Sexuality in Childhood and Adolescence

Chapter 13
Learning Objectives

• Infancy
• Early Childhood (3 to 8 years)
• Preadolescence (9 to 13 years)
• Sex Education and Miseducation
• Adolescence
• Puberty
• Types of Sexual Behaviors in Adolescence
• Teenage Pregnancy
## Infants Capacity for Sexual Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Erections</th>
<th>Male fetuses have erections, and many boys are born with them or have erections during the first few weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vaginal lubrication and genital swelling</td>
<td>Signs are less readily detected, but reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both lubrication and erection are reflexes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelvic thrusting</td>
<td>Observed in infants at 8 to 10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orgasm</td>
<td>Sexual responses that resemble orgasm are seen at four months in baby girls and five months in baby boys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Thinking

What are the scientific problems in attempting to explain or interpret the meaning of pelvic thrusting in infants?

Is it possible that pelvic thrusting in infants can have no meaning?
Infancy

**Masturbation**
- Is typical and may start as early as 5 months
- Masturbation to orgasm is rare until the second year
- Some children never do this, but it is frequently found among children, as among adults

**Sexual Curiosity**
- Playing “Doctor” or wanting to be present when parent is bathing
- This can be seen as early as 12 to 15 months of age
## Infancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genital Play</th>
<th>Co-Sleeping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Genital play with others starts at about 2 years of age</td>
<td>• No developmental or sexual problems found to be associated with bed-sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expression of curiosity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May be part of rough-and-tumble play</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Infancy

Sexual Orientation of Parents

- Children raised by homosexual parents do not differ from children raised by heterosexual parents in any of the following measures:
  - Emotional stability
  - Sexual orientation
  - Gender-typed behavior
  - Adjustment
  - Gender identity
  - Intellectual functioning
Early Childhood

Masturbation
- Speculative research shows that at least 20% of children touch their genitals

Male-Female Sexual Behavior
- Sex games like “Show” and playing “Doctor” are common between the ages of 6 and 10

Male-male and female-female sexual behavior
- Does not indicate adult sexual orientation
- May be more common than heterosexual play
Preadolescence

Behaviors are sexually related rather than sexual
- Same-sex best friend
- Sex-segregated groups

Increasingly preoccupied with and self-conscious about their bodies

Sexual urges are experienced but may not emerge until adolescence
- Many preadolescents are sexually active

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Preadolescence

**Masturbation**
- Kinsey et al. reported
  - Primary means of achieving orgasm
  - 45% of males and 15% of females masturbated by age 13
  - Appears more acceptable or normal for boys than for girls

**Male-Female Sexual Behavior**
- Mutual display of the genitals, with or without touching, is common

**Male-Male and Female-Female Sexual Behavior**
- Is explorative behavior that does not reflect one’s sexual orientation
  - Includes mutual touching or mutual masturbation
  - Often with peers, and may reflect lack of availability of opposite-sex partners
Sex Education and Miseducation

Most learn from peers and media

Most programs emphasize biological aspects

- Few deal with “controversial” topics like sexual orientation, abortion, masturbation, etc.
- Research shows that education does not encourage activity
- Accurate information might prevent problems
Adolescence

Puberty

- When reproduction first becomes possible
- Begins with the appearance of secondary sex characteristics
  - Physical characteristics that differentiate males and females but are not involved directly with reproduction (body hair, fat & muscle changes, deepening of voice, etc.)
- Ends when the long bones in the body stop growing
- Major changes typically take 3 years for girls and 4 years for boys
Adolescence

Primary sex characteristics

Physical characteristics that are involved directly in reproduction

• For example, the sex organs
Pubertal Changes in the Female

Menarche – the onset of menstruation

- Early menstrual cycles are typically anovulatory
- Progressively earlier age in Western societies
- Critical fat hypothesis
  - The view that girls must reach a certain body weight to trigger pubertal changes such as menarche

Ovaries secrete estrogen

- Promotes growth of breast tissue, uterus, vagina, and fatty tissue

Adrenal glands produce small amounts of androgens

- Stimulate growth of pubic and underarm hair, and the development of the clitoris
Pubertal Changes in the Male

- Promotes growth of male genitals and pubic hair
- Body and facial hair develop
- Voice deepens as the larynx grows and the vocal cords lengthen

Testes increase output of testosterone

Erections become frequent and first ejaculation usually occurs by 13 or 14

• Nocturnal emissions usually begin a year later
Adolescent Sexual Behaviors

Masturbation

- Most common sexual outlet during adolescence
- Boys more than girls
- Unclear if due to greater sex drive or social constraints
Adolescent Sexual Behaviors

- **Petting**
  - Many adolescents use petting to express affection, satisfy curiosity, and reach orgasm
  - Many believe it is not sexual because it stops short of intercourse
  - Girls more likely to be pushed into it and feel guilty

- **Oral sex**
  - Incidence increases with age
  - Some couples use it as a method of birth control and to maintain virginity
Adolescent Sexual Behaviors

Male-Female Sexual Behavior

• Sexual Intercourse
  • About half of U.S. high school students are sexually active, but rates are declining
  • Different concerns about intercourse for first time
    • Girls concerned if doing the right thing
    • Boys concerned if doing the thing right
Adolescent Sexual Behaviors

Motives for intercourse
- Surge in sex hormones
- Love
- Desire for pleasure
- Conformity to peers
- Peer recognition

Factors against intercourse
- Religious and moral reasons
- Family influences
- Fear of being caught, of pregnancy, or of disease
- Educational and career goals
Adolescent Sexual Behaviors

Male-Male and Female-Female Sexual Behavior

- 4.5% males and 10.6% females report ever having same-sex sexual contact (Mosher et al 2005)
- May reflect exploration or a lack of partners rather than sexual orientation
- Many gay males and lesbians develop sense of being gay during adolescence
Teenage Pregnancy

- 700,000 teenage girls impregnated in 2010
- 368,000 births to teenage mothers in 2010

- Vast majority of teenage pregnancies are unplanned
- Related: poverty, joblessness, and lack of hope for future
Teenage Pregnancy

Factors that contribute include:

- Loosening of taboos on adolescent sexuality
- Impaired parental relationships
- Academic problems
- Misunderstandings about reproduction
- Lack of contraception
Teenage Pregnancy

- If used, used inconsistently
- Factors that increase use
  - More frequent intercourse; relationship satisfaction; peer use; age
- Factors that decrease use
  - Poor academic performance and low educational ambitions; poor family relationships and communication; myths regarding reproductive capability

Contraceptive use among sexually active teens
Teenage Pregnancy

Combating teenage pregnancy

- Parents underestimate their influence
- Education
  - Not just abstinence
- Free contraceptive services
  - Studies consistently show that making condoms available does not increase sexual behavior