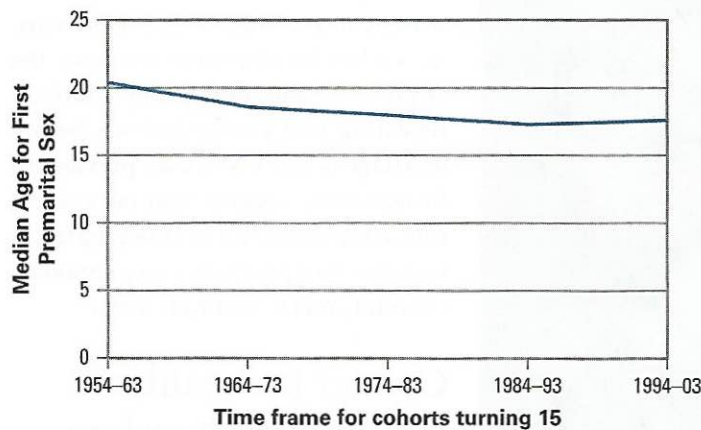
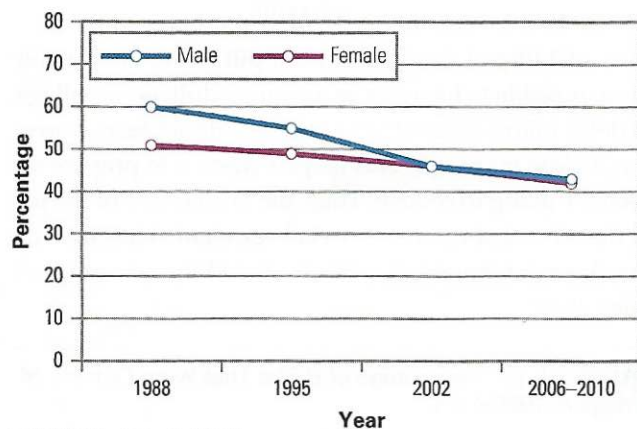


Figure 12.9 Median Age of Premarital Sex for U.S. Teens

SOURCE: Finer (2007).

Figure 12.10 Percentage of U.S. Never-married Females and Males Aged 15–19 Who Have Ever Had Sexual Intercourse, 1988–2008

SOURCE: Martinez et al. (2011).

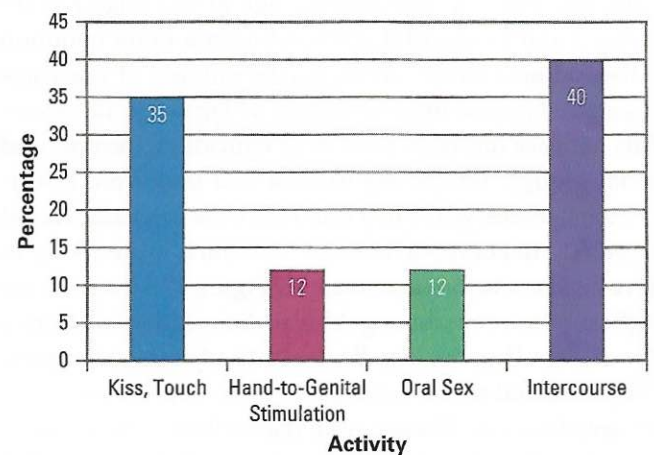
compared attitudes of American and Dutch middle-class parents by interviewing parents of 16-year-olds in both nations. The researcher asked parents how they would feel about their son or daughter having a girlfriend or boyfriend sleep overnight in the family's home. Almost all Dutch parents said this was okay. They thought sex should be in a relationship with a nice person and saw sex as a natural and appropriate progression of a relationship. They preferred to have their teen child have sex at home in a safe, comfortable place. They wanted to talk to their child about using protection from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy. In answer to the same question, almost all the American parents said they were vehemently against their child having sex. They expressed concern that kids who have sex are driven by "raging hormones," not making considered decisions. They saw teen sex as the outcome of a "battle of the sexes" rather than envisioning a caring relationship among the teens. Even if they knew that sex was common and their own child might be doing it, most didn't want to approve of it in their own home (Schalet 2011).

For people coming of age in the 1960s through the 1980s, the proportion of those having premarital sex

increased, and, as Figure 12.9 shows, the median age that people first had sex outside marriage decreased from age 20 to 17. But more recently, since the late 1980s, the trend has reversed. That is, the proportion of teens having sex by a given age has decreased. For example, in 1988, 51 percent of female teens 15 to 19 had had intercourse at least once, but among those the same age in 2006–2010, only 43 percent had had intercourse (Martinez, Copen, and Abma 2011). See Figure 12.10 for more details.

While premarital sex has become almost universal, what has changed over time is in what context it typically occurs, with the acceptable contexts getting more casual. In the 1950s and 1960s, those who had premarital sex often did so only with the person they later married. In the 1970s, sex became common in relationships, and since then, increasingly young couples in relationships have become involved in **cohabitation**, the term that sociologists and demographers use to describe the act of living together as an unmarried couple. These relationships may be serious enough that couples are considering marriage, or they may involve couples who are not engaged but just dating and who cohabit for practical reasons, such as to save money by sharing rent. It is only in recent decades that sexual activity has become common in casual liaisons where there is no expectation that either party expects a relationship to ensue. Youth culture uses different terms to refer to such a liaison, one of which is a **hookup**.

On college campuses today, when students say they "hooked up," this can mean anything from just making out to having intercourse. In an online survey I conducted with students at over 20 colleges and universities, one of the questions asked students whether they had ever hooked up in college with someone with whom they were not in a relationship. For those who said yes, they were asked to report on what happened sexually in their most recent hookup. Figure 12.11 shows what percentage was in each

Figure 12.11 How Far College Students Went on Their Most Recent Hookup

SOURCE: Based on Paula England's calculations from Online College Social Life Survey, 2010 version.