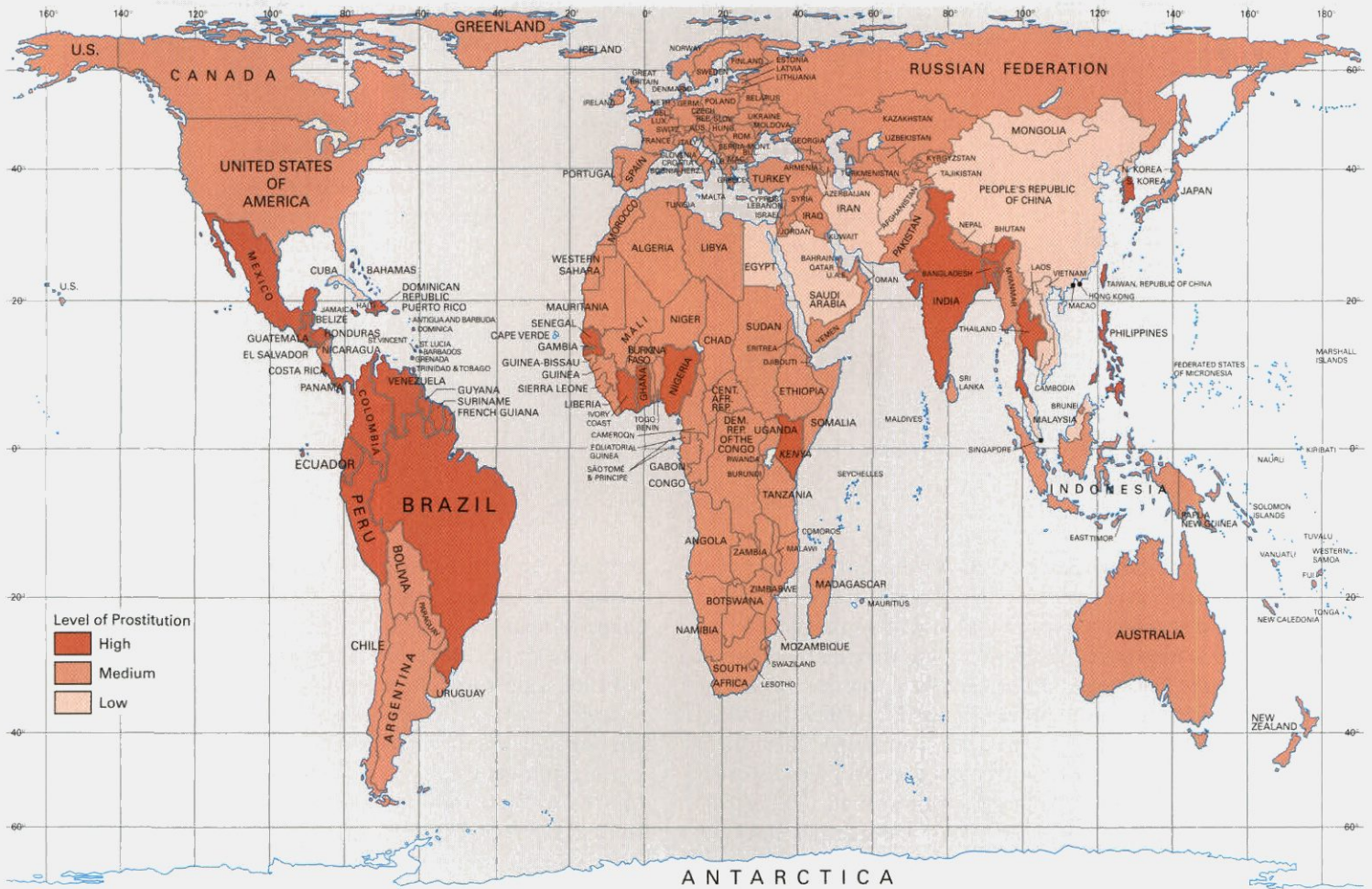
Around the world, prostitution is greatest in poor countries where patriarchy is strong and traditional cultural norms limit women’s ability to earn a living. Global Map 6-2 on page 160 shows where prostitution is most widespread.

DISCUSS: Is prostitution (as well as exotic dancing and other sex work) a sign of the oppression of women or an opportunity for some women to make a reasonably good living?

SOCIAL SURVEY: "Thinking about the time since your 18th birthday, have you ever had sex with a person you paid or who paid you for sex?" (GSS 2004, N = 2,242; Codebook, 2005:1701)
 "Yes" 7.3% "No" 90.5% DK/NR 2.1%

SOCIAL SURVEY: "There is nothing inherently wrong with prostitution, so long as the health risks can be minimized. If consenting adults agree to exchange money for sex, that is their business." (GSS 1996, N = 1,444; Codebook, 2005:757)

"Agree strongly"	15.4%	"Disagree strongly"	43.1%
"Agree somewhat"	23.7%	DK/NR	2.7%
"Disagree somewhat"	15.2%		



WINDOW ON THE WORLD

GLOBAL MAP 6-2 Prostitution in Global Perspective

Generally speaking, prostitution is widespread in societies where women have low standing. Officially, at least, the People's Republic of China boasts of gender equality, including the elimination of "vice" such as prostitution, which oppresses women. By contrast, in much of Latin America, where patriarchy is strong, prostitution is common. In many Islamic societies, patriarchy is also strong, but religion is a counterbalance, so prostitution is limited. Western, high-income nations have a moderate amount of prostitution.

Sources: *Peters Atlas of the World* (1990) and Mackay (2000).

Types of Prostitution

Most prostitutes (many prefer the morally neutral term "sex workers") are women, but they fall into different categories. *Call girls* are elite prostitutes, typically young, attractive, and

well-educated women who arrange their own "dates" with clients by telephone. The classified pages of any large city newspaper contain numerous ads for "escort services," by which women and men offer both companionship and sex for a fee.

NOTE: The ancient Greeks had much the same prostitution hierarchy as we do now. Low-cost brothel workers occupied the lowest position; street walkers were only slightly more rewarded. At the top, the elite call girls of the time—the *hetirae*—were educated in the arts and philosophy and provided intellectual as well as sexual stimulation (cf. Davis, 1971).

NOTE: Prostitution was legal throughout the U.S. until 1909. Iowa was first to ban it; by 1920, all states followed suit.

DISCUSS: What arguments can the class develop in favor of legalizing prostitution? What arguments oppose such a position?

CYBER: What about the future of cyber-sex: “teledildonics,” or virtual sex in sensory suits that “connect” individuals or simply provide sexual stimulation?



Brothels like this one are found in rural counties of Nevada. Some people claim that legalizing prostitution permits the government to protect the health and safety of “sex workers,” who have the opportunity to earn a good income. Others claim that selling sex is degrading to women as well as men, and that women’s economic opportunity should not depend on selling themselves in this way. Where do you stand on the issue of legalized prostitution? Why?

In the middle are prostitutes employed in “massage parlors” or brothels under the control of managers. These sex workers have less choice about their clients, receive less money for their services, and get to keep no more than half of what they make.

At the bottom of the sex worker hierarchy are *streetwalkers*, women and men who “work the streets” of large cities. Typically, female streetwalkers are under the control of male pimps who take most of their earnings. Some are addicted to drugs and sell sex to buy the drugs they need. All streetwalkers are at high risk of becoming the victims of violence (Davidson, 1998; Estes, 2001).

Most prostitutes offer heterosexual services. However, gay prostitutes also trade sex for money. Researchers report that many gay prostitutes end up selling sex after having suffered rejection by family and friends because of their sexual orientation (Weisberg, 1985; Boyer, 1989; Kruks, 1991).

A Victimless Crime?

Prostitution is against the law almost everywhere in the United States, but many people consider it a victimless crime (defined in Chapter 7, “Deviance,” as a crime in which no one claims to be a victim). Consequently, instead of enforcing prostitution laws consistently, police stage only occasional crackdowns. This policy reflects a desire to control prostitution while recognizing that it is impossible to eliminate it totally.

Many people take a “live and let live” attitude about prostitution and say that adults ought to be free to do as they please as long as no one is forced to do anything. But is prostitution really victimless? The sex trade subjects many women to abuse and outright violence and also plays a part in spreading sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

In addition, many poor women—especially in low-income nations—become trapped in a life of selling sex. Thailand, in Southeast Asia, has 2 million prostitutes, representing about 10 percent of all women in the labor force. Many of these women begin working before they are teenagers, are often subjected to physical abuse, and run a high risk of contracting HIV (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001).

In the past, the focus of law enforcement has been on the women who earn money as sex workers. But prostitution would not exist without demand on the part of men. For this reason, police officers are now more likely to target “Johns” when they attempt to buy sex.



Do you consider prostitution a victimless crime or not? Explain your position.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE: RAPE AND DATE RAPE

Ideally, sexual activity occurs within a loving relationship between consenting adults. In reality, however, sex can sometimes be twisted by hatred and violence. Here we consider two types of sexual violence: rape and date rape.

Rape

Although some people think rape is motivated only by a desire for sex, it is actually an expression of power, a violent act that uses sex to hurt, humiliate, or control another person. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, about 95,000 women report being raped to the police each year.

NOTE: Public support for rape victims has prompted more women to come forward, a trend reflected in a steady rise in the number and percentage of forcible rapes reported to police during the 1980s and 1990s.

NOTE: Men also rape men, and there are rare cases of women raping men. Although the federal definition of “forcible rape” focuses on a man raping a woman, other patterns are noted separately by the FBI.

DISCUSS: How many words can students think of to characterize a sexually loose female? How many comparable words apply to men? Why the difference?

GLOBAL: Interpol data indicate that the worst nation in the world with regard to rape is South Africa, with about 1.6 million rapes per year (a rate of 119 per 100,000 people versus 90 in the U.S.). Only about 3 in 100 rapes are reported to police (Hawthorne, 1999).



SEEING SOCIOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

When Sex Is Only Sex: The Campus Culture of “Hooking Up”

Have you ever been in a sexual situation and not been sure of the right thing to do? Most colleges and universities highlight two important rules. First, sexual activity must take place only when both participants have given clear statements of consent. The consent principle is what makes “having sex” different from date rape. Second, no one should knowingly expose a partner to a sexually transmitted disease, especially when the partner is unaware of the danger.

These rules are very important, but they say little about the larger issue of what sex *means*. For example, when is it “right” to have a sexual relationship? How well do you have to know the other person? If you do have sex, are you obligated to see the person again?

Two generations ago, there were informal rules for campus sex. Dating was part of the courtship process. That is, “going out” was a way in which women and men evaluated each other as possible marriage partners while they sharpened their own sense of what they wanted in a mate. Because, on average, marriage took place when people were in their early twenties, many college students became engaged and married while they were still in school. In this cultural climate, sex became part of a

relationship along with commitment—a serious interest in the other person as a possible marriage partner.

Today, the sexual culture of the campus is very different. Partly because people now marry much later, the culture of courtship has declined dramatically. About three-fourths of women in a recent national survey point to a new campus pattern, the culture of “hooking up.” What exactly is “hooking up”? Most describe it in words like these: “When a girl and a guy get together for a physical encounter—anything from kissing to having sex—and don’t necessarily expect anything further.”

Student responses to the survey suggest that “hookups” have three characteristics. First, most couples who hook up know little about each other. Second, a typical hookup involves people who have been drinking alcohol, usually at a campus party. Third, most women are critical of the culture of hooking up and express little satisfaction with these encounters. Certainly, some women (and men) who hook up simply walk away, happy to have enjoyed a sexual experience free of further obligation. But given the powerful emotions that sex can unleash, hooking up often leaves someone wondering

what to expect next. “Will you call me tomorrow?” “Will I see you again?”

The survey asked women who had experienced a recent hookup to report how they felt about the experience a day later. A majority of respondents said they felt “awkward,” about half felt “disappointed” and “confused,” and one in four felt “exploited.” Clearly, for many people, sex is more than a physical encounter. Further, because today’s campus is very sensitive to charges of sexual exploitation, there is a need for clearer standards of fair play.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. How extensive is hooking up on your campus? Are you aware of differences in these encounters between heterosexuals and homosexuals?
2. What do you see as the advantages of sex without commitment? What are the disadvantages of this kind of relationship? Are men and women likely to answer these questions differently? Explain.
3. Do you think college students need more guidance about sexual issues? If so, who should provide this guidance?

Source: Based in part on Marquardt & Glenn (2001).

The actual number of rapes is likely several times higher (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2005).

The official government definition of rape is “the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will.” Thus official rape statistics include only victims who are women. But men, too, are raped—in perhaps 10 percent of all cases. Most men who rape men are not homosexual; they are heterosexuals who are motivated by a desire not for sex but to dominate another person.

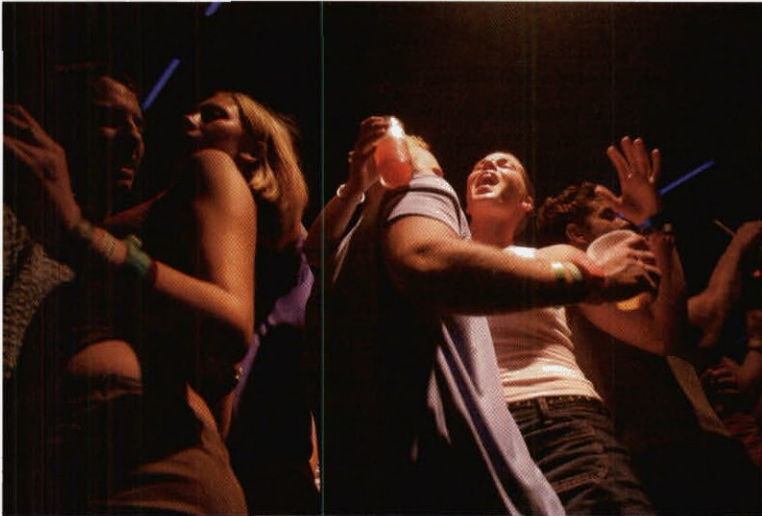
Date Rape

A common myth is that rape involves strangers. In reality, however, only about one-third of all rapes fit this pattern. Three of every four rapes involve people who know each other—more often than not, pretty well—and these crimes usually take place in familiar surroundings, such as the home or a college campus. The term “date rape” or “acquaintance rape” refers to forcible sexual violence

NOTE: Kingsley Davis argued that prostitution was functional to the extent that it provided sexual access for people without committed partners and a sexual outlet that might even keep some marriages together. Generally, however, functionalism views sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy, pornography, prostitution, and sexual violence as dysfunctional patterns that result from the failure of social institutions—notably the family and the church—to operate as they

should. Ideally, at least, a society in which children grow up in two-parent families learning to respect conventional moral standards should have little problem with pornography, sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Q: “Human beings are the only living creatures who blush—or need to.” Mark Twain



Experts agree that one factor that contributes to the problem of sexual violence on the college campus is the widespread use of alcoholic beverages. What policies are in force on your campus to discourage the kind of drinking that leads to one person imposing sex on another?

against women by men they know (Laumann et al., 1994; U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006).

A second myth, often linked specifically to date rape, is the idea that a woman who has been raped must have done something to encourage the man and make him think she wanted to have sex. Perhaps the victim agreed to go out with the offender. Maybe she even invited him to her room. But of course, such actions no more justify rape than they would any other kind of physical assault.

Although rape is a physical attack, it also leaves emotional and psychological scars. Beyond the brutality of being physically violated, rape by an acquaintance also affects a victim’s ability to trust others. Psychological scars are especially serious among the half of rape victims who are under eighteen; one-third of these young victims are attacked by their own fathers or stepfathers (Greenfield, 1996).

How common is date rape? One recent study found that about 20 percent of a sample of high school girls in the United States reported being victims of sexual or physical violence inflicted by the boys they were dating (Dickinson, 2001).

Nowhere has the issue of date rape been more widely discussed than on college campuses, where the danger of date rape is high. The collegiate environment promotes easy

friendships and encourages trust. At the same time, many young students have much to learn about relationships and

about themselves. As the Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box explains, although college life encourages communication, it provides few social norms to help guide young people’s sexual experiences. To counter the problem, many

schools now actively address myths about rape. In addition, greater attention is now focused on the use of alcohol, which increases the likelihood of sexual violence.

Theoretical Analysis of Sexuality

Applying sociology’s various theoretical approaches gives us a better understanding of human sexuality. The following sections discuss the three major approaches. The Applying Theory table on page 164 highlights the key insights of each approach.

STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

The structural-functional approach explains the contribution of any social pattern to the overall operation of society. Because sexuality can have such important consequences, society regulates this type of behavior.

The Need to Regulate Sexuality

From a biological point of view, sex allows our species to reproduce. But culture and social institutions regulate *with whom* and *when* people reproduce. For example, most societies condemn married people who have sex with someone other than a spouse. To allow the forces of sexual passion to go unchecked would threaten family life, especially the raising of children.

The fact that the incest taboo exists everywhere shows clearly that no society permits a completely free choice of sexual partners. Reproduction resulting from sex between family members other than married partners would break down the kinship system and hopelessly confuse human relationships.



A government report on the sexual victimization of college women is available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/svcw.htm>

APPLYING THEORY

Sexuality

	Structural-Functional Approach	Symbolic-Interaction Approach	Social-Conflict Approach
What is the level of analysis?	Macro-level	Micro-level	Macro-level
What is the importance of sexuality for society?	Society depends on sexuality for reproduction. Society uses the incest taboo and other norms to control sexuality in order to maintain social order.	Sexual practices vary among the many cultures of the world. Some societies allow individuals more freedom than others in matters of sexual behavior.	Sexuality is linked to social inequality. U.S. society regulates women's sexuality more than men's; this is part of the larger pattern of men dominating women.
Has sexuality changed over time? How?	Yes. As advances in birth control technology separate sex from reproduction, societies relax some controls on sexuality.	Yes. The meanings people attach to virginity and other sexual matters are all socially constructed and subject to change.	Yes and no. Some sexual standards have relaxed, but society still defines women in sexual terms, just as homosexual people are harmed by society's heterosexual bias.

Historically, the social control of sexuality was strong, mostly because sex often led to childbirth. We see these controls at work in the old-fashioned distinction between “legitimate” reproduction (within marriage) and “illegitimate” reproduction (outside marriage). But once a society develops the technology to control births, its sexual norms become more permissive. This occurred in the United States, where over the course of the twentieth century, sex moved beyond its basic reproductive function and became mainly a form of intimacy and even recreation (Giddens, 1992).

Latent Functions: The Case of Prostitution

It is easy to see that prostitution is harmful because it spreads disease and exploits women. But does it have latent functions that help explain why prostitution is so widespread? According to Kingsley Davis (1971), prostitution is one way to meet the sexual needs of a large number of people who do not have ready access to sex, including soldiers, travelers, and people who are not physically attractive enough or are too poor to attract a marriage partner (such as Ali in the opening to this chapter). Some people favor prostitution because they want sex without the “trouble” of a relationship. As one analyst put it, “Men don’t pay for sex; they pay so they can leave” (Miracle, Miracle, & Baumeister, 2003:421).

CRITICAL REVIEW The structural-functional approach helps us appreciate the important role sexuality plays in the organization of society. The incest taboo and

other cultural norms suggest that society has always paid attention to who has sex with whom and, especially, who reproduces with whom.

Functional analysis sometimes ignores gender; when Kingsley Davis wrote of the benefits of prostitution for society, he was really talking about the benefits to *men*. In addition, the fact that sexual patterns change over time, just as they differ around the world, is ignored by this perspective. To appreciate the varied and changeable nature of sexuality, we now turn to the symbolic-interaction approach.



YOUR LEARNING Why do modern societies give people more choice about matters involving sexuality?

SYMBOLIC-INTERACTION ANALYSIS

The symbolic-interaction approach highlights how as people interact, they construct everyday reality. As explained in Chapter 4 (“Social Interaction in Everyday Life”), *different* people construct different realities, so the views of one group or society may well differ from those of another. In the same way, our understanding of sexuality can and does change over time.

The Social Construction of Sexuality

Almost all social patterns involving sexuality saw a lot of change over the course of the twentieth century. One good

NOTE: Another interaction example involves the meaning attached to AIDS. Various precautions (dentists using gloves and masks, carefully disposing of needles, and so on) began after the AIDS crisis, even though other diseases such as hepatitis are more contagious and have been around far longer. Why? Probably because AIDS was defined as a gay disease.

DISCUSS: Actress Brooke Shields filmed her famous “Nothing

illustration is the changing importance of virginity. A century ago, our society’s norm—for women, at least—was virginity until marriage. This norm was strong because there was no effective means of birth control, and virginity was the only assurance a man had that his bride-to-be was not carrying another man’s child.

Today, because we have gone a long way toward separating sex from reproduction, the virginity norm has weakened considerably. In the United States, among people born between 1963 and 1974, just 16.3 percent of men and 20.1 percent of women report being virgins at first marriage (Laumann et al., 1994:503).

Another example of our society’s construction of sexuality involves young people’s awareness of sex. A century ago, childhood was a time of innocence in sexual matters. In recent decades, however, thinking has changed. Although few people encourage sexual activity between children, most people believe that children should be educated about sex so that they can make intelligent choices about their behavior as they grow older.

Global Comparisons

Around the world, different societies attach different meanings to sexuality. For example, Ruth Benedict (1938), an anthropologist who spent years learning the ways of life of the Melanesian people of southeastern New Guinea, reported that adults paid little attention when young children engaged in sexual experimentation with one another. Parents in Melanesia shrugged off such activity because before puberty, sex cannot lead to reproduction. Is it likely that most parents in the United States would respond the same way?

Sexual practices also vary from culture to culture. Circumcision of infant boys (the practice of removing all or part of the foreskin of the penis) is common in the United States but rare in most other parts of the world. A practice sometimes referred to as female circumcision (removal of the clitoris) is rare in the United States but common in parts of Africa and the Middle East (Crosette, 1995; Huffman, 2000). (For more about this practice, more accurately called “female genital mutilation,” see the Thinking About Diversity box on page 286).

CRITICAL REVIEW The strength of the symbolic-interaction approach lies in revealing the socially constructed character of familiar social patterns. Understanding that people “construct” sexuality, we can better appreciate the variety of sexual attitudes and practices found over the course of history and around the world.

One limitation of this approach is that not all sexual practices are so variable. Men everywhere have always

comes between me and my Calvins” ad when she was 15. Describe the ad to the class and ask them if they think sexual advertising of this kind is helpful or harmful to young people.

EXERCISE: Visit a local supermarket and examine the covers of the magazines displayed at the checkout line. To what extent is sexuality used to sell products? More specifically, are men or women more commonly portrayed in sexual terms?



The control of women’s sexuality is a common theme in human history. During the Middle Ages, Europeans devised the “chastity belt”—a metal device locked about a woman’s groin that prevented sexual intercourse (and probably interfered with other bodily functions as well). While such devices are all but unknown today, the social control of sexuality continues. Can you point to examples?

been more likely to see women in sexual terms than the other way around. Because this pattern is widespread, some broader social structure must be at work, as we shall see in the following section on the social-conflict approach.

YOUR LEARNING What evidence can you provide showing that human sexuality is socially constructed?

SOCIAL-CONFLICT ANALYSIS

As you have seen in earlier chapters, the social-conflict approach highlights dimensions of inequality. This approach shows how sexuality both reflects patterns of social inequality and helps perpetuate them.

Sexuality: Reflecting Social Inequality

Recall our discussion of prostitution, a practice outlawed almost everywhere in our society. Enforcement of prostitution laws is uneven at best, especially when it comes to who is and is not likely to be arrested. Although two people are

NOTE: In the decades since 1973, new laws and court decisions have restricted—but not eliminated—women’s access to abortion. In 1977, Congress (the Hyde Amendment) declared that Medicaid funds could not be used to pay for abortions except to save a mother’s life. In 1980, the Supreme Court (*Harris v. McRae*) ruled that state and federal governments may decide not to use welfare funds to pay for abortions for poor women. In 1989, the Supreme Court supported a state’s law for-

bidding state doctors and hospitals from performing abortions except to save a mother’s life. Most states have also enacted laws requiring girls under legal age to obtain parental consent before receiving an abortion.

NOTE: The ancients used a wide range of plants, including Queen Anne’s lace and myrrh, to make contraceptive potions (Riddle, Estes, & Russell, 1994).



THINKING CRITICALLY

The Abortion Controversy

A black van pulls up to a storefront in a busy section of the city. Two women get out of the front seat and look up and down the street. After a moment, one nods to the other, and they open the rear door to let a third young woman out of the van. Standing to the right and left of the woman, the two quickly escort her inside the building.

This scene might describe two federal marshals taking a convict to a police station, but it is actually an account of two clinic workers helping a woman who has decided to have an abortion. Why must they be so cautious? Anyone who has read the papers in recent years knows about the angry confrontations at abortion clinics across North America. Some opponents have even targeted and killed doctors who carry out abortions, some 1.3 million of which are performed in the United States each year. It is one of the most hotly debated issues of our day.

Abortion has not always been so controversial. In colonial times, mid-

wives and other healers performed abortions with little community opposition and with full approval of the law. But controversy arose around 1850, when early medical doctors wanted to eliminate the competition they faced from midwives and other traditional health providers, whose income came largely from ending pregnancies. By 1900, medical doctors succeeded in getting every state to pass a law banning abortion.

Such laws greatly reduced the number of abortions. Those that did occur were performed “underground,” as secretly as possible. Many women who wanted abortions—especially those who were poor—had little choice but to seek help from unlicensed “back alley” abortionists, sometimes with tragic results due to unsanitary conditions and the use of medically dangerous techniques.

By the 1960s, opposition to laws prohibiting abortions was rising. In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered a landmark decision (in the

cases of *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*), striking down all state laws banning abortion. In effect, this action established a woman’s legal access to abortion nationwide.

Even so, the abortion controversy continues. On one side of the issue are people who describe themselves as “pro-choice,” supporting a woman’s right to choose abortion. On the other side are those who call themselves “pro-life,” opposing abortion as morally wrong; these people would like to see the Supreme Court reverse its 1973 decision.

How strong is the support for each side of the abortion controversy? A recent national survey asked the question, “Should it be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if the woman wants it for any reason?” In response, 38.5 percent said yes (placing them in the pro-choice camp), and 56.5 percent said no (expressing the pro-life position); the remaining 5 percent offered no opinion (NORC, 2005:282).

involved, the record shows that police are far more likely to arrest (less powerful) female prostitutes than (more powerful) male clients. Of all women engaged in prostitution, it is streetwalkers—women with the least income and most likely to be minorities—who face the highest risk of arrest (COYOTE Los Angeles, 2006). We might also wonder whether so many women would be involved in prostitution in the first place if they had economic opportunities equal to those of men.

More generally, which categories of people in U.S. society are most likely to be defined and treated as sexual objects? The answer, once again, is those with less power: women compared to men, and people of color compared to whites. In this way, sexuality, a natural part of human life, is used by society to define some people as less worthy.

Sexuality: Creating Social Inequality

Social-conflict theorists, especially feminists, point to sexuality as the root of inequality between women and men. Defining women in sexual terms devalues them from full human beings to objects of men’s interest and attention. Is it any wonder that the word “pornography” comes from the Greek word *porne*, meaning “a man’s sexual slave”?

If men define women in sexual terms, it is easy to see pornography—almost all of which is consumed by males—as a power issue. Because pornography typically shows women focused on pleasing men, it supports the idea that men have power over women.

Some radical critics doubt that this element of power can ever be removed from heterosexual relations (A. Dworkin, 1987). Most social-conflict theorists do not reject

DISCUSS: In 1920, one analyst offered the following explanation for the pattern of arresting prostitutes more than “johns”: “The professional prostitute being a social outcast may be periodically punished without disturbing the usual course of society. [T]he man is something more than partner in an immoral act: He discharges important social and business relations, is a father or brother responsible for the maintenance of others. He cannot be imprisoned without [disrupting] soci-

ety” (Abraham Flexner, *Prostitution in Europe* [New York, Century, 1920:108]). How do students react to this analysis?

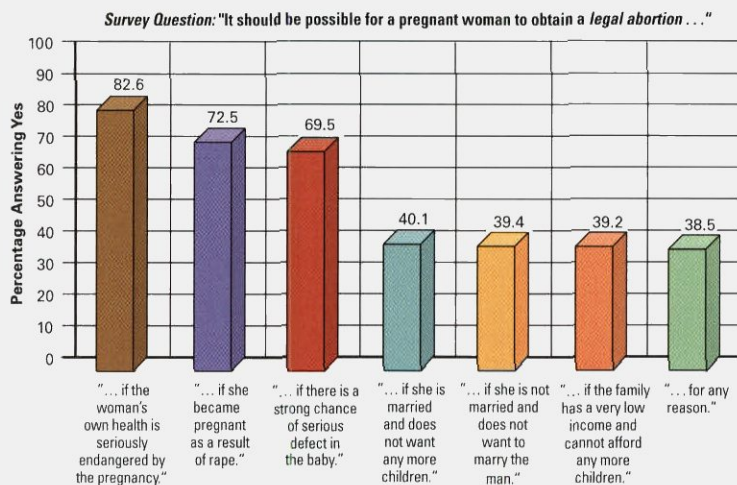
SOCIAL SURVEY: Share of U.S. categories describing themselves as “pro-choice in all instances” (all adults, 38%); Jews, 62%; African Americans, 41%; Asian Americans, 39%; Arab Americans, 29%; Italian Americans, 29%; Hispanic Americans, 24% (Zogby, 2001).

A closer look shows that particular circumstances make a big difference in how people see this issue. The figure shows that most U.S. adults favor legal abortion if a pregnancy seriously threatens a woman’s health, if the woman became pregnant as a result of rape, or if the fetus is very likely to have a seri-

ous defect. The bottom line is that about 38 percent support access to abortion under *any* circumstances, but nearly 83 percent support access to abortion under *some* circumstances.

Many of those who take the pro-life position feel strongly that abortion is nothing other than the killing of unborn chil-

dren, some 42 million since *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973. To them, people never have the right to end innocent life in this way. But pro-choice people are no less committed to their position, that women must have control over their own bodies. If pregnancy decides the course of women’s lives, women will never be able to compete with men on equal terms, whether it is on campus or in the workplace. Therefore, access to legal, safe abortion is a necessary condition to full participation in society.



When Should the Law Allow a Woman to Choose Abortion?

The extent of public support for legal abortion depends on exactly how the issue is presented.
Source: NORC (2005).

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. The more conservative, pro-life people see abortion as a moral issue, and more liberal, pro-choice people see abortion as a power issue. Compare these positions to how conservatives and liberals view the issue of pornography.
2. Surveys show that men and women have almost the same opinions about abortion. Does this surprise you? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think the abortion controversy is often so bitter? Do you think our nation can find a middle ground on this issue?

heterosexuality, but they do agree that sexuality can and does degrade women. Our culture often describes sexuality in terms of sport (men “scoring” with women) and violence (“slamming,” “banging,” and “hitting on,” for example, are verbs used for both fighting and sex).

Queer Theory

Social-conflict theory has taken aim not only at the domination of women by men but also at heterosexuals dominating homosexuals. In recent years, as many lesbians and gay men have sought public acceptance, a gay voice has risen in sociology. The term **queer theory** refers to *a body of research findings that challenges the heterosexual bias in U.S. society.*



The Queer Resources Directory looks at a wide range of issues from a queer theory perspective: <http://www.qrd.org/qrd/>

Queer theory begins with the claim that our society is characterized by **heterosexism**, *a view that labels anyone who is not heterosexual as “queer.”* Our heterosexual culture victimizes a wide range of people, including gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, and even asexual people. Furthermore, although most people agree that bias against women (sexism) and people of color (racism) is wrong, heterosexism is widely tolerated and sometimes well within the law. For example, U.S. military forces cannot legally discharge a female soldier for “acting like a woman” because that would be a clear case of gender discrimination. But the military forces can discharge her for homosexuality if she is a sexually active lesbian.

Heterosexism is also part of everyday culture (Kitzinger, 2005). When we describe something as “sexy,” for example, don’t we really mean attractive to *heterosexuals*?

Q: “Sex is something everyone can do. Love is different. You need to learn about love when you are a baby, and you need lessons until you die. You can’t learn love by yourself. You need to grow up with it.” Anonymous prostitute, cited in Sterke (2000)

DISCUSS: Various “isms” can build on one another. Some queer theorists point out that disadvantages are more severe for gay men who are black than for those who are white (Seidman, 1996).



From a social-conflict point of view, sexuality is not so much a “natural” part of our humanity as it is a socially constructed pattern of behavior. Sexuality plays an important part in social inequality: By defining women in sexual terms, men devalue them as objects. Would you consider the behavior shown here to be “natural” or socially directed? Why?

NOTE: In 1973, the landmark *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was published, a book that not only provided “how-to” information for women who wanted to know how to give themselves breast and pelvic examinations but also encouraged women to take charge of their own reproductive health rather than relying on the predominantly male medical establishment.



Can you think of three social patterns (like the one just mentioned) that are examples of heterosexism?

CRITICAL REVIEW The social-conflict approach shows how sexuality is both a cause and an effect of inequality. In particular, it helps us understand men’s power over women and heterosexual people’s domination of homosexual people.

At the same time, this approach overlooks the fact that many people do not see sexuality as a power issue. On the contrary, many couples enjoy a vital sexual relationship that deepens their commitment to one another. In addition, the social-conflict approach pays little attention to steps our society has made toward reducing inequality.

Today’s men are less likely to describe women as sex objects than they were a few decades ago. One of the most important issues in the workplace today is ensuring that all employees remain free from sexual harassment. Rising public concern (see Chapter 10, “Gender Stratification”) has reduced sex abuse in the workplace. There is also ample evidence that the gay rights movement has won greater opportunities and social acceptance for gay people.

YOUR LEARNING How does sexuality play a part in creating social inequality?

This chapter closes with a look at what is perhaps the most divisive sexuality-related issue of all: **abortion**, the *deliberate termination of a pregnancy*. There seems to be no middle ground in the debate over this controversial issue. The *Thinking Critically* box on pages 166–67 helps explain why.

APPLYING SOCIOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

1. The most complete study of sexual patterns in the United States to date is *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* by Edward Laumann and colleagues (1994). Get a copy from your campus or community library, and read a chapter or two. Did what you read surprise you? Why or why not?
2. Contact your school’s student services office, and ask for information about the extent of sexual violence

- on your campus. Do people typically report such crimes? What policies and procedures does your school have to respond to sexual violence?
3. Use the campus library and Internet sources to learn more about the experiences of women and men involved in prostitution. As you learn more, decide whether you think prostitution should be considered a “victimless crime.”



MAKING THE GRADE

CHAPTER 6 Sexuality

WHAT IS SEXUALITY?

SEX is biological, referring to bodily differences between females and males.

p 146

GENDER is cultural, referring to behavior, power, and privileges a society attaches to being female or male.

p 148

Sexuality is a **BIOLOGICAL ISSUE**.

- Sex is determined at conception as a male sperm joins a female ovum.
- Males and females have different genitals (*primary sex characteristics*) and bodily development (*secondary sex characteristics*).
- *Intersexual people (hermaphrodites)* have some combination of male and female genitalia.
- *Transsexual people* feel they are one sex although biologically they are the other.

pp 146–48

Sexuality is a **CULTURAL ISSUE**.

- For humans, sex is a matter of cultural meaning and personal choice rather than biological programming.
- Sexual practices vary considerably from one society to another (examples include kissing, ideas about modesty, and standards of beauty).
- The *incest taboo* exists in all societies because regulating sexuality, especially reproduction, is a necessary element of social organization. Specific taboos vary from one society to another.

pp 148–50

sex (p. 146) the biological distinction between females and males

primary sex characteristics (p. 147) the genitals, organs used for reproduction

secondary sex characteristics (p. 148) bodily development, apart from the genitals, that distinguishes biologically mature females and males

intersexual people (p. 148) people whose bodies (including genitals) have both female and male characteristics

transsexuals (p. 148) people who feel they are one sex even though biologically they are the other

incest taboo (p. 149) a norm forbidding sexual relations or marriage between certain relatives

✓ *Sexuality is a theme found throughout most areas of social life in the United States (p 146).*

SEXUAL ATTITUDES IN THE UNITED STATES

The **SEXUAL REVOLUTION**, which peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, drew sexuality out into the open. Baby boomers were the first generation to grow up with the idea that sex was a normal part of social life.

pp 151–52

The **SEXUAL COUNTERREVOLUTION**, which was evident by 1980, aimed criticism at “permissiveness” and urged a return to more traditional “family values.”

pp 152–53

Beginning with the work of Alfred Kinsey, researchers have studied sexual behavior in the United States and reached many interesting conclusions:

- Premarital sexual intercourse became more common during the twentieth century.
- About three-fourths of young men and two-thirds of young women have intercourse by their senior year in high school.
- Among all U.S. adults, sexual activity varies: One-third report having sex with a partner a few times a year or not at all; another one-third have sex once to several times a month; the remaining one-third have sex two or more times a week.
- Extramarital sex is widely condemned, and just 25 percent of married men and 10 percent of married women report being sexually unfaithful to their spouses at some time.

p 153–55



MAKING THE GRADE

CONTINUED...

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

SEXUAL ORIENTATION is a person's romantic or emotional attraction to another person. Four sexual orientations are

- heterosexuality
- homosexuality
- bisexuality
- asexuality

pp 155–56

Most research supports the claim that sexual orientation is rooted in biology in much the same way as being right-handed or left-handed.

pp 156–57

Sexual orientation is not a matter of neat categories because many people who think of themselves as heterosexual have homosexual experiences; the reverse is also true.

p 155

- The share of the U.S. population that is homosexual depends on how you define "homosexuality."
- About 9% of adult men and 4% of adult women report engaging in some homosexual activity; 2.8% of men and 1.4% of women consider themselves homosexual.

p 157

The gay rights movement helped change public attitudes toward greater acceptance of homosexuality. Still, just over half of U.S. adults say homosexuality is wrong.

pp 157–58

sexual orientation (p. 155) a person's romantic and emotional attraction to another person

heterosexuality (p. 155) sexual attraction to someone of the other sex

homosexuality (p. 155) sexual attraction to someone of the same sex

bisexuality (p. 155) sexual attraction to people of both sexes

asexuality (p. 155) no sexual attraction to people of either sex

homophobia (p. 158) discomfort over close personal interaction with people thought to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual

SEXUAL ISSUES AND CONTROVERSIES

TEEN PREGNANCY Almost 1 million U.S. teenagers become pregnant each year. The rate of teenage pregnancy has dropped since 1950, when many teens married and had children. Today, most pregnant teens are not married and are at high risk of dropping out of school and being poor.

pp 158–59

PORNOGRAPHY The law allows local communities to set standards of decency. Conservatives condemn pornography on moral grounds; liberals view pornography as a power issue, condemning it as demeaning to women.

p 159

PROSTITUTION The selling of sexual services is illegal almost everywhere in the United States. Many people view prostitution as a victimless crime, but it victimizes women and spreads sexually transmitted diseases.

pp 159–61

SEXUAL VIOLENCE Some 95,000 rapes are reported each year in the United States, but the actual number is probably several times higher. Rapes are violent crimes in which victims and offenders typically know one another.

pp 161–63

pornography (p. 159) sexually explicit material intended to cause sexual arousal

prostitution (p. 159) the selling of sexual services

abortion (p. 168) the deliberate termination of a pregnancy

ABORTION Laws banned abortion in all states by 1900. Opposition to these laws rose during the 1960s, and in 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court declared these laws unconstitutional. Today, some 1.3 million abortions are performed each year. People who describe themselves as "pro-choice" support a woman's right to choose abortion; people who call themselves "pro-life" oppose abortion on moral grounds.

pp 166–67

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF SEXUALITY

The **STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH** highlights society's need to regulate sexual activity and especially reproduction. One universal norm is the incest taboo, which keeps family relations clear.

pp 163–64

The **SOCIAL-CONFLICT APPROACH** links sexuality to social inequality. *Feminist theory* claims that men dominate women by devaluing them to the level of sexual objects. *Queer theory* claims our society has a heterosexual bias, defining anything different as "queer."

pp 165–68

The **SYMBOLIC-INTERACTION APPROACH** emphasizes the various meanings people attach to sexuality. The social construction of sexuality can be seen in sexual differences between societies and in changing sexual patterns over time.

pp 164–65

queer theory (p. 167) a body of research findings that challenges the heterosexual bias in U.S. society

heterosexism (p. 167) a view that labels anyone who is not heterosexual as "queer"

See the Applying Theory table on page 164.