Human Sexuality

Social Agents
Defining Human Sexuality

• Sex can refer to:
  • Biological features
    • E.g. Gender
  • Physical Act
  • Gender Identity

• Human sexuality refers to:
  • Actions of sexual expression, as seen by cultural surroundings
    • i.e. What it means to be a “masculine” in society vs what it means to be “feminine”
Sexuality and Values

• Pluralistic society embraces wide range of sexual attitudes and values
  • Diverse societies more likely to accept range of behaviors, while more culturally homogeneous more likely to expect gender conformity

• Values influence sexual attitudes & behavior
  • Values: the qualities in life that are deemed important or unimportant, right or wrong, desirable or undesirable
View of Sexuality Values

• Legalism – Moral laws from an external source
  • “If it is legal it must be ok”
    • Ex. If Homosexuality is legal it must be “ok”

• Situational Ethics – decision making is context-dependent and rules are flexible
  • Ex. “Something may not be ok now, but might be under other circumstances”

• Ethical Relativism – no one correct moral view, but rather diversity in beliefs is considered natural and based upon culture
  • “It might be ok for one culture, but not another, and it shouldn’t be judged”
    • Ex. “I’m not homosexual, but I don’t judge people who are”
The Sociological Perspective

• Examine effect of cultural institutions and beliefs on sexual behavior and attitudes
  • Ex. How does the strength of religious institutions impact the views of sexuality in country A versus country B?

• Societies differ widely in sexual attitudes, practices, customs, e.g.
  • Marriage
    • What is the role and definition of marriage?
  • Sex partners
    • Views of “promiscuity”
  • What constitutes Sexual Contact

• Double Standard – Often what is “acceptable” for males is seen as “unacceptable” for females
Sources of Views of Sexuality

• Parents
  • Responsible for earliest views of sexuality. Children learn by observing

• Peers
  • Open individuals to variety of different perceptions

• Religion
  • Typically teach to the conformity of traditional roles and values

• Ethnicity
  • Differing cultural views based on ideals of ethnic group

• Mainstream culture
  • Provide more insight into cultural norms
Perspectives of Human Sexuality: Classical Era

• The Historical Perspective
  • No uniform understanding of Human Sexuality
    • Many difference throughout history

• Historical Examples
  • Incestuous relationships in classical era
  • Having male and female extra-marital relationships in ancient Greece and Rome
  • Ancient Hebrew practicing Polygamy
  • Prostitution “oldest profession”
Perspectives of Human Sexuality: Religion

• Most major religions have stricter views of sexuality and gender roles
  • Islam
    • The Islamic tradition values only marital sexual contact
  • Far East
    • Taoism (China) – sex is a form of worship that leads to harmony with nature, as well as immortality
  • The Early Christians
    • Sex was restricted to marriage and was for procreation and not for pleasure
    • Lust made sexual expression inherently evil
    • Divorce was outlawed
Perspectives of Human Sexuality: Modern Changes

• The Middle Ages
  • Women viewed as Sinful (Eve) and Saintly (Mary)

• The Protestant Reformation
  • Idea of Marriage for priests, and sex for more than just procreation

• Colonial Era
  • Europeans transported ideas to other cultures

• Industrial Era
  • Sexuality suppressed and not talked about
Perspectives of Human Sexuality: The 60s

• The Sexual Revolution
  • During the 1960s and 70s views on sexuality changed
  • Forces that brought about the revolution include
    • The birth-control pill
    • The mass media
    • Playboy Magazine
  • Discussion and portrayals of sexuality accepted & commonplace
Broadening Perspectives of Sexuality

• Gay Rights activism
  • Arose during the sexual revolution
  • AIDS education, prevention, and treatment
  • Pushing for legal marriage equality
    • Achieved in United States in June, 2015

• Sex research
  • Trying to learn more about psychology of sexual attraction
    • Sexually explicit questionnaires
    • Masters & Johnson laboratory research
The Historical Perspective: Recent Trends

- More teens sexually active
  - Teen Pregnancy is down
  - Sexual Education is more common
- Teens are becoming sexually active at younger ages
- Female sexuality is accepted
- Gay Rights movements common
- Sex is discussed openly
  - Pornography commonplace
  - Sexual themes in advertising
Feminist Theory

• Challenges such traditional views as
  • Men as breadwinners, women as homemakers
  • Men as political policymakers
  • Men as objective, rational beings and women as emotional, irrational creatures

• Asserts men have no right to control a women’s body
  • Main argument being used against abortion
Homosexual Theory

• Theory of the psychology and sociology of gender roles and sexual orientation
  • Challenges heterosexist assumptions
• Asserts sexuality is more varied than those in power want to believe
  • Ex. Just because there is a law that bans it, it doesn’t mean it does not exist

![Conflict between Same-sex Marriage and Religious Beliefs](chart.png)