CHAPTER 8
SEXUALITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

Learning Outcomes

8.1 What are sexual values?
Sexual values are moral guidelines for making sexual choices in nonmarital, marital, heterosexual, and homosexual relationships.

8.2 What are alternative sexual values?
Three sexual values are absolutism (rightness is defined by official code of morality), relativism (rightness depends on the situation—who does what, with whom, in what context), and hedonism (“if it feels good, do it”). Relativism is the sexual value most college students hold, with women being more relativistic than men and men being more hedonistic than women. Under the Bush administration, absolutism was taught in the public school system if the school wanted federal funds. There is no evidence that abstinence-based sex education programs are effective in stopping unmarried youth from having sex. Half of those who take the “virginity pledge” withdraw the pledge within one year. About three-fourths of college students believe that if they have oral sex, they are still virgins. About half of undergraduates reported involvement in a “friends with benefits” relationship. Women are more likely to focus on the “friendship” aspect, men on the “benefits” (sex) aspect.

8.3 What is the sexual double standard?
The sexual double standard is the view that encourages and accepts sexual expression of men more than women. For example, men may have more sexual partners than women without being stigmatized. The double standard is also reflected in movies.

8.4 What are sources of sexual values?
The sources of sexual values include one’s school, family, and religion as well as technology, television, social movements, and the Internet.

8.5 What are gender differences in sexuality?
Gender differences in sexual beliefs include that men are more likely than women to believe that oral sex is not sex, that cybersex is not cheating, that men can’t tell if a woman is faking orgasm, and that sex frequency drops in marriage. In regard to sexual behavior, men are more likely than females to report frequenting strip clubs, paying for sex, having anonymous sex with strangers, having casual sexual relations, and having more sexual partners. When asked what they would do in a “Vegas” context where no one would know what they did, males were more likely than females to identify a range of sexual behaviors they would engage in.

8.6 How do pheromones affect sexual behavior?
Pheromones are chemical messengers emitted from the body that activate physiological and behavioral responses. The functions of pheromones include opposite-sex attractants, same-sex repellents, and mother-infant bonding. Researchers disagree about whether pheromones do in fact influence human sociosexual behaviors. In one study, men who applied a male hormone to their aftershave lotion reported

Key Terms

absolutism belief system based on unconditional allegiance to the authority of science, law, tradition, or religion.
AIDS acquired immunodeficiency syndrome; the last stage of HIV infection, in which the immune system of a person’s body is so weakened that it becomes vulnerable to disease and infection.
asceticism the belief that giving into carnal lusts is wrong and that one must rise above the pursuit of sensual pleasure to a life of self-discipline and self-denial.
friends with benefits (FWB) a relationship between nonromantic friends who also have a sexual relationship.
hedonism belief that the ultimate value and motivation for human actions lie in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.
HIV human immunodeficiency virus, which attacks the immune system and can lead to AIDS.
relativism sexual value system whereby decisions are made in the context of the situation and the relationship.
satiation the state in which a stimulus loses its value with repeated exposure.
secondary virginity the conscious decision of a sexually active person to refrain from intimate encounters for a specified period of time.
sexual double standard the view that encourages and accepts sexual expression of men more than women.
significant increases in sexual intercourse and sleeping next to a partner in comparison with men who had a placebo in their aftershave lotion.

8.7 What are the sexual relationships of never-married, married, and divorced people?

Never-married and noncohabiting individuals report more sexual partners than those who are married or living with a partner. Marital sex is distinctive for its social legitimacy, declining frequency, and satisfaction (both physical and emotional). Divorced individuals have a lot of sexual partners but are the least sexually fulfilled.

8.8 How does one avoid contracting or transmitting STIs?

The best way to avoid getting an STI is to avoid sexual contact or to have contact only with partners who are not infected. This means restricting your sexual contacts to those who limit their relationships to one person. The person most likely to get an STI has sexual relations with a number of partners or with a partner who has a variety of partners. Even if you are in a mutually monogamous relationship, you may be at risk for acquiring an STI, as 30 percent of male undergraduate students and 20 percent of female undergraduate students in “monogamous” relationships reported having oral, vaginal, or anal sex with another partner outside of the monogamous relationship.

8.9 What are the prerequisites of sexual fulfillment?

Fulfilling sexual relationships involve self-knowledge, self-esteem, health, a good nonsexual relationship, open sexual communication, safer sex practices, and making love with, not to, one’s partner. Other variables include realistic expectations (“my partner will not always want what I want”) and not buying into sexual myths (“masturbation is sick”).

Did you take the Self-Assessment on page 171?

If so, what was your score? Read on to find out scores of other students who completed the scale.

Scores of Other Students Who Completed the Scale

This scale was completed by 252 student volunteers at Valdosta State University. The mean score of the students was 40.81 (standard deviation [SD] = 13.20), reflecting that the students were virtually at the midpoint between a very negative and a very positive attitude toward premarital sex. For the 124 males and 128 females in the total sample, the mean scores were 42.06 (SD = 12.93) and 39.60 (SD = 13.39), respectively (not statistically significant). In regard to race, 59.5 percent of the sample was white and 40.5 percent was nonwhite (35.3 percent black, 2.4 percent Hispanic, 1.6 percent Asian, 0.4 percent American Indian, and 0.8 percent other). The mean scores of whites, blacks, and nonwhites were 41.64 (SD = 13.38), 38.46 (SD = 13.19), and 39.59 (SD = 12.90) (not statistically significant). Finally, regarding year in college, 8.3 percent were freshmen, 17.1 percent sophomores, 28.6 percent juniors, 43.3 percent seniors, and 2.8 percent graduate students. Freshmen and sophomores reported more positive attitudes toward premarital sex (mean = 44.81; SD = 13.39) than did juniors (mean = 40.32; SD = 12.58) or seniors and graduate students (mean = 38.91; SD = 13.10) (p = .05).