Sexuality and The Life Cycle:
Adulthood
Sex and the Single Person: Sexual Unfolding

- In late adolescence the individual moves toward mature, adult sexuality.
- Struggles over sexual orientation seem to be more difficult for men, because in many societies heterosexuality is a cornerstone of the male role.
Sex and the Single Person: Sexual Unfolding

• Identifying sexual likes and dislikes and learning to communicate them to a partner is a step toward maturity.
• Some people intentionally seek opportunities to engage in novel behaviors or in sexual intimacy with novel partners.
• Maturity is also becoming responsible about sex and developing a capacity for intimacy.
Sex and the Single Person: The Never-Married

• Includes those who intend to marry and those who have decided to remain single.
• A typical married person has spent several adult years in the never-married category.
• A person who passes age 25 without getting married enters a new world, because social structures that supported dating - such as college - are gone.
Sex and the Single Person: The Never-Married

• Some young men and women decide to live both celibate (unmarried) and chaste (abstaining from sexual intercourse).
• Some find the single lifestyle exciting and enjoy their freedom by being celibate but not chaste.
• Others are searching for a spouse, with increasing desperation as the years go by.
Cohabitation

• Living together
  – Varies from “some days and nights” to “all the time.”
  – A public declaration of a sexual relationship.
  – Sometimes considered an opportunity to try out marriage.
  – Has become an increasingly common alternative to marriage.
  – Twenty-five percent of people aged 25 to 29 have cohabited at least once.
Cohabitation

- Arrangements tend to be short-lived – 1/3 last <1 year, 1 out of 10 lasts 5 years
- ¾ of men & women cohabitating have plans to marry or think they will marry their partner
- 60% of these couples do marry
- The marriages are more likely to end in divorce than marriages that are not preceded by cohabitation (probably because they were less committed to the relationship)
- 40% have children (1/3 of these are the biological parents)
Marital Sex: Frequency of Marital Intercourse

• Average American married couple has coitus 2-3 times a week in their 20s.
  – Frequency declines with age.
  – Learning about desires, preferences and habits may result in increased sexual quality.
  – Increased popularity of mouth-genital techniques is one of the most dramatic changes in marital sex in the past 50 years.
Marital Sex: Negotiations and Masturbation

• Negotiating sex
  – Sexual scripts are played out in marriage as in other aspects of sex.
  – Negotiations to have intercourse may involve indirect or euphemistic language to spare possible feelings of rejection.

• Masturbation in marriage
  – Many adults continue to masturbate while married. (63% of men, 42% of women, according to NHSLS)
Marital Sex: Satisfaction and Sexual Patterns

• Satisfaction with marital sex
  – Satisfaction with sexual activity
  – Emotional satisfaction
  – Married people are significantly more satisfied than are cohabiting or single people in a continuing relationship.

• Sexual patterns in marriage
  – Some people experience fundamental changes in their sexual experience at least once over the course of the marriage.
Reasons for Age-related Frequency Decline

• Unhappiness with the marriage, lack of shared activity, presence of children, poor health
• Habitual explanation -- loss of interest as the partner becomes more & more familiar (e.g., research cited in *Why Women Have Sex*, if a male rat is dropped into a cage with a willing female rat, he engages in enthusiastic copulation. He will mount her repeatedly until he is completely tired out. But if his former sexual mate is replaced with another willing female, he becomes randy all over again. Every time the female rat is replaced with a new female, the male rat shows renewed vigor and begins to copulate. He will keep going with new females until he nearly dies of exhaustion.)
Marital Sex:
Duals Careers, Mate Retention

• Sex and the two-career family
  – One couple reported making appointments with each other to make love.
  – Women and men with satisfying jobs reported that sex was better, compared with those who expressed dissatisfaction with their jobs.

• Keeping your mate
  – Mate retention tactics include “giving her money” for men and enhancing appearance for women.
Extramarital Sex

• Sexual activity between a married person and someone other than that person’s spouse (adultery).
• Can occur under several circumstances:
  – Accidental
  – Romantic infidelity
  – Open marriage
  – Philanderers
  – Swinging - married couples exchange partners with each other.
Swinging

• Closed swinging – couples meet & exchange partners, & each pair goes off separately to a private place to have intercourse

• Open swinging – the pairs get back together for sex in the same room for at least part of the time
Reasons for Swinging

• Desire for variety in sexual partners & experiences
• Pleasure or excitement in part because exchanging partners is culturally forbidden
• Meet new people, Craig’s List
• In open swinging, the opportunity to be a voyeur, to watch other people engage in sexual activity, which turns on some people
Characteristics of Swingers
(Based on review of 15 published studies)

- Majority are upper or middle class
- Above average in education & income
- 50% voted Republican (only 27% described themselves as politically liberal, rest were moderate or conservative)
- 93% white
- 2/3 raised in a religious home, but as adults they did not attend services, & were not affiliated with a denomination
How Many People Engage in Extramarital Sex?

• Not as common as many people believe
  – 25% of married men and 15% of married women reported having engaged in extramarital sex at least once.

• Most people in the U.S. disapprove of extramarital sex.
Equity and Extramarital Sex

• **Equity theory**
  – People mentally calculate the benefits and costs for them in a relationship.
Internet Infidelity

• Cyberaffair
  – a romantic or sexual relationship initiated by online contact and maintained primarily via online communication
  – Ashley Madison.com
  – Ashley Madison on The View
Evolution and Extramarital Sex

• Having children with multiple partners increases the genetic diversity of one’s offspring, increasing chances that some will survive.

• According to one sociobiological perspective, extramarital sex occurs because the genes of some men and women motivate them to be unfaithful.
Polyamory

- The non-possessive, honest, responsible, and ethical philosophy and practice of loving multiple people simultaneously
  - **Intentional family** - three or more persons
  - **Group relationship** - three or more partners in committed, loving relationships
  - **Group marriage** - three or more persons
Postmarital Sex

• The divorced and the widowed
  – Most divorced women, but fewer widowed women, return to having an active sex live.
  – Widowed and divorced women who have postmarital sex often begin a relationship within one year of the end of the marriage.
  – Divorced men are more sexually active than divorced women.
Sex and Seniors: Physical Changes in the Female

- Calendar Girls
- Gradual decline in functioning of the ovaries
- Decline in production of estrogen
- Vagina shrinks in both width and length
- Vaginal lubrication decreases
Estrogen Production in Women

Estrogens excreted in urine, milligrams per 24 hours

Age, years

0 12 13 40 50 60

Puberty
Menopause
Sex and Seniors: Physical Changes in the Male

- Testosterone production declines
- Erections occur more slowly
- Refractory period lengthens with age
- Volume of the ejaculate gradually decreases
Testosterone Production in Men

Rate of testosterone secretion, milligrams per 100 milliliters of androgen in plasma

Age, years
Attitudes About Sex and the Elderly

• Our society holds a negative attitude toward sexual expression among the elderly.

• According to Masters and Johnson, two factors are critical in maintaining sexual capacity in old age:
  – Good physical and mental health
  – Regularity of sexual expression - “use it or lose it”
Sexual Behavior of the Elderly

• Substantial numbers of elderly men and women have active sex lives.

• One influence on sexuality in the elderly is the fact that there are far more elderly women than elderly men.

• Among healthy and active older people, sexual activity in all forms continues past 70 years of age.