

Group Six Presentation
Chapter 8
Culture and Issues of Gender and Sexuality: Adolescence (pp. 120-122)
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Adolescence: Marker of Sexual Maturation (pp. 120-121)

- A. Much of the change associated with adolescent development centers on **puberty**, a *period of biological transition between childhood and adulthood lasting approximately one to two years*. (p. 120)
1. In boys, the transition from child to adult may be marked by several physical events, including change in voice, emergence of pubic and facial hair, nocturnal ejaculation, and/or a sudden growth spurt and muscle development. (p. 120)
 2. The age at which a boy is granted “adult status” varies greatly by culture, mostly depending on which physical “marker” is used as indicator of physical adulthood. (p. 120)
- B. The “landmark event” for girls marking the end of childhood is **menarche**, or *first menstruation*. The importance of viewing menarche within the cultural context and the ecocultural system is illustrated in a study of young girls living at low and high altitudes in Peru. (p. 120)
1. For example, Gonzales and Villena (1996) compared ten-to nineteen-year-old Peruvian girls living in the mountainous regions of Lima with girls of similar age in Cerro de Pasco. Results indicated that those living at higher elevations, where food sources are more limited, experienced the onset of menarche later than those living at sea level in Cerro de Pasco. The authors concluded that although nutrition is an important factor in determining the age at which menarche occurs, one’s physical surroundings and developmental niche also need to be considered. (p. 120)
 2. Some cross-cultural researchers have focused on the extent to which exposure to modernization alters the menstrual experience of young girls. In one such study, Fitzgerald (1990) examined three Samoan communities as part of an ongoing stress and health project at the University of Hawaii. (p. 120)
 3. Ninety-three young girls reported on their family medical history, menstrual symptoms, menstrual beliefs and practices, and menstrual experiences. (p. 120)
- C. **One community** consisted of residents living in remote traditional villages on the island of Savaii in Western Samoa. (p. 120)

- D. **A second community**, experiencing rapid modernization, was made up of seven villages on the southern coast of the island of Tutuila in American Samoa. (p. 120)
- E. **The third community** was composed of individuals living in affluent neighborhoods in Honolulu, Hawaii. (p. 120)
1. **Community One Result:** According to Fitzgerald, although the literal translation of the Samoan word for “menstruation” (*ma’imasina*) means “monthly illness,” most Samoans view menstruation as a natural part of life, something given to them by God to prepare them for motherhood, over which they have no control. (p. 120)
 2. **Community Two Result:** Findings revealed that the more exposed Samoans were to the influences of modernization, the more likely they were to report severe menstrual symptoms. This suggests that as cultures come into greater contact with each other, the values and beliefs of one tend to influence the behaviors of the other. (p. 120)
 3. **Community Three Result:** In this case, the values and beliefs characteristic of the more modern society (Honolulu) tended to affect the menstrual experience of the Samoan islanders in the second community. Once again, this tends to support the validity of studying behavior from the perspective of the recurring themes of the ecological model and the developmental niche. (p. 121)

Sexual Maturity and Sexual Partners

- A. The transition from adolescence to adulthood is often considered a highly spiritual event that is celebrated with elaborate initiation ceremonies. These ceremonies often involve a ritual change of hairstyle, clothing, tattoos, or even circumcision to make the newly gained status as adult visible to all. (p. 121)
- B. In addition to clear biological markers of sexual maturity, there are distinct cultural markers that indicate a readiness among women and men to find a sexual partner. Biological and cultural markers may or may not coincide, depending on cultural norms. (p. 121)
1. For example, Hindus consider a girl sexually mature with the onset of menstruation. However, a sexually mature unmarried woman living in her father’s house is considered unfortunate for all involved, and it is the duty of the father to marry off his daughter as soon as she reaches puberty or even before. (p. 121)
 2. Mayan culture, for example, considers young women and men to be sexually mature and allows them to find a mate when they begin to feel sexual desire. Parents or other members of the community do not get involved in the young person’s decisions about

who or when to marry. This generally does not happen until the ages of sixteen to eighteen for women and twenty for men. (p. 121)

Gender, Sexuality, and Cultural Taboos (pp. 121-122)

- A. Once young women and young men are considered sexually mature, they are prepared to experience their first initial sexual encounter. (p. 121)
 - 1. The expectation of chastity until marriage (particularly for women) is a norm among many cultures. Patriarchal societies and those based on traditional Catholic or Islamic values generally have very strict chastity norms. Consequently, young women have little or no sexual experience or instruction until they marry. (p.121)
 - 2. For example, in societies in which girls are allowed to explore their sexuality more or less freely, such as the Masai of Kenya or the Hopi Indians of North America, there are some legal or normative rules about the age at which a girl may become sexually active. Usually, the minimum age is no younger than thirteen or fourteen. (p. 121)
 - 3. Chastity norms-rarely apply in the same way to young men. Instead, boys are frequently encouraged to engage in various types of activity to practice sexual behavior, satisfy their sexual desires, or express their virility and dominance. (p.121)
- B. In addition to prohibiting sexual intercourse before marriage, some societies have strict taboos about sexual activities. (p. 121)
 - 1. In China, the only sexual behavior considered legal and morally permissible is heterosexual intercourse within a monogamous marriage. Any other behavior is considered illegal. (p. 121)
 - 2. Traditional Hinduism prescribes a very specific definition of sexuality, and following that definition is absolutely essential. Any unnatural sexual activity, including extramarital relations or homosexuality, results in losing one's caste, mutilation, or even death. It should be noted that these norms refer to the strictest followers of traditional Hindu teachings. (p. 121)
- C. Young adolescents in many other cultures are permitted to explore and express their sexuality in a variety of ways. (p. 121)
 - 1. For example, among the Maya in Guatemala, it is common to freely choose one's sexual partner. Parents do not have much to say regarding the selection of a mate or the age of marriage. Mayan adolescents respect cultural traditions and generally abstain from sexual contact before marriage. (p. 121)

2. In cultures in which premarital relations between women and men are not prohibited by cultural norms, they are considered an expression of love and affection. In a comparison according to, Dion and Dion (1993) found that Asian subjects of both genders view love relationships more in terms of friendship and caring than do women and men of European or Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. The authors argue that this view of love is consistent with the notion of self and others in cultures that emphasize collectivism. (pp. 121-122)

Sexual Orientation

- A. Other sexual minorities, such as transgendered individuals and bisexual youth, face similar challenges. In adolescence, when issues of gender and sexuality become particularly salient, young people may struggle with the expression of their gender identity and sexuality. The extent of the consequences depends on how strictly gender deviation is viewed in a given cultural context. (p. 122)
 1. For example, in traditional Latino cultures that value and expect “machismo” from young men and passivity, subservience, and nurturance from young women, those who deviate from these ideals are stigmatized, ostracized, and sometimes the victims of violence. (p. 122)
- B. In recent years, we have heard more about **transgender**, *of or relating to people who have a sexual identity that is not clearly male or clearly female*---individuals as they openly declare their sexuality. (p.122)
 1. Cross-culturally, we have found transgender individuals in Thailand, India, Iran, Nepal, Vietnam, Indonesia, and other countries. However, it is an area that has not received a great deal of professional research interest. (p. 122)

References

Gardiner, H. W. (2018). *Lives Across Cultures Cross-Cultural Human Development* (6th ed.).

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