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Developmental precursors of men's relationships

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DEVELOPMENTAL PRECURSORS OF MEN'S RELATIONSHIPS

by

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Abstract

Research drawn from both the sexuality and relationship literatures largely omits the experiences, attitudes, and issues of adult men. In addition, the information we have about males is typically generalized from either adolescent or university populations. Although existing research provides substantial information about the precursors to both adolescent males' and females' sexual activities, it is limited in its presentation of adult male experiences. The present study surveyed 190 men, ages 19 to 82, who completed questionnaires assessing their parents' sexual views and communication, peer influences on sexuality, gender composition of friendship networks, and sexual and relationship histories. Descriptive information and variables predicting sexual behavior are presented. Parents were found to generally disapprove of sexual permissiveness, and men reported low rates and low comfort levels associated with parental sexual discussions. Very little peer sexual pressure was reported. Despite the limited contact from parents and peers, both influences predicted sexual behavior, thus suggesting that, although not the only sources of sexual information, parents and peers are likely important in influencing men's sexual behavior.

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Developmental Precursors of Men's Relationships

Relationships are a feature of most adult life experience. There are many different kinds of relationships that we experience with one another, ranging from friendships to intimate romantic and sexual relationships. Maintaining relationships is an essential component to our experiences which can play an important role in determining both our affect and our behavior (Shulman, Levy-Shiff, Kedem, & Alon, 1997).

Although a substantial literature has been developed around relationship experiences, we lack knowledge and information about *men's* sexual and romantic relationship experiences. Women's experiences have been extensively investigated (e.g., Walsh & Foshee, 1998), typically because women are often at greater risk when involved in sexual or dating relationships, both for issues related to violence and reproductive health. Within the literature however, few studies have focused exclusively on men's sexual and romantic relationships, contributing to an under-developed understanding of male sexual and dating experiences. The early impact of influential sources such as parents and peers is likely to affect men's sexual behaviors and relationship experiences; this supposition needs to be further investigated. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to contribute to our presently limited understanding of developmental precursors that impact upon adult[1] men's sexual and romantic relationships with women.

Although a few researchers have attempted to map out some of the sexual and relationship issues and experiences faced by men, especially young men (e.g., Sonenstein, Ku, Lindberg, Turner, & Pleck, 1998), the literature examining men's experiences

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[1]For the purpose of the current study, 'adulthood' is defined as ages 19 and up.

remains sporadic and insufficient. Researchers who have studied male sexuality agree that limited research has been conducted on sexual issues and experiences specific to males. Bolton and Mac Eachron (1988) asserted that "information on male sexuality across adolescence remains essentially anecdotal and speculative" (p. 260). Marsiglio (1988) affirmed that "little systematic attention has been devoted to understanding the social and psychological dimensions of adolescent male sexuality" (p. 285).

Indeed, much of what we do know about men's relationships has been extracted from the vast literature that examines women's sexual and relationship experiences, or literature that contrasts women's and men's experiences. Typically, women have been the focus of attention, and as a result, we have a rich and dynamic understanding of women's sexual experiences and relationship histories (e.g, Weddle, Mc Kenry, & Leigh, 1988). Even within the research conducted with women, there is more literature regarding sexual experiences and behavior, with fewer studies examining relationship issues or combining both sexual experience and relationship concerns. This means that our understanding of issues related to sexuality is much better defined than issues regarding relationships, while the interplay of sexuality and relationships is least well determined.

Male sexual and romantic relationship 'issues' or 'experiences' can include many different aspects of sexuality or romantic behavior. However, for the purpose of the current study, men's relationship experiences will be measured by numbers of sexual and romantic partners and types of relationships at different age periods, as well as ages of first sexual and romantic relationships. Parents' views and communication about sexuality, peer influences, and friendship networks will also be examined as predictors of men's sexual and romantic relationship histories.

Sexuality literature to be reviewed will focus on gender differences in sexual behavior, research on 'casual' sexual relations, and differences in emotional responses to sexual involvement as a function of gender. Also, data on adolescent males, which describe their sexual experiences and variables related to sexual behavior, will be presented. Literature on relationships will focus on both male and female relationship issues. The limited research on the combination of sexuality and relationships will also be examined. Measurement limitations will also be discussed in terms of gender comparison research. Finally, developmental influences on sexual and relationship experiences will be explored. Specifically, the roles of parents and peers will be presented as a function of their impact upon adolescent sexual behavior.

Sexuality

Studies investigating sexuality typically explore the onset of sexual relationships, the duration of relationships involving sexual involvement, and variables that affect decision-making processes prior to and during sexual relationships. For example, one meta-analysis of the comparative sexuality literature on males and females indicated that males held more permissive views on sexuality, lost their virginity at a younger age, had higher numbers of sexual partners, engaged in sexual intercourse more often, and behaved in a more sexually permissive manner than females (Oliver & Hyde, 1993). Other researchers have also found that males approve of 'casual' sex more than females (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993), and report having more sexual partners than females (De Gaston, Jensen, & Weed, 1995). Overall, male and female sexual behaviors appear to differ. Males engage in sexual relations at an earlier age, have more sexual partners, and

engage in sex more frequently and casually than do females. Due to this gender discrepancy in sexual behavior, it seems reasonable to investigate males and females separately.

Gender differences in casual sexual behavior. The literature on casual sexual behavior is of particular importance when examining male populations because males interpret these sexual experiences in a different way from women. For example, Herold and Mewhinney (1993) found males were more likely to engage in 'casual' sexual behavior, which refers to engaging in sexual activity with a partner who is a new acquaintance, or at the very least, someone other than a committed partner. Not only had males reported having significantly more casual sexual encounters, but they anticipated and enjoyed these experiences more than did women. As well, men were less likely to report feeling guilty about their last casual sex experience (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993).

Intent to engage in casual sex has also been reported to differ across gender. Maticka-Tyndale, Herold, and Mewhinney (1998) compared university students' intentions to engage in casual sex on a spring break vacation before the trip with their actual behaviors reported after their vacation. Notable gender differences were evident before the trip; more males intended to have casual sex during their vacation and had verbally expressed these intentions to their peers. However, results after the trip indicated no gender differences in actual engagement of casual sex, and furthermore, the number of males who had engaged in casual sex was significantly lower than the number who had intended to be sexually active. Maticka-Tyndale et al. proposed that this discrepancy may be explained by the lower percentage of females than males who were intent on engaging

in casual sex during the trip. In other words, they suggested that "women's attitudes, norms, expectations, and intentions, which were less supportive of engaging in casual sex, determined whether coitus occurred" (p. 262).

In order to explore precursors of casual sexual relationships, it is important to understand why individuals become involved in these behaviors. To explore this question, Herold, Maticka-Tyndale, and Mewhinney (1998) studied casual sex intentions among university students. They found the greatest predictors of engaging in casual sex among both males and females to be personal attitudes favoring casual sex, being in control of situations involving sexual activity, and having experienced casual sex in the past. For men, intent to engage in casual sex was also predicted by the belief that their peers would support their decision to be involved in casual sex. Similarly, Levinson, Jaccard, and Beamer (1995) examined variables that predicted the likelihood that first-year university students would support or engage in casual sex. One predictor of accepting casual sex for males was holding the perception that being involved in casual sexual relations would contribute to being highly regarded among male peers; these men viewed casual sex as a means of gaining status among other men. Interestingly, both Herold et al.'s and Levinson et al.'s research implicated peers as influential factors in male university students' intentions to engage in casual sex. However, Levinson et al. reported that parental impact was a 'suppressor' variable, such that believing that their parents discouraged this type of behavior was associated with decreased likelihood of being casually involved in sexual relations.

While gender differences in casual sex behavior have been reported by some, not

all researchers have found large differences. Luster and Small (1994) investigated common characteristics of male and female adolescents who were at risk for pregnancy and STD's, which was determined by adolescents who had multiple sexual partners and used contraception inconsistently. "For males, sexual risk taking was associated with low GPA, frequent alcohol consumption, suicidal ideations, low levels of parental support, and a history of sexual abuse" (p. 630). For females, sexual risk taking was related to the same variables as males with the exclusion of suicidal ideations and sexual abuse history. However, sexual risk taking for females was also associated with lack of birth control discussions with their mothers. Thus, some of the predictor variables were the same for both males and females, suggesting that gender differences are not always evident with every factor associated with casual sexual behavior, especially among males and females who engage in risky sexual behavior.

In summary, while some researchers have found gender differences to exist in reports of males' and females' casual sex intentions and behaviors, others have found less pronounced gender differences in sexual risk-taking. However, since sexual behaviors have been found by some researchers to differ as a function of gender, it seems relevant to explore men's unique sexual behaviors since their actions may place themselves and their partners at risk for STD's.

Emotional responses to sexual activity. Gender differences have been implicated in the emotional reactions that sexual involvement often evokes. Donald, Lucke, Dunne, and Raphael (1995) explored high school students' emotional responses to being sexually active by comparing the feelings of sexually active males and females. They found that

girls, across grade levels, were more likely than boys to report feeling 'bad' or 'used' following their last sexual encounter. Similarly, Oliver and Hyde (1993) reported that females felt guiltier about their sexual activity and were more likely to endorse the 'sexual double standard' than were males. This 'double standard' conveys the notion that sexually active males are perceived positively, while females are viewed negatively for engaging in similar sexual behavior. Donald et al. reported that for males, feeling guilty about a recent sexual incident was associated with both having had sex with a partner other than their girlfriend as well as holding the perception that none or few of their peers were sexually active. Conversely, feeling good about their last sexual experience was related to both having had sex with their girlfriend and not being under the influence of substances. Therefore, among adolescents, emotional responses to sexual experiences appear to be affected by different types of factors, including social and situational.

National Survey of Adolescent Males. Since research on sexuality has primarily involved samples of both males and females, the National Survey of Adolescent Males (NSAM) is of particular interest since it examines male adolescents only. In 1988, data were collected through the NSAM, which was administered to a nationally representative sample of 1,880 American males, aged 15 to 19. A number of studies have been published from this data set, as reviewed below, particularly research describing sexual behavior of adolescent males and the factors associated with their sexual activity.

Sonenstein, Pleck, and Ku (1991) reported that sexual intercourse had been experienced by the majority of sample participants at some point during adolescence; nearly 80% of 19-year old males had already engaged in sexual activity. Yet, most

adolescent males had not experienced high levels of sexual activity in terms of number of sexual partners (on average, less than two partners during the past year) and frequency of sexual encounters (on average, less than three sexual acts in the past month). However, age was related to sexual activity levels such that being older was associated with having more sexual partners and more frequent sexual activity.

Sonenstein, Pleck, and Ku (1989) explored condom use and knowledge of AIDS, and found that over half of males had used a condom at last coitus and that males generally had high awareness about AIDS. The same authors also examined factors associated with male condom use and found that perceiving the benefits of condom use (prevention of pregnancy and AIDS) to be greater than the costs (reduced sexual pleasure, embarrassment of buying and discussing condoms) was associated with increased likelihood of using condoms. Both feeling responsible for contraception and decreased oral contraceptive use among female partners were also associated with increased condom use. Having concerns about acquiring AIDS and believing their partner would want them to use a condom were both related to consistent condom usage. Based on their findings, concerns about pregnancy and AIDS appear to be salient issues in men's decision to use condoms (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1991).

Ku, Sonenstein, and Pleck (1993) investigated risky sexual behaviors among males in the 1988 NSAM and at follow-up nearly three years later. They reported a developmental trend in which increased sexual activity levels, in terms of number of partners and frequency of coitus, but decreased condom use was associated with increased age. Ku et al. also found adolescent males to rely increasingly on female

contraception as they became older and therefore suggested that "the transition from adolescence to adulthood is a period of even greater risk" (p. 1614). Since their findings revealed that males may be increasing their activity levels but decreasing their condom use as they become older, prevention programs may need to continue to be implemented into and throughout adulthood.

This survey provided some insight into the sexual experiences of adolescent males. Although they assessed changes in sexual behavior over a three year period, the current study will examine change over many different age periods. As well, since the NSAM focused on *adolescent* males, the gap in the literature still exists regarding relationships of adult males. Indeed, attempts to investigate sexual and relationship experiences of males have typically relied on studying adolescent boys and male university students. Furthermore, when attempts have been made to study males from other settings, limitations are often present. For example, Herold and Mewhinney (1993) conducted research on casual sex experiences and attitudes with male and female bar patrons. In this way, men were representative of a more 'general' sample than most studies typically employ. However, the mean age of participants was only 23 years and participants were more highly educated than the general population. Thus, the age and educational characteristics elicit concerns about the generalizability of their findings to the male population.

Summary of sexuality research. Gender differences have been found to exist between male and female sexual behavior. As well, males and females generally report different intentions and attitudes toward sexual experiences and they define these

experiences differently in terms of their emotional reactions (i.e., males report feeling less guilt about their sexual activity). Therefore, these gender discrepancies in sexual behaviors, intentions, and attitudes reinforce the importance of men's and women's histories being examined separately. Furthermore, since we know that gender differences exist with sexuality issues, it is important to obtain a descriptive framework of men's romantic relationship histories.

Relationship Issues

While issues which affect how women respond to their dating relationships have been studied (see Kalra, Wood, Desmarais, Verberg, & Senn, 1998), little is known about the experiences of men. In recent years, the literature has identified women's exposure to violence as being an important factor in their relationships (Mac Leod, 1994). While we are knowledgeable about some of the issues women must deal with, we seem to be less familiar with men's issues.

Women's relationship issues. Within the dating literature, research on men is particularly under-explored. Indeed, most dating studies only survey female samples (e.g., Kalra et al., 1998). Therefore, we have information on women's dating experiences, including what women hope to gain from their dating relationships, as well as concerns and expectations in their dating activities (Kalra et al., 1998). Furthermore, the female literature has extensively examined the issue of dating violence (e.g., Walsh & Foshee, 1998), since the majority of dating violence situations involve male perpetrators and female victims (Mac Leod, 1994). As a result, the violence that females experience contributes to a cycle that affects women's physical and psychological well-being. Girls

are two to three times more likely to experience sexual abuse than their male peers (Johnston & Saenz, 1997). Not only are girls and women victimized through their dating experiences, but violence issues often affect every aspect of females' lives, including their health. According to Mac Leod and Kinnon (1996), those females who have experienced violence are at an increased risk of developing low self-esteem, depression, and eating disorders, as well as suicidal thoughts and attempts. The Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA] (1995) reinforced the linkage between violence and depression by contending that those who experience violence are often anxious, insecure, and depressed. In addition, sexual abuse is linked to suicidal behavior (CMHA, 1995).

While prevention and intervention initiatives for women typically focus on fostering empowerment, programs for men tend to focus on anger management, differing because men's and women's needs are different according to their experiences. Our perspective on males is affected by the information that we have about women's experiences. As a result, we are lacking valuable knowledge about men's emotional experiences and consequences of relationship issues since the focus is usually on women. Although violence is only one issue that women may experience in their relationships, it is an issue that is interpreted differently as a function of gender.

Men's relationship issues. To fully understand male dating experiences, it would be advantageous to have the same knowledge about men as we have about women's relationships. Yet, we are quite unfamiliar with the issues that men experience in their dating activities. We can suspect that men most likely have important concerns and expectations in their relationships which are unique to them and which differ from

women's experiences. For example, Herold and Mewhinney (1993) found that 52% of females reported that they feared for their physical safety when alone with a new acquaintance, while only 7% of males had this concern. Furthermore, females were more likely than males to admit that their concern about STD's, including AIDS, was a reason for declining offers of casual sex. Therefore, it appears that males and females may have different concerns which are important within their relationships, and which contribute to them responding differently to their dating experiences. As Leaper and Anderson (1997) suggested, due to early socialization differences as a function of gender, "peer relationships tend to provide different experiences and promote different skills (for males and females) which may clash later when young men and young women come together to form heterosexual romantic relationships" (p. 90).

We also know very little about the connection between romantic and sexual experiences of men. For example, society tends to reinforce the view that men are only interested in achieving sexual goals, while women place great value on the romantic aspects or emotional attachment in their relationships with men (Carroll, Volk, & Hyde, 1985). Thus, it is possible that men's romantic relationship experiences may be disregarded, since we tend to believe that men are purely interested in sexual relationships. However, men may indeed be viewing romantic relationships as equally important.

In summary, we seem to have a wealth of knowledge about women's sexual and romantic relationships, while the scant information we have about males typically tells us only about their experiences regarding sexual behavior. We are missing important

information on the combination of men's romantic and sexual relationships. Due to the lack of literature on these relationship components, the present study will explore both the sexual and romantic histories of men.

Sexuality and Relationships

When sexuality and relationship issues are researched with males, studies are typically conducted with either adolescent males (e.g., Bolton & Mac Eachron, 1988) or university men (e.g., Heilbrun & Loftus, 1986), but not men from the general population. For example, Byers and Eno (1991) examined the relationship between dating experiences and sexual relations in a sample of male university students. They reported an association between dating many females and dating frequently and increased sexual activity. Furthermore, a positive relationship was reported between length of involvement in a relationship and the likelihood of experiencing sexual intercourse.

Similarly, Sanderson and Cantor (1995) explored dating patterns and goals of high school and university students, and assessed relationship patterns and sexual experiences as functions of intimacy and identity goals. They found that having casual dating patterns, including higher numbers of sexual partners, was related to having strong identity goals or a desire to engage in self-exploration. However, being involved in committed dating relationships was associated with striving for intimacy goals or seeking love and closeness with a relationship partner. Sanderson and Cantor reported no significant gender differences in these goals and they suggested that this may be a result of high school and university being stages of self-exploration for both males and females. However, they proposed that gender differences may be evident in young adulthood and

throughout later stages of life. This reinforces the speculation that information obtained from adolescent and university student populations is likely to differ from data collected from adult populations.

Unlike research which separates sexuality from relationship experiences, Koch (1988) investigated the types of relationships in which college students were involved when they first experienced coitus. Types of relationships were assessed for male respondents who had already experienced first coitus (approximately 90% of the sample). Over 60% of males reported that their first sexual experience occurred within the context of a romantic relationship involving a girlfriend, a dating partner, or someone with whom they were in love, going steady, or engaged. Approximately one-fourth experienced first coitus with a friend or acquaintance, while 13% had their first sexual experience with a partner they had just met. Males cited their most common reason for engaging in first coitus to be that both they and their partner wanted to be sexually intimate, whereas the least common reason was feeling pressure from their partner. The majority of men (almost 80%) reported that first coitus was a positive experience for them.

We know that males are more likely than females to engage in casual sexual behavior (Oliver & Hyde, 1993); this presents risks to both males who are engaging in risky behaviors as well as their female partners. Although studies about casual sex have typically focused only on implications for sexual behavior, one study examined the relationship between casual sex behavior and romantic relationships. O'Sullivan (1995) investigated college students' perceptions of relationship partners by their assignment of personality attributes to male and female characters depicted in vignettes. Gender of

character as well as number of sexual partners and types of sexual relationships were manipulated. Results revealed that compared to characters with few sexual partners and who were involved in committed relationships, both male and female characters who had high numbers of partners and many casual sex relationships were more likely to be perceived as an undesirable romantic or sexual partner by both males and females. However, females perceived characters who had sex outside of committed relationships more negatively than did males. Thus, knowledge about sexual behavior does indeed appear to influence the perceived desirability of a potential relationship partner. This could suggest that women's decisions about with whom to become sexually or romantically involved, may be influenced by their knowledge of whether or not a potential partner has been engaging in casual or risky sexual behaviors.

In summary, few studies have investigated both sexual and romantic relationships, and even fewer have been specific to men. Based on what the literature on sexuality tells us, we know that being involved in a romantic relationship may provide the opportunity for sexual activity to occur, and that being involved in casual dating is associated with having self-exploration goals. Furthermore, one study indicated that only a small proportion of adolescent males engaged in first coitus with someone they had just met, and another study revealed that having information about a potential partner's sexual history may influence their perceived desirability. Thus, sexual and romantic relationships appear to be connected. While the literature sometimes excludes relationship considerations and concentrates solely on sexual behavior, the current study will provide information about types of relationships common during different age periods as well as a

comparative framework for numbers of sexual and romantic partners at different ages. By examining data for both sexual and romantic relationships, we hope to contribute to information which identifies sources that influence men's relationship experiences.

Measurement Limitations to Gender Comparison Research

The literature on sexuality and relationships has typically either examined females alone, or combined males and females. However, gender comparison studies of research investigating both men and women together have their limitations. For example, these comparison studies usually apply the same testing tools and questions for both male and female participants (e.g., De Gaston et al., 1996). Clearly however, based on the literature reporting gender discrepancies in sexual behavior, we know that the behaviors of men and women differ and we need to have materials sensitive enough to detect this information. For example, if we are trying to determine if a relationship exists between attitudes about casual sex and actual behavior, we need to account for the fact that men typically have more sexual partners and hold more permissive views about sexuality. However, by administering the same measure to males and females, we may be unable to accurately access this information for both sexes because males and females may respond differently to similar items.

Another example of a measurement limitation was cited by Oliver and Hyde (1993), when they discussed methodological limitations involved in administering self-report measurements to males and females. They suggested that "males may have a tendency to exaggerate their sexual experiences" (p. 45) since they tend to hold more permissive sexual views, while the opposite effect may be true of females. Oliver and

Hyde were concerned that this issue "could create gender differences in self-reports where no actual differences in behaviors or attitudes exist" (p. 45), and recognized that this is a measurement limitation often encountered in sex research.

It is essential to acknowledge that such limitations to gender comparison research exist, and more importantly, that we need to tailor measurement techniques according to gender when exploring sexuality and relationship issues. Since the present study will employ a male sample only, testing items have been designed with men specifically in mind.

Developmental Influences

Developing and maintaining healthy relationships throughout our lives is a challenging, yet rewarding experience. Healthy development in childhood and adolescence can be a determinant in promoting healthy relationships in adulthood. Collins, Henninghausen, Schmit, and Sroufe (1997) contended that "a salient issue underlying healthy romantic relationships during adolescence is a capacity for intimacy" (p. 70). They further suggested that "differences among adolescents' behavior in romantic relationships are embedded in both earlier and concurrent relationship experiences that foster the development of a capacity for intimacy" (p. 70).

What factors in childhood and adolescence can contribute to building healthy relationships? During childhood and adolescence, we have many sources of influence that impact upon us, and the information these sources provide can affect our development. Parents are one such source who can help their children and adolescents to become healthy individuals. One way they can do so is by discussing health issues, including

sexual topics, with their children and adolescents. Mc Kay and Holowaty (1997) noted that many studies have provided evidence of the positive implications that sexual education has on sexual health behaviors. Over 60% of adolescents in Mc Kay and Holowaty's study believed that their parents had sufficiently educated them about sexual health issues, thus lending support to the idea that parents may be valuable sources of information to their children. While most researchers discuss implications of effective parental sexual communication in terms of its impact upon adolescent sexual behavior (e.g., Hutchinson & Cooney, 1998), it is important to recognize additional benefits to sexual discussions. For example, if parents provide children and adolescents with open communication about sexual and relationship issues, as they develop into adults they may apply this valuable information to their own intimate relationships.

The *developmental* picture of male sexual and relationship experiences is under-represented in the literature. Even when researchers attempt to investigate male sexual behavior within a developmental context, there are often weaknesses. For example, Bogaert and Fisher (1995) examined males' number of 'lifetime' sexual partners, but only considered men from a university sample whose mean age was less than 20 years. It would be difficult to examine number of lifetime partners for men who had only recently become sexually active (the mean age of first coitus had been 16 years). As previously mentioned, research on males typically involves either adolescent males or university students, particularly those enrolled in the first few terms of undergraduate studies. This not only limits the generalizability of findings, but also limits our understanding of the long-term impact of early experiences. A great deal of effort has been directed toward

examination of variables that might mitigate the occurrence of sexual activity as well as individual responses to these factors. Variables such as parental socialization, communication about sexual issues, and the influence of peers seem to impact upon adolescent males' sexual involvement. To date, however, the long-term impact of these sources of influence is not available.

Different indices of men's sexual relationships later in life may be dependent on what has happened earlier in life. To investigate the effect of childhood experiences on sexuality in late adolescence, Okami, Olmstead, and Abramson (1997) reported findings from the American Family Lifestyles Project, a longitudinal study that followed families from the mothers' third trimester of pregnancy into the late adolescence stage for each participating child. Okami et al. found that being an adolescent who was raised in a family with liberal views about sexuality was related to having sexually liberal views themselves at age 18. Their finding proposes that adolescents' sexual decision-making may be related to that of their parents. Undoubtedly, Okami et al. would agree that early childhood experiences are important and likely impact upon individuals throughout their lives.

It is important to recognize that experiences in childhood and adolescence can affect us throughout our lives, since exposure to influential sources during our first few years of life can contribute to our development into and throughout adulthood. This is not to suggest that development from childhood to adulthood involves a continuous unidirectional process. For example, because we are exposed to sexually liberal attitudes in our families as we grow up does not necessarily imply that we will hold sexually

liberal views throughout our lives. Indeed, development involves change over time and we are constantly in transition during our lives. In order to assess the effect of development we need to relate earlier life experiences to outcomes later in life. To do this, we require information about earlier experiences. However, much sexuality and relationship research has been conducted on adolescents and university students at one point in time and, therefore, has not examined developmental changes. Within the adolescent literature, the influence of both parents and peers on sexual behavior is the primary topic that has been most extensively investigated.

Parental Influence

Literature examining parental influence typically focusses on the impact of parents' sexual communication upon the sexual behavior of their adolescents. What is the importance of receiving sexual information from parents and how does this information affect sexual behavior? In addition to the obvious advantages of gaining knowledge and learning about family values, parental information about sexuality provides various benefits to children and adolescents that can be applied into adulthood. For example, although their data were correlational, Bates and Joubert (1993) reported a relationship between presence of parental sex education and high self-esteem among college students.

While some researchers have found adolescent sexual behavior to be associated with parental variables, others have not found this relationship to exist. For example, Pick and Palos (1995) reported a relationship between presence of open parental sexual communication and decreased likelihood of becoming a teenage parent among adolescent males. Holtzman and Rubinson (1995) reported that having sexual discussions with

parents was related to the decreased likelihood of adolescents being involved in 'risky' sexual behavior (e.g., unprotected sex, multiple partners). Furthermore, Raffaelli, Bogenschneider, and Flood (1998) found that having open parental sexual communication was related to having parents who both revealed their personal views on premarital sex and provided sexual health information. However, Mc Laughlin, Chen, Greenberger, and Biermeier (1997) found no relationship between adolescent sexual activity and parental warmth or acceptance. Similarly, Newcomer and Udry (1985) reported no relationship between parents' attitudes toward, or communication about, sex and adolescent sexual behavior. Thus, research appears to be inconsistent regarding the relationship between parental factors and adolescent sexual behavior.

Gender differences have been reported regarding parental sexual communication. Raffaelli et al. (1998) found that adolescents more openly discussed sexual issues with their mothers than with their fathers, and girls discussed sexual topics with their mothers more frequently than did boys. Nolin and Petersen (1992) also reported greater sexual discussion between adolescent females and their parents than between adolescent males and their parents. Furthermore, mothers were the primary sex educators, with mother-daughter dyads reporting the highest level of communication. Unfortunately, fathers did not discuss sexuality to the same extent that mothers did. Therefore, what mothers did not discuss with their sons was also typically overlooked by fathers. Nolin and Petersen advised that sons may be at a disadvantage because they may feel more comfortable discussing sex with the male parent, but fathers are often uneasy broaching the topic of sexuality. Therefore, adolescent males may be less likely to have discussions of a sexual

nature with either parent because sexual issues raise feelings of awkwardness. Nolin and Petersen concluded, "lacking easy communication with father and having only limited discussions with mother, sons may be more susceptible to peer pressure because they would be less certain of family norms for sexual behavior" (p. 77). Compounding the problem of limited sexual communication among males and their parents, Moore, Peterson, and Furstenberg (1986) reported that parents do not typically discuss sexual issues with their adolescent son until they have reason to believe he has become sexually active. Parents appear to initiate sexual communication in the hopes of intervening in, rather than preventing, sexual involvement.

How frequently are discussions about sex initiated between parents and adolescents? Hutchinson and Cooney (1998) found sexual communication between parents and their adolescent daughters to occur at low to moderate rates. For example, only 40% of Caucasian mothers and approximately 15% of Caucasian fathers had provided their daughters with some information about STD's or condoms. Hutchinson and Cooney also reported that having parental sexual discussions was related to adolescent females communicating with their sexual partners about condom use. If parental communication is indeed related to adolescent sexual behavior, and there truly are only low to moderate communication levels, then lack of communication may be a real barrier to decreasing sexual involvement among adolescents.

In addition to discussions about sex occurring infrequently (Hutchinson & Cooney, 1998), Newcomer and Udry (1985) found that adolescents were typically unaware of their parents' views about premarital sex; adolescents and parents were often

inconsistent in their reports of the content of their sexual discussions. Newcomer and Udry suggested that adolescents may be unreceptive because parents are not clearly communicating their sexual views. Instead, parents may be approaching sexual discussions from a broader or more general perspective, and not conveying their personal attitudes. Not only have adolescents been uncertain about their parents' sexual views, but, according to adolescents, little information about dating relationships has been provided by parents. Indeed, Wood, Senn, Park, Verberg, and Desmarais (in press) found that adolescents reported obtaining less dating information from their parents than from their peers. Receiving little information from parents could be a contributing factor to the lack of relationship that some researchers have reported between parental communication and adolescent sexual behavior (e.g., Newcomer & Udry, 1985).

While parents may not be providing much information about dating or their sexual attitudes, Fisher (1986) examined the relationship between sexual knowledge and sexual discussions. For parents, having high levels of sexual communication with their adolescent was related to having increased sexual knowledge. Fisher proposed that low parental knowledge levels, being related to lack of communication, could be a primary barrier limiting open sexual discussions. Parents, themselves, need to be well-informed before they can provide their children and adolescents with correct information. It is interesting to note, however, that adolescents did not differ in sexual knowledge as a function of their parents' levels of communication. Therefore, it is likely that these children may be receiving sexual information from alternate sources (e.g., peers, school) rather than their parents. Sexual attitudes of parents were more strongly related to those of

their children in the high communication group than between parents and children in the low communication group, thus implying that sexual opinions of parents may impact upon their adolescent's beliefs. Fisher concluded that parents may be more effective in conveying *values* rather than facts about sexuality.

Since parental discussions about sex may not be occurring at high rates, and parents' sexual views may not be known to adolescents, one study examined parents' attitudes toward adolescent sexual activity. While the majority of parents agreed that adolescents should be deterred from having sexual intercourse at all, Jaccard and Dittus (1991) reported that 20% of parents believed it would be permissible for their adolescent to have one or two sexual experiences with a committed partner. Furthermore, 8% of parents did not believe that their adolescent should be discouraged from engaging in sexual intercourse at all. Overall, parents were less likely to support sexual activity among their daughters than their sons.

What factors predict whether parents will discourage premarital sex among their teenagers? Jaccard and Dittus (1991) reported morality to be the strongest predictor among parents; viewing adolescent sex as immoral was related to disapproval of adolescent sexual activity. Parents' beliefs about feelings of guilt and regret on the part of their adolescent also predicted opposition to premarital sex. Finally, parents' concern about their son or daughter losing the respect of their peers was also associated with parental opposition to adolescent sexual activity. Thus, morality, guilt, and loss of respect were found to be related to disapproval of adolescent sexual involvement.

Summary of parental impact. Undoubtedly, parents play an important role in adolescent development, and the literature seems to indicate that parents do have an impact upon adolescent sexual behavior. However, researchers have reported inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between parental sexual communication and adolescent sexual activity. While some studies have found increased sexual discussions to be associated with decreased adolescent sexual activity, others have not reported such a relationship to exist. Researchers have found mothers' sexual communication to occur more frequently than fathers' sexual discussions, and adolescent girls to receive more sexual information from their parents than do their male peers. Compounding this issue of males receiving less parental sexual information, one study found that parents did not typically discuss sex with their son until they believed he had become sexually active. Furthermore, another study investigated the amount of parental sexual communication present between parents and their adolescents, and found these discussions to occur at only 'low to moderate' rates.

Research on parental sexual communication has typically focused on parents who discourage sexual activity among their adolescents, and the impact of discussions which promote sexual abstinence has been investigated in relation to adolescent sexual behavior. However, as Jaccard and Dittus (1991) indicated, not *all* parents discourage sexual activity among their teenagers, especially among males. Therefore, it may be useful to investigate the discrepancy between parents' attitudes which support or discourage premarital sex and the impact upon adolescent sexual behavior. The current study will

investigate the relationship between parents' sexual views, discussions about sex, and men's sexual and romantic relationship histories.

Peer Influence

While parental influence on adolescent sexual activity has been discussed, another important source of influence for adolescents is their peers. Peers can be influential in that they create the opportunity for their friends to either imitate their actions, or follow their verbal advice, or both. According to Bukatko and Daehler (1998), "the intimacy required in friendships may also promote healthier relationships with others later in life" (p. 526). Maintaining healthy relationships with peers can provide us with necessary skills to enter into successful relationships as adults.

Overall, peers appear to play an important role in adolescent experience. Wood et al. (in press) found peers to provide more dating information than either parents or the media, and to have the greatest influence on dating choices. Although few studies have investigated the effect of peer pressure on male sexual behavior, research relating peer variables to sexual behavior has been conducted. Interestingly, gender differences have been found regarding peers and sexual behavior. De Gaston, Weed, and Jensen (1996) found that males reported experiencing greater pressure from their peers to be sexually active, while females reported believing that there was more support from their peers to abstain from sexual relations.

Billy and Udry (1985) explored friendships among adolescents and compared adolescents' sexual behavior to that of their friends, and assessed change in friendships two years later. Among white adolescents, Billy and Udry discovered that there was an

interesting trend in which adolescents actually acquired new friends who had similar sexual experiences over the two year period. Billy and Udry suggested that this may be due to adolescents placing great emphasis on similarity of peer sexual behavior as an important criterion for friendship development. However, although adolescents initiated new friendships, they did not dissolve intact friendships because of dissimilar sexual experiences. Billy and Udry concluded that although sexual experience may be an important variable, factors other than sexual behavior are likely critical for maintaining friendships.

Not only do similar sexual experiences of peers relate to adolescent sexual behavior, but peer acceptance has been reported to be associated with sexual activity levels. Feldman, Rosenthal, Brown, and Canning (1995) conducted a longitudinal study of boys at sixth and tenth grades. At sixth grade, peer acceptance or rejection was measured by a peer nominating procedure, and at tenth grade, the same group of boys responded to items about sexual experiences, including numbers of sexual partners. Independent path models were investigated for peer rejection and peer acceptance, and Feldman et al. reported that both peer acceptance and peer rejection at sixth grade were related to having more sexual partners at tenth grade, but by way of different paths. Being accepted by peers was associated with both increased dating frequency as well as increased alcohol use, both of which were associated with having multiple sexual partners. Being rejected by peers, however, was associated with having lower self-restraint and higher misconduct, which were positively related to having multiple sexual partners. Feldman et al. concluded that their findings revealed "that there is not

necessarily a single cluster of behaviors and traits that precipitates sexual intercourse with multiple partners in adolescence. It appears that at least two important predictive clusters are contingent on youths' peer status prior to adolescence" (p. 406-7). Feldman et al. also recognized that factors other than the variables that they studied are likely to contribute to having multiple sexual partners.

As with parental influence research, literature about peer influence on sexual behavior typically surveys only adolescent samples. However, Heilbrun and Loftus (1986) investigated the effects of peer pressure on sexually aggressive behaviors of male university students. They found that the majority of males who were classified as 'sexually aggressive', measured by self-reported views and behaviors, did not report experiencing pressure from male peers to engage in more sexual activity. Conversely, most of the 'sexually non-aggressive' men claimed that their male friends had pressured them to be more sexually active. One may typically think, in general, that sexually aggressive men would have been more likely to be exposed to peer pressure, and this pressure could have contributed to their sexually aggressive behavior. However, Heilbrun and Loftus suggested that since sexually aggressive men may be engaging in substantial amounts of sexual activity, pressure from peers to be more active may not be warranted. They also proposed that the personalities of sexually aggressive men may not elicit peer pressure of any type.

Gender composition of friendship networks. Forming friendships with peers is an important aspect of our lives. While our friendship network may include same-sex friends, many of us also find great satisfaction in maintaining friendships with peers of

the opposite sex. What are the differences between these types of friendships and what are the implications for forming romantic relationships? Werking (1997) reported that, for women, friendships with members of the opposite sex, or cross-sex friendships, are "less intimate, less supportive, and less satisfying than same-sex friendships" (p. 24). However, Davis and Todd (1985) reported that trust, respect, and enjoyment did not differ between same-sex and cross-sex friendships. As for gender differences among friendships, females are more likely to name talking with one another as a major aspect of same-sex friendships, and they typically discuss more personal topics and feelings than do male same-sex friends (Parker & de Vries, 1993). Men, on the other hand, report that engaging in activities is a major component of their friendships with men (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982). However, friendships with women tend to provide men with a unique opportunity that they do not typically experience in their same-sex friendships. Specifically, "men as a group tend to view cross-sex friendship as a nurturing and intimate relationship in which they may express their feelings" (Werking, 1997, p. 53).

How does the gender composition of friendship networks impact upon the development of romantic relationships? Leaper and Anderson (1997) contended that males are more likely than females to participate in aggressive sports with one another and "the emphasis on physical aggression in these sports has been correlated with positive attitudes toward sexism and male dominance as well as higher incidences of violence toward women" (p. 89). Furthermore, some researchers (e.g., Hansen, Christopher, & Nangle, 1992) have found that acceptance and tolerance of male aggressive behavior may negatively impact upon romantic relationships, possibly providing an opportunity for

relationship violence. Although there may be repercussions manifested as a result of male aggression, maintaining friendships does have beneficial effects on romantic relationships. Friends who communicate well with one another are likely to be satisfied with their relationships (Leaper & Anderson, 1997). We know that male same-sex friends do not typically have a high level of communication, especially when discussing intimate or personal topics; however, cross-sex friendships provide a greater avenue for men to express their feelings (Werking, 1997). Therefore, if friendships with women do indeed provide men with an opportunity for open communication, one may wonder whether this would impact upon men's quality of romantic relationships with women. For example, does having a primarily female friendship network affect the types of romantic relationships that men experience, or do romantic relationships differ among men with all-male friends? Leaper and Anderson suggested that maintaining friendships with members of the opposite sex during adolescence may be related to having more successful and satisfying romantic relationships during adolescence and adulthood, but cautioned that research is lacking in this area and could only suggest this as a possibility. However, it seems reasonable that men may benefit from cross-sex friendships since they typically learn more egalitarian and reciprocal values from their experiences with female friends (Leaper & Anderson, 1997).

In summary, peers appear to have an impact upon sexual behavior. One study found sexual behavior among adolescents to be related to that of their peers. Another study found that being either accepted or rejected by peers was associated with having multiple sexual partners. Finally, gender composition of friendship networks may play an

important role in men's romantic relationships since different types of friendships provide different opportunities for men.

Thus far, we have reviewed literature pertaining either to parents or peers. However, research has suggested that both parents and peers can be influential sources of sexual information and can impact upon adolescent sexual behavior and interpersonal relationships. While the literature has primarily concentrated on the influence of either parents (e.g., Nolin & Petersen, 1992) or peers (e.g., Billy & Udry, 1985) on sexual behavior, a few studies have compared the relative influence of parents versus peers (e.g., Holtzman & Rubinson, 1995). However, in the current study, we recognize that both parents and peers are likely to be influential sources on male sexual behavior and thus, both sources will be examined. After all, Lottes and Kuriloff (1994) found that males reported being socialized from *both* parents and peers to hold more permissive sexual views than females.

Summary of Research

Research drawn from both the sexuality and relationship literatures largely omits the experiences, attitudes, and issues of adult men. What is known about males and sexual behavior is generalized from either adolescent or university populations. What is important, however, is that existing research has provided substantial information about the precursors to both male and female adolescents' sexual activities. The literature has examined parental influence and, to a lesser extent, peer impact upon adolescent sexual behavior. Researchers have also acknowledged the importance of early experiences with influential sources for later life, an issue that the current study investigates further.

Investigating men's sexual lives. The effects of influential variables that occur earlier in life, especially during adolescence, on adult males' sexual and relationship patterns will be examined in the present study. The current study will attempt to contribute to our understanding of the developmental precursors in men's lives that are associated with their sexual experiences in adolescence and adulthood. In addition, an exploratory analysis of men's romantic relationships will be conducted. The current study will also investigate parental and peer variables which predict the sexual and relationship behaviors of men, specifically age of first coitus and numbers of lifetime sexual and romantic partners.

Variables that will be examined in the current study include parents' sexual views, parental sexual communication, peer pressure toward sexual activity and peer influence on sexual behavior (in both adolescence and adulthood), and gender composition of friendship networks. Men's sexual and romantic relationship histories will be measured by the numbers of sexual and romantic partners and types of relationships that men have had during different age periods, as well as their ages when they first experienced sexual and romantic relationships. In addition to providing descriptive information about these variables, relationships between parental and peer influences and relationship histories will be examined. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to present information about sexual and romantic relationships across men's lifespan, and to assess variables predictive of sexual and romantic relationship behavior.

Based on previous research implicating parents and peers as influential sources upon adolescent sexual behavior, it is expected that both parents and peers will impact

upon men's sexual and relationship experiences and histories. Therefore, two research questions will be posed and two expectations have been formed for the current study.

Which sources of influence will be related to sexually permissive behavior among men (i.e., early onset of sexual activity, more sexual partners)? Levinson et al. (1995) found that male university students who believed that being involved in casual sexual relationships was highly regarded among male peers were more likely to be involved in casual sex than men who did not hold that view. In the current study, we expect peer measures to predict male sexual behavior, such that receiving pressure to increase sexual activity will be predictive of increased sexual activity among men.

Which sources of influence will be related to less sexually permissive behavior among men (i.e., later onset of sexual activity, fewer sexual partners)? Levinson et al. (1995) reported that males who believed that their parents discouraged casual sexual encounters were less likely to be involved in casual sexual relations, thus suggesting that parental impact may have been suppressing casual sexual activity. In the current study, we expect that having parents who frequently and comfortably discussed sexual issues, and whose views did not support permissive sexual behavior, will be predictive of less permissive sexual behavior among men.

In addition to investigating measures of sexual behavior, romantic relationship experiences will also be assessed. Specifically, age of first romantic relationship and numbers of romantic partners during different age periods will be examined. Since the literature on romantic experiences of men is very limited, our analyses on romantic relationships will be purely exploratory.

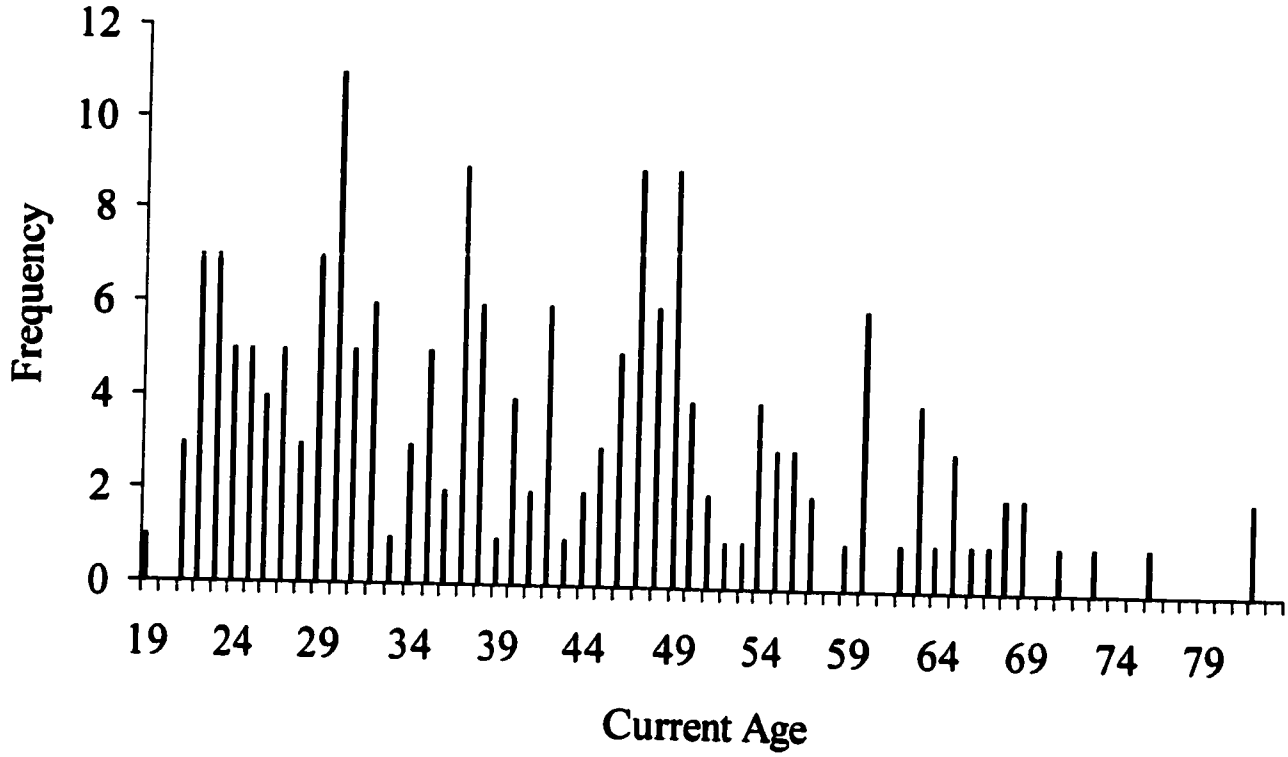
Method

Participants

Participants were selected randomly from municipal enumeration records of a mid-sized city in Southern Ontario, Canada. One hundred and ninety-five men, ranging in age from 19 to 82 (M = 41.17, SD = 14.21), completed questionnaires (see Figure 1 for the frequency distribution of ages). This constitutes a 25.16% response rate of the 775 men who were eligible to participate, which is a higher than average response rate for men responding to a survey involving personal and sensitive topics (Senn, Verberg, Desmarais, & Wood, in press). Senn et al. manipulated both incentive value and whether or not participants received a letter introducing the current study, and reported that a response rate of 20% can typically be expected from a sexual experiences survey sent to men from the general population.

Respondents who answered the question about race/ethnicity were primarily white (96.4%). Ninety-seven percent of the men identified themselves as heterosexual. Sixty-four percent of the men were married, with an additional 9% living in common-law arrangements. Seventy-five percent of the participants were employed full time, while only 8% were full-time students. Forty-three percent of the sample had high school education or less while 24% had earned university degrees. The remainder had some university or had partially or fully completed trade school or college. All men sampled were given a $1 coin incentive. Participants were treated in accordance with the ethical principles of the Canadian and American Psychological Associations.

Figure 1. Frequency distribution for current age of respondents.



Measures

A 17 page booklet-style questionnaire was designed as part of a larger study on sexual coercion and men's attitudes toward women. The cover contained the title "A Survey on Men's Social and Sexual Attitudes and Experiences" and assurance of confidentiality. An information sheet was included, in which informed consent was explained to participants. Return of the questionnaire was considered consent to participate, and anonymity and confidentiality were reiterated in this context. It was stressed that the questionnaires and return envelopes could not be traced or identified as belonging to individuals.

In order of how they were presented, the questionnaire booklet contained 11 background questions (age, sexual identity, living arrangements, religion, ethnicity, employment and educational status, see Appendix A), six items about peer influences on sexual behavior in adolescence and adulthood (adapted from Heilbrun & Loftus, 1986, see Appendix B), three items on friendship networks (see Appendix C), six questions about past and current romantic and sexual relationships (see Appendix D), eight items about parents' sexual views (adapted from Lottes & Kuriloff, 1994, see Appendix E), and two items on parental sexual communication (see Appendix F).

The six questions about peer influences on male sexuality were based on 7-point Likert scales. Men were asked how much pressure they had received as adolescents to engage in more (and less) sexual activity. They were also asked how much pressure they had received as adults to engage in more (and less) sexual activity. Response options ranged from 'no pressure' to 'extreme pressure'. Men were also asked in both cases (as

adolescents and as adults) how much their behavior was influenced by these views. Again, on a 7-point scale, response options ranged from 'not at all' to 'completely'.

Participants were also questioned about their friendships. On a 5-point scale with response options ranging from 'all male' to 'all female', men were asked to indicate the proportion of males and proportion of females in their friendship network. In addition, on a 5-point scale ranging from 'not very important' to 'very important', men were asked about the importance of their friendships with men and the importance of their friendships with women.

The romantic and sexual relationship history section consisted of six questions. Participants identified their age for their first sexual relationship and first romantic relationship. In addition, men were asked to give a historical account of their numbers of sexual and romantic partners for four age periods: adolescence (ages 12 to 18), early (ages 19 to 29), middle (ages 30 to 49), and late (ages 50 and up) adulthood. Respondents were also asked to indicate, by checking, the most typical type of relationship they encountered during each of the age groups mentioned, as well as at present. Types of relationships included sexual with no romantic attachment, sexual with romantic attachment, nonsexual with romantic attachment, romantic and sexual with one person and sexual only with others, no relationships, and an 'other' space for participants to indicate relationship types not listed.

The questions about parents' sexual views had response options based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Two questions referred to mothers, two items were specific to fathers, and the remaining four items

encompassed both parents. One mother and one father item measured men's beliefs about their individual parents' support of multiple sexual partners, while the other mother and father questions measured beliefs about their parents' views of sex within the context of relationships. The four items about both parents assessed the importance of sexual activity for defining adulthood, views about sex within the context of relationships, approval of sexual activity, and views about multiple partners. In addition to the parents' sexual view items, two other questions assessed parental influence or, more specifically, parental sexual communication. On a 7-point scale, ranging from 'not at all' to 'all the time', respondents were asked if their parents talked to them about sex. A 7-point scale, ranging from 'not at all' to 'completely', assessed how comfortable men believed that their parents were with talking to them about sex.

The survey began and ended with non-threatening background information about the respondents (i.e., the general information described earlier, age, education, etc.). Pilot tests of the questionnaires used focus groups of university and community men (n=25). Based on their responses, changes were made to ensure accessibility of language and to correct layout features.

Procedure

Enumeration records were randomly sampled to produce a list of 2000 names and addresses. Male names were identified from these lists (N=930), and preliminary letters announcing the study and describing the sampling method were sent to the addresses of all of these men. The post office returned 105 of these letters, marked "moved - no forwarding address" or "unknown". One survey package was mailed to each of the 825

men whose addresses appeared current. Survey packages included a one dollar incentive attached to a cover sheet that explained informed consent, what participation entailed, and who the researchers were, the survey, and a resource list. Reminder postcards were sent two weeks later. Of these packages, 36 were returned by the post office and 14 were returned with notes explaining that they could not be completed (usually indicating death of a potential participant). Sixty packages were returned blank by men who did not wish to participate. One hundred and ninety-five completed surveys were returned from the remaining 775 mailed surveys, for a response rate of 25.16%.

Results

Of the 195 men who responded to the survey, 190 identified themselves as heterosexual. Since the sexual and relationship history items ask for information about experiences with heterosexual relationships, data were analyzed only for the 190 'heterosexual' participants. Six areas of the data were examined. These included parental influence, peer influence, gender composition of friendship networks, numbers and types of relationships during different age periods, and ages of first sexual and romantic relationships. Descriptive information about each of these measures is presented first, followed by an assessment of the relations among these items.

Descriptive Information

Parental influence. Parental influence was assessed by two Likert-type questions about parents' sexual communication and eight Likert-type items about parents' sexual views. Intercorrelations among the items on the parents' sexual views scale are presented in Table 1. Almost all of the items were significantly correlated with the other items of

the scale. Most notably, item 4 about fathers' views of casual sex was related to the other seven items. Items about multiple sexual partners (item 1 with 3, and item 1 with 8) were correlated with each other, and items about sex within the context of relationships (items 2, 4, and 6) were also significantly correlated with each other.

Table 1

Intercorrelations Between Parents' Sexual View Items

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8
Item 1	–	.09	-.17*	.40**	.22**	-.02	-.20**	.37**
Item 2		--	.05	.15*	.17*	.26**	-.05	.11
Item 3			--	-.33**	-.08	.16*	.33**	-.13
Item 4				--	.19*	-.20**	-.36**	.39**
Item 5					--	.31**	-.07	.31**
Item 6						--	.11	.04
Item 7							--	-.18*
Item 8								--

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

The means, standard deviations, and number of responding participants for the parental influence measures are presented in Table 2. The two questions about parents' sexual communication assessed men's perceptions of their parents' willingness to engage in discussions about sex. Although possible scores ranged from 0 to 6, mean scores did not exceed 1.52 and there was limited variability (see Table 2). Men believed that their parents rarely discussed sex and that their parents did not feel comfortable discussing sex.

These two parental sexual communication items were significantly correlated, $r(177) = .59$, $p < .001$, suggesting that willingness to discuss sexual issues was related to comfort in having these discussions. In general, parents were neither willing to discuss sexual topics, nor were they comfortable.

For the eight items assessing parents' sexual views, respondents indicated how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a five-point scale. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was .51. Given this low value, all subsequent analyses were conducted by examining individual items or grouping items together according to whether they pertained to mothers, fathers, or both parents.

Two items, referring to mothers and fathers independently, assessed respondents' beliefs about each of their parents' attitudes toward multiple sexual partners (item 1 for mothers and 3 for fathers) and sex within the context of relationships (item 2 for mothers and 4 for fathers). The two items about mothers indicated that respondents believed that their mothers would not support multiple sexual relationships (item 1, $M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.96$), while the requirement that sexual relationships be associated with a serious relationship was less clear cut, with the mean rating almost at the mid-point of the scale, but tending toward disapproval of sex outside of relationships (item 2, $M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.42$). The means for the two items about fathers both fell around the mid-point of the scale, tending toward disapproval of both multiple sexual partners (item 3, $M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.35$) and casual sexual encounters (item 4, $M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.21$). Mothers' and fathers' sexual views were modestly related $r(182) = .18$, $p = .01$. Both parents typically did not overtly support sexually permissive behavior, and when summed together, both

mothers' and fathers' means were around the mid-point (5.18 versus 4.50 on a scale ranging from 2 to 10).

Since two items asked about parents' views regarding multiple sexual partners, differing only in direction of wording, we compared the views of mothers and fathers[2]. Men believed that their mothers disapproved of their being sexually involved with multiple partners (item 1 reverse-scored, $\underline{M}$ = 1.61, $\underline{SD}$ = 0.96) more than did their fathers (item 3, $\underline{M}$ = 2.68, $\underline{SD}$ = 1.35), $\underline{t}(181) = -9.33$, $\underline{p} < .001$.

Four items assessed the views of both parents combined. One item assessed parents' attitudes toward casual sex (item 6) and one item assessed views about multiple sex partners (item 8). The mean evaluations for both parents combined were close to the middle range for casual sex (item 6, $\underline{M}$ = 2.58, $\underline{SD}$ = 1.26), but close to strongly disagreeing with multiple sexual partners (item 8, $\underline{M}$ = 4.52, $\underline{SD}$ = 0.80). The two remaining questions assessed the approval of sexual activity (item 7) and the importance of sexual activity for defining adulthood (item 5). Respondents indicated mixed views regarding approval of sexual activity but tending toward parental disapproval ($\underline{M}$ = 2.85, $\underline{SD}$ = 1.26), and a tendency to not view sexual activity as an important part of becoming an adult ($\underline{M}$ = 3.81, $\underline{SD}$ = 1.15). Parents are perceived to be reluctant to support sexual activity and do not regard it as a relevant marker for the transition to adulthood.

As a final note about parents' sexual views, an overall score was calculated by summing the eight individual items (with four of the eight items reverse-scored) to

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[2] One must be aware that the non-parallel wording of these two items makes it difficult to compare these two items. Therefore, comparisons must be interpreted cautiously.

include a possible range of 8 (indicating parents' views do not support sexually permissive behavior) to 40 (indicating parents' views do support sexually permissive behavior). Parents' scores were skewed ($\underline{M}$ = 18.44, $\underline{SD}$ = 4.80, Range = 8 to 31), indicating that most men believed that their parents would not support sexually permissive behavior.

Table 2

Descriptive Information for Parental Measures

Measure	M	SD	n
Parents' Sexual Discussion Items[a]			
1- Did your parents talk about sex with you?	1.00	1.26	178
2- How comfortable are your parents about talking about sex with you?	1.52	1.66	178
Parents' Sexual View Items[b]			
1- My mother would have felt okay about my having sex with many different people	4.39	0.96	188
2- My mother would only have approved of my having sex in a serious relationship	2.89	1.42	185
3- My father would have felt upset if he'd thought I was having sex with many different people	2.68	1.35	182
4- My father would have felt okay about my having casual sexual encounters	3.50	1.21	181
5- According to my parents, having sexual intercourse was an important part of my becoming an adult	3.81	1.15	187
6- My parents would have stressed that sex and intimacy should always be linked	2.58	1.26	183
7- My parents would have disapproved of my being sexually active	2.85	1.21	186
8- My parents encouraged me to have sex with many people before I got married	4.52	0.80	186

[a]Possible scores range from 0 to 6 where 0 is not at all and 6 is all the time or completely.
[b]Possible scores range from 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly agree and 5 is strongly disagree.

Peer influence. Intercorrelations between the six peer influence measures, which assessed the influence of peers in both adolescence and adulthood, are presented in Table 3. As Table 3 indicates, each item is correlated with all other items, suggesting that receiving pressure of either type as either adolescents or adults was related to believing peers' views influenced male sexual behavior.

Table 3

Intercorrelations Between Peer Influence Measures

	Increase as teen	**Decrease as teen**	**Influence as teen**	**Increase as adult**	**Decrease as adult**	**Influence as adult**
Increase as teen	--	.25**	.51**	.56**	.28**	.36**
Decrease as teen		--	.32**	.30**	.32**	.17*
Influence as teen			--	.39**	.27**	.48**
Increase as adult				--	.33**	.55**
Decrease as adult					--	.39**
Influence as adult						--

*$p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Descriptive information about the peer measures is presented in Table 4. As indicated in Table 4, means were close to the lowest possible scores for all six items. Specifically, men typically reported that they did not receive much pressure from male friends to engage in sexual activity (either more or less) as adolescents or as adults. In

addition, respondents typically did not feel that their sexual behavior was influenced by the views of their male peers. Within both age groups, there was greater pressure to engage in more sexual activity (M = 1.80, SD = 1.52) than less sexual activity (M = 0.72, SD = 1.13) as adolescents, $t(185) = 8.95, p < .001$, and more (M = 1.13, SD = 1.56) than less (M = 0.43, SD = 0.90) as adults, $t(185) = 6.41, p < .001$.

An overall 'peer influence' score was constructed by aggregating the mean scores for pressure to engage in more sexual activity, pressure to engage in less sexual activity, and peer influence on behavior, for both age periods. Overall, men reported receiving greater sexual peer pressure and influence as adolescents (M = 4.21, SD = 3.18) than as adults (M = 2.36, SD = 2.97), $t(184) = 9.10, p < .001$. Taken together, these findings suggest that adolescence, rather than adulthood, appears to be a time for receiving sexual peer pressure to increase sexual activity. However, it is important to remember that these scores revealed that men did not report experiencing much pressure on average.

Table 4

Descriptive Information for Peer Measures

Measure	M	SD	n
Teen - engage in more sexual activity[a]	1.80	1.52	187
Teen - engage in less sexual activity[a]	0.72	1.13	186
Teen - peers' views influenced behavior[b]	1.69	1.50	185
Adult - engage in more sexual activity[a]	1.13	1.56	188
Adult - engage in less sexual activity[a]	0.43	0.90	186
Adult - peers' views influenced behavior[b]	0.80	1.26	187

[a]Possible scores range from 0 to 6 where 0 is no pressure and 6 is extreme pressure.
[b]Possible scores range from 0 to 6 where 0 is not at all and 6 is completely.

Friendship networks. Gender composition of friendship networks was assessed by one item where a high score reflected all-female friends and a low score indicated all-male friends (see Table 5). On a scale of 1 to 5, men indicated that mixed-sex friendships were most common ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.57$). Indeed, only three men described their friendship network as all-female, while two men described their friendship network as all-male. Furthermore, respondents were asked to indicate the importance of both their male and female friendships (see Table 5). In general, male and female friendships were rated as equally important, $t(184) = -0.34$, $p = .73$.

Table 5

Descriptive Information for Friendship Network Measures

Measure	M	SD	n
Gender composition of friendships[a]	2.87	0.57	187
Importance of male friendships[b]	3.57	1.07	185
Importance of female friendships[b]	3.59	1.01	185

Note. Possible scores range from 1 to 5.
[a]Lower scores correspond to all-male friendship networks and higher scores correspond to all-female friendships. [b]The higher the score is, the more important the friendship.

Sexual and romantic partners as a function of age. Participants were asked to report numbers of both sexual partners and romantic partners during the age periods of 12-18, 19-29, 30-49, 50+, and overall (total). The means, standard deviations, and number of responses for how many sexual partners and romantic partners men had during each age period, as well as overall, are presented in Table 6. Reporting overall or total numbers of partners allows us to determine whether men had the same partner(s) across different age periods. For example, while a respondent may have reported having one partner during each age period, we can determine by the overall number whether he had the same partner across age periods or a different partner at each age period.

Mean number of sexual partners and mean number of romantic partners did not differ during adolescence or late adulthood. However, during early and middle adulthood, men reported more sexual partners than romantic partners. Descriptive information for each of the age groups is presented below (see Table 6 for means).

Of the men who provided information about numbers of sexual (n = 166) and romantic (n = 162) partners during adolescence (ages 12-18), about one-third reported having no sexual partners (36.7%) or romantic partners (36.4%). Approximately one-fifth reported having one sexual partner (21.1%) or one romantic partner (20.4%). However, the majority of respondents reported having between 2 and 20 sexual partners (42.2%) or between 2 and 30 romantic partners (43.2%). Mean number of sexual partners and mean number of romantic partners did not differ during this age period, $t(155) = 0.10$, $p = .93$.

Of the participants who reported numbers of sexual (n = 168) and romantic (n = 162) partners during early adulthood (ages 19-29), 6.6% had no sexual partners and 4.3% had no romantic partners. However, 35.7% had one sexual partner and 45.7% had one romantic partner. Again, the majority of respondents (57.7%) reported having more than one sexual partner (range 2-40) and 50.0% had more than one romantic partner (range 2-30). Men reported having more sexual partners than romantic partners during early adulthood, $t(157) = 4.63$, $p = .001$.

During middle adulthood (ages 30-49), 3.6% of 113 men had no sexual partners and 2.7% of 112 respondents had no romantic partners; the majority of men had one sexual partner (62.8%) and one romantic partner (78.5%). While 33.6% had more than one sexual partner (range 2-40), only 18.8% had more than one romantic partner (range 2-15). There was a significantly higher mean number of reported sexual partners than romantic partners during middle adulthood, $t(108) = 2.45$, $p = .02$.

Of the 33 men who reported the number of partners during late adulthood (ages 50 and up), 3.0% had no sexual partners while 9.1% had no romantic partners. Again, the

majority of respondents had one sexual partner (78.8%) and one romantic partner (75.8%). While 18.2% reported having more than one sexual partner (range 2-7), 15.1% had more than one romantic partner (range 2-8). Mean number of sexual partners did not differ from mean number of romantic partners during late adulthood, $t(31) = 0.00$, $p = 1.00$.

Summing the mean numbers of sexual partners during each of the four age periods yields a mean of 11.37 total partners. However, men reported an average of 8.74 lifetime partners. Therefore, we know that each sexual partner a man has does not change at every age period. Similarly, the mean number of overall romantic partners at each age period sums to a total of 7.52, yet men reported an average of 4.94 lifetime romantic partners. Again, some partners are constant over more than one age period.

In summary, during both adolescence and early adulthood, the majority of respondents had two or more sexual and romantic partners. However, during middle and late adulthood, the majority of men had one sexual and one romantic partner. Collapsed across all age periods, men reported higher numbers of sexual partners than romantic partners, $t(169) = 4.15$, $p = .04$. Men reported significantly more sexual partners during early adulthood than any other age group (smallest t value: $t(112) = 2.00$, $p = .04$) but number of romantic partners did not differ among age periods (largest t value: $t(109) = 1.78$, $p = .08$). Thus, it is the number of sexual partnerships that seems to change with age.

Table 6

Mean Numbers of Sexual and Romantic Partners At Each Age Period

Age periods	Number of sexual partners			Number of romantic partners		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n
12-18	2.05	2.89	166	2.08	3.35	162
19-29	4.76	6.70	168	2.29	3.10	162
30-49	2.98	5.61	113	1.60	2.14	112
50+	1.58	1.56	33	1.55	1.80	33
Overall	8.74	10.58	176	4.94	6.14	172

Relationship types as a function of age. Participants were asked to report the most typical relationship type they had experienced during each age period (see Table 7 for percentages and numbers). The type of relationship that best described men's relationship experiences differed as a function of age period. Specifically, during adolescence, non-sexual romantic relationships and purely romantic relationships were most commonly reported, $\chi^2(5, N = 157) = 26.71, p < .001$. However, relationships with *both* sexual and romantic components were most typical of early adulthood, $\chi^2(5, N = 161) = 214.76, p < .001$; middle adulthood, $\chi^2(5, N = 84) = 169.57, p < .001$; and late adulthood, $\chi^2(4, N = 20) = 23.00, p < .001$. It is important to note that the chi-square statistic for relationship types in late adulthood had expected frequencies less than five in each of its cells.

Although respondents reported having the same numbers of sexual ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 2.89$) and romantic ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 3.35$) partners during adolescence, both purely romantic and purely sexual relationships were reported as being most common during this

age period. Based on the types of relationships reported, it would appear that men's partners during adolescence were typically either sexual or romantic, but not both. During early, middle, and late adulthood, men believed that relationships with both sexual and romantic components were most common. This response was similar to the outcome in the previous questions (see Table 6), where the mean numbers of sexual and romantic partners did not differ in late adulthood. However, for early and middle adulthood, a discrepancy appears in which men reported most commonly having relationships that were both sexual and romantic for this question, yet earlier reported a higher number of sexual partners than romantic partners.

Respondents were provided with the opportunity to indicate 'other' types of relationships they may have commonly encountered, rather than one of the five descriptions presented. Of those men who reported other types of relationships, they combined two or three of the relationship descriptions provided. For example, some men indicated that both purely sexual *and* purely romantic relationships were most characteristic of an age period, rather than identifying either purely sexual or purely romantic. In other words, some respondents appeared to have difficulty deciding which relationship type best described their particular age periods and thus opted for a combination of more than one type.

Table 7

Most Common Relationship Types Reported At Each Age Period

Relationship Descriptions	12-18 (n = 157)	19-29 (n = 161)	30-49 (n = 84)	50 + (n = 20)
Sexual, no romantic attachment	23.6% (37)	6.8% (11)	2.4% (2)	0% (0)
Sexual with romantic attachment	17.2% (27)	58.4% (94)	69.1% (58)	60.0% (12)
Nonsexual, romantic attachment	25.5% (40)	5.0% (8)	7.1% (6)	5.0% (1)
Romantic and sexual with one partner, sex with others	4.5% (7)	11.2% (18)	10.7% (9)	25.0% (5)
No relationships	14.0% (22)	1.9% (3)	1.2% (1)	5.0% (1)
Other	15.3% (24)	16.8 % (27)	9.5% (8)	5.0% (1)

Ages of first sexual and romantic relationships. Reported ages of first sexual and romantic relationships are presented in Table 8. Age of first sexual relationship (M = 18.03, SD = 4.59) and age of first romantic relationship (M = 18.15, SD = 4.03) were correlated, $r(175) = .48$, $p < .001$, and did not significantly differ from one another, $t(175) = -0.48$, $p = .64$. Reports of age for first sexual relationship ranged from ages 8 to 35. While only 7% of men had become sexually active before they turned 14 years old, the majority of respondents had become sexually active before they turned 18 years old (55%). Furthermore, 82% of men had experienced first coitus before they were 21. Similarly, reports of age for first romantic relationship ranged from 9 to 35. While only

6% had reported having their first romantic relationship before they were 14 years old, 61% had been romantically involved before reaching age 18. Similar to sexual relationships, 79% of respondents had been involved in a romantic relationship by the time they turned 21 years old.

Table 8

Mean Ages of First Sexual and Romantic Relationships

Measure	M	SD	n
Age of first sexual relationship	18.03	4.59	180
Age of first romantic relationship	18.15	4.03	181

Predicting Men's Sexual and Romantic Behavior

Three simultaneous multiple regression analyses were conducted, examining predictors of age of first sexual experience, overall number of sexual partners, and overall number of romantic partners. For each of these three models, current age, highest level of education completed, parents' sexual view scores[3] summed for mothers (items 1 and 2, $\alpha = .19$), fathers (items 3 and 4, $\alpha = .50$), and parents (items 5, 6, 7, and 8, $\alpha = .29$), as well as adolescent peer pressure measures (to engage in more or less sexual activity), and parents' comfort with discussing sex were regressed on the criterion variable. We did not test amount of parental discussion since the mean was so low and there was very little

[3] Given the very low Cronbach alpha values for the summed items, we tested the individual as well as the summed items, and the outcome did not change. For example, the two mother items (items 1 and 2) were tested instead of the summed mother items and neither item significantly predicted age of first sexual experience (see Appendix G).

variability. For predicting overall numbers of sexual and romantic partners, adult peer pressure measures (to engage in more or less sexual activity) were also entered. In addition, for predicting overall numbers of romantic partners, gender composition of friendship networks was also entered into the regression analysis. Correlations between predictor and criterion variables are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Correlations Between Predictor and Criterion Variables

Variable	Age of First Sexual Experience	Overall Sexual Partners	Overall Romantic Partners
Current age	-.15*	.08	.06
Highest level of education	.08	.03	-.08
Mothers' sexual views	.02	.03	-.02
Fathers' sexual views	-.22**	.33**	.04
Parents' sexual views	-.23**	.25**	-.05
Parents' comfort in discussing sex	-.19**	.04	-.01
Teen pressure to increase sex	-.16*	.19**	.06
Teen pressure to decrease sex	-.10	.10	.01
Adult pressure to increase sex	--	.04	-.03
Adult pressure to decrease sex	--	-.02	-.01
Gender composition of friendships	--	--	.09

*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

Correlations among predictor variables entered into the three regression analyses are presented in Table 10. The sexual views of mothers, fathers, and both parents are

related to each other, and as shown previously, the peer influence items are correlated with each other.

Table 10

Correlations Among Predictor Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	--	.34**	-.02	.01	-.04	-.26**	-.32**	.03	-.24*	-.08
2		--	.05	-.08	-.24**	-.10	-.03	.14	-.03	.03
3			--	.18**	.22**	.08	.01	-.03	.04	.02
4				--	.49**	.10	.06	-.09	-.04	-.04
5					--	.06	-.04	-.05	-.13	-.13
6						--	-.07	.02	.09	-.01
7							--	.25**	.56**	.28**
8								--	.30**	.32**
9									--	.33**
10										--

*$p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Predictor Variables

1. Current age
2. Highest level of education
3. Mothers' sexual views
4. Fathers' sexual views
5. Parents' sexual views
6. Parents' comfort in discussing sex
7. Teen pressure to increase sex
8. Teen pressure to decrease sex
9. Adult pressure to increase sex
10. Adult pressure to decrease sex

A test of the model with age of first coitus as the criterion variable was significant, $R^2 = .15$, $F(8, 155) = 3.29$, $p = .002$. Two of the seven variables entered were found to be significant predictors. Being younger at age of first sexual experience was predicted by parents' increased comfort with having sexual discussions, $t(155) = -2.54$, $p = .01$, and by fathers' views supporting sexually permissive behavior, $t(155) = -2.23$, $p = .03$, (see Table 11).

Table 11

Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analysis Predicting Age of First Sexual Relationship (N = 163)

Variable	B	SE B	t
Parents' comfort in discussing sex	-0.55	0.22	-2.54*
Fathers' sexual views	-0.42	0.19	-2.23*
Teen pressure to increase sex	-0.35	0.24	-1.44
Teen pressure to decrease sex	-0.31	0.31	-1.02
Mothers' sexual views	0.26	0.20	1.30
Parents' sexual views	-0.19	0.17	-1.11
Current age	0.01	0.03	0.36
Highest level of education	0.01	0.14	0.05

Note. $R^2 = .15$
*p<.05.

For predicting overall number of sexual partners, a test of the model was significant, $R^2 = .19$, $F(10, 150) = 3.21$, $p = .001$. Having more overall sexual partners was predicted by fathers' attitudes supporting sexually permissive behavior, $t(150) =$

2.71, p = .01, and receiving teen pressure to increase sexual activity, t(150) = 2.21, p = .03 (see Table 12).

Table 12

Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analysis Predicting Overall Number of Sexual Partners (N = 158)

Variable	B	SE B	t
Teen pressure to increase sex	1.89	0.86	2.21*
Fathers' sexual views	1.61	0.60	2.71**
Teen pressure to decrease sex	0.94	1.00	0.94
Parents' sexual views	0.82	0.54	1.53
Parents' comfort in discussing sex	0.69	0.66	1.04
Mothers' sexual views	-0.45	0.64	-0.70
Adult pressure to decrease sex	-0.20	1.25	-0.16
Adult pressure to increase sex	-0.16	0.81	-0.20
Current age	0.14	0.09	1.60
Highest level of education	0.06	0.43	0.15

Note. $R^2 = .19$
*p<.05. **p<.01.

However, for our third regression which was predicting overall number of romantic partners, a test of the model was not significant, $R^2 = .05$, F(11, 150) = 0.60, p = .82, and none of the variables contributed significantly to the model (see Table 13).

Table 13

Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analysis Predicting Overall Number of Romantic Partners (N = 156)

Variable	B	SE B	t
Teen pressure to increase sex	1.05	0.61	1.75
Gender composition of friendships	0.75	1.35	0.56
Adult pressure to increase sex	-0.58	0.56	-1.02
Highest level of education	-0.46	0.31	-1.46
Parents' sexual views	-0.43	0.38	-1.11
Parents' comfort in discussing sex	0.36	0.46	0.78
Teen pressure to decrease sex	0.25	0.71	0.36
Fathers' sexual views	0.22	0.43	0.52
Adult pressure to decrease sex	-0.21	0.88	-0.24
Mothers' sexual views	0.21	0.45	0.48
Current age	0.06	0.07	0.95

Note. $R^2 = .05$ (all p's $>.05$).

Discussion

One of the most striking findings in the current study is the lack of sexual discussion among parents and their sons. Sons' perceptions of their parents' involvement in the discussion of sexual issues was consistently low. Men also indicated that communication about sexual activities was an uncomfortable experience for their parents. The low reported rates of sexual communication with parents that we found appear to be consistent with previous findings (e.g., Hutchinson & Cooney, 1998). A number of

researchers (e.g., Nolin & Petersen, 1992; Raffaelli et al., 1998) have found parental sexual discussions to occur even less often between parents and their sons compared to parents and their daughters. Furthermore, adolescents may be more likely to seek sexual advice or information from the same-sex parent, but fathers provide even less communication than do mothers (Nolin & Petersen, 1992). Taking all of this into account, males are at a disadvantage when it comes to having parental sexual discussions. This disadvantage is even more disturbing when one considers that some researchers (e.g., Moore et al., 1986) have found that parents only discuss sex with their son after they speculate he has already become sexually active. Therefore, males may be engaging in sex without being properly informed about issues such as birth control and STD's or, perhaps even more importantly, without being aware of their family values regarding sexuality.

Why are parents not discussing sex with their sons? While Fisher (1986) reported that low levels of sexual communication were related to low sexual knowledge levels, feeling uncomfortable about broaching sexual topics is likely a more reasonable explanation. Our data indicate that low rates of communication were related to perceived lack of comfort. It is unfortunate that sons do not believe that they can discuss sexual issues with their parents when they may be at greatest risk for receiving incorrect information from other sources. Indeed, Wood et al. (in press) found that adults, namely parents and teachers, were perceived by adolescents as providing the most correct information about dating relationships. Not only can parents attempt to ensure that their

sons receive accurate facts, but they can provide information about their values and expectations regarding sexual behavior.

It is important to recognize that with the parental communication items, we assumed that parents were discouraging sexual activity in their discussions. Yet, Jaccard and Dittus (1991) reported that over one-fourth of parents in their study believed it would be acceptable for their adolescent to be involved in sexual relationships, and boys were even less likely to be discouraged from being sexually active than were girls. In the current study, the overall parents' sexual views score indicated that the large majority of parents did not support sexual permissiveness. In fact, only a small proportion (8%) of overall parents' sexual views were either at the midpoint of the scale or toward the end supporting sexual permissiveness; most parents were perceived by their sons as strongly opposing permissive behavior. Thus, we can reason that since parents' views were generally not supportive of permissive behavior, their discussions were likely to discourage permissiveness as well. While an item investigating the content of sexual discussions between parents and adolescents may be a useful addition, Holtzman and Rubinson (1995) stated that "some have argued that the nature of the discussion may not be as important as the fact that it occurred at all, since communication itself may be indicative of parental involvement or support" (p. 240).

Since our findings revealed that parents' sexual discussions with their sons occur at low rates and lack comfort, we wanted to determine whether parental discussion variables, as well as other factors, might contribute to men's sexual and romantic behavior. Information was obtained about men's sexual and romantic relationships during

their lifespan, namely ages of first sexual and romantic relationships, numbers of overall partners and most common relationship types at different age periods. Our regression analyses attempted to determine variables predictive of age of first sexual relationship as well as numbers of lifetime sexual and romantic partners. Age of first sexual experience is an important piece of information since it is negatively correlated with overall number of sexual partners.

Predicting Age of First Sexual Relationship

Past research has found age of first sexual experience to be salient information, but few studies have examined factors associated with age of first coitus. Studies investigating adolescent sexual behavior typically examine number of partners (e.g., De Gaston et al., 1996), level or frequency of activity (e.g., Sonenstein et al., 1991), or use of contraception (e.g., Holtzman & Rubinson, 1995). In the current study, we found age of first sexual experience to be predicted by parents' comfort in having sexual discussions and fathers' support of sexually permissive behavior.

Regarding the parental comfort predictor, a critical piece of information may be missing. While we found a relationship to exist between increased parental comfort in having sexual discussion and sons being younger at first coitus, we believe that it may be important to determine *when* discussions occurred relative to whether first coitus had been experienced. After all, Moore et al. (1986) found that parents did not typically talk about sex with their son until they had reason to believe that he had become sexually active. Thus, it is possible that parents may initiate sexual discussions after they suspect sexual activity has started because they feel more comfortable. They may perceive these

discussions as being easier if they believe their son already has basic knowledge about sexual activity. Furthermore, parents who believe that 'talking about sex may make it happen' may feel less comfortable broaching sexual issues if they think their son has not experienced first coitus. Indeed, a future avenue of research which examines the impact of parental sexual communication timing on male sexual behavior could prove informative.

Being younger at first coitus was also predicted by fathers' sexual views supporting sexual permissiveness. It is encouraging to think that sexual behavior may be influenced by fathers' attitudes. However, one may wonder how fathers convey their views when they are not having sexual discussions. Hepburn (1983) described both direct and indirect forms of parental communication regarding sexual issues. For example, while some parents may openly address topics of a sexual nature with their sons, others may discuss general sexual issues from an impersonal standpoint. Jaccard and Dittus (1993) described this type of communication as involving discussions about "deviant behavior of the populations as a whole, rather than specific behavior within the family" (p. 340). They suggested that the purpose of this type of communication is to present family values from a general perspective without having discussions of a personal nature with individual family members and therefore, not leaving oneself open to feeling uncomfortable. Thus, family values and expectation regarding sexuality could be accessed through observing parents' positions about general sexual issues.

Information about variables that predict number of overall sexual partners is also important since males generally report having more partners than do females (De Gaston

et al., 1996), putting both males and their female partners at increased risk for acquiring STD's, including AIDS. Being younger at age of first coitus was related to having more lifetime sexual partners, which seems logical since the younger a male is when he begins having sexual relationships, the longer his sexually active life, and the greater the opportunity for multiple sexual partners.

Predicting Number of Overall Sexual Partners

Having more sexual partners overall was also predicted by fathers' attitudes supporting sexually permissive behavior, as well as receiving adolescent peer pressure to increase sexual activity. Thus, while age of first sexual relationships as well as men's number of overall partners seem to be influenced by fathers' views, mothers' views do not seem to predict their sons' sexual behavior. This is not to suggest that mothers do not hold strong views about their sons' sexual behavior. Indeed, descriptive data on mothers' sexual views suggest that they are strongly opposed to multiple sexual partners. However, with the regression analyses, mothers' views do not appear to hold any predictive power for their sons' sexual behavior. Possibly, men felt they could relate better to the same-sex parent (Nolin & Petersen, 1992), and held their fathers' views in higher regard, thus contributing to their fathers' attitudes being most influential.

Receiving adolescent peer pressure to increase sexual activity was predictive of having more overall sexual partners. Number of total sexual partners was predicted only when males received adolescent pressure to *increase* their activity. Receiving pressure to decrease adolescent activity or receiving any type of adult pressure did not appear to impact upon number of partners. Since society tends to promote increased sexual activity

rather than decreased activity, and places great value on the sexual goals of men (Carroll et al., 1985; Heilbrun & Loftus, 1986), men may expect their peers to persuade them to be more sexually active. However, having peers who encourage decreased sexual activity may have no effect on their actual behavior since it is atypical of societal norms and expectations about male sexual behavior. As for *adolescent* pressure predicting sexual behavior, males may be influenced more by the views of peers as adolescents than as adults since "susceptibility to peer pressure heightens during early adolescence but declines as young adulthood approaches" (Bukatko & Daehler, 1998, p. 528).

Nolin and Petersen (1992) suggested that adolescent males may be more susceptible to sexual peer pressure since they are not discussing sex with their parents. Since we found that parents did not discuss sex much, males may indeed be communicating about sex with their peers. After all, if parents are not communicating about sex, then from whom are adolescents receiving their information? Wood et al. (in press) found that adolescents received more dating information from their peers than their parents. Peers may be stronger influences because they provide information in an age-appropriate context. One possibility for the low amounts of sexual peer pressure reported could be that peers, themselves, are engaging in similar levels and types of sexual activity; thus, there is no need to pressure their friends to increase or decrease their activity. Indeed, Billy and Udry (1985) found that adolescent males' sexual activity levels were related to those of their male peers. Although men generally did not report receiving much pressure to increase sexual activity, some men did receive this pressure. For those

men, receiving that pressure predicted increased numbers of overall sexual partners. For others, lack of pressure contributed to decreased numbers of overall sexual partners.

Men's Sexual and Romantic Relationships

Although men typically have more 'active' sexual lives than females, in terms of numbers of partners and types of sexual activities, romantic relationships are also important aspects of men's lives which vary at different age periods. Our data provide us with some descriptive information about men's romantic relationships. We know that men typically reported that they experienced their first romantic relationship at the same age as their first sexual relationship. However, these two relationships did not necessarily occur with the same partner; some discrepancies were found between numbers of partners and commonly reported relationship types. For example, sexual and romantic relationships were first experienced, on average, at the end of adolescence; the large majority of men were either adolescents or early adults when they experienced their first relationships (98% experienced their first romantic, and 97% their first sexual, relationship before they turned 30 years old), and during adolescence, mean numbers of sexual partners and romantic partners were the same. Thus, one would logically assume that male adolescents had partners with whom they were both romantically and sexually involved. After all, the majority of participants in Koch's (1988) college sample reported that their first sexual experience occurred within the context of a romantic relationship. However, one-half of our respondents described their most common type of adolescent relationship as being either purely romantic or purely sexual. In fact, adolescent relationships with *both* sexual and romantic components were chosen as the most

common type by only a small proportion of men (about one-sixth). Taking these reports into account, it appears that men were typically engaging in adolescent sexual relationships with partners other than those to whom they were romantically attached, or were experiencing their first sexual and romantic relationships with the same partner, but this was not their most common adolescent relationship type.

As for early and middle adulthood, mean numbers of sexual partners significantly exceeded mean numbers of romantic partners. However, men reported relationships with both sexual and romantic qualities to be most typical of those age periods. One possibility for this discrepancy is that while men were engaging in purely sexual encounters (thus, contributing to the increased numbers of sexual partners), again, this may not have been their most common relationship type - they were *typically* involved in relationships that were both sexual and romantic.

Based on our data, men report their adolescent relationships as typically differing from their adult relationships. After engaging in their adolescent relationships which were either sexual or romantic, men appear to be making the transition into developing relationships with both sexual and romantic components as adults. This transitional period in which males begin to form different types of relationships as they become adult men would be an interesting avenue of research to further study.

Predicting Number of Overall Romantic Partners

In our regression analysis, we found that none of the variables used in this study significantly predicted number of overall romantic partners; thus, number of romantic partners is not predicted by the same factors as number of sexual partners. This could be

the reason why so little research has been published about romantic relationship experiences. It may be difficult to determine which variables are involved when predicting factors related to romantic relationships, especially when sexual and romantic experiences may be occurring with different partners. Thus, while we attempted to determine influential sources which affect romantic relationship experiences, our study found variables predictive of sexual behavior only. Gender composition of friendship networks was tested as a predictor of overall number of romantic partners, but was not significant. This may be a result of men reporting primarily mixed-sex friendships; very few reported having all-male or all-female friendship networks. It is possible that while our men reported having both male and female friendships, they may rely increasingly on one type of gender friendship over the other at different points in their lives, particularly when they have different needs to be met through their friendship interactions. Furthermore, their friendship networks may vary across the lifespan according to their involvement in certain types of relationships. Asking men to indicate the gender composition of their friendship networks and the importance of male and female friendships during different age periods would be an interesting aspect to examine in future research.

Men's Sexual Behavior

From our findings, we know that parents do not discuss sex much and that peers do not provide much pressure in terms of changing the amount of sexual activity. Furthermore, our regression analyses suggest that other variables are contributing to male sexual behavior, or at least to age of first coitus and numbers of overall partners. One

study found that schools were named by adolescents as being the top source of information regarding sexual health (Mc Kay & Holowaty, 1997). Another study reported peers and sex education teachers to provide the most information about dating relationships (Wood et al., in press). Again, gender composition of friendship networks may impact upon male sexual behavior since men have different experiences with male friends than with female friends, and friendship networks may change across the lifespan.

Study Limitations

An important limitation in need of recognition is the possibility of cohort effects. Since it is difficult to separate age from cohort, we must remember that sexual standards and expectations are likely to differ according to cohorts. Although our regression analyses which predicted sexual behavior did not find 'current age' to be a significant predictor variable, it is possible that current age could be a factor confounding some of our analyses. Furthermore, the issue of retrospective bias must be considered. Since the men in our study represented a wide range of ages, it is possible that accurately recalling their sexual and relationship histories, especially among the older respondents, may have been difficult. However, men may view their sexual and romantic relationships as being salient components throughout their lives and therefore, information about these important relationships may be more easily recalled. This is an issue that needs to be examined more closely. We need to determine how difficult it may be for men to remember information about relationships in which they were involved many years prior.

Another study limitation is the sample studied. Although an attempt was made to ensure a random sample, with a response rate of 25% the final sample is unlikely to be

truly random. However, we believe that our sample is more representative than university or adolescent samples since respondents were more diverse in terms of age. Consistent with other researchers (e.g., Dillman, 1991, Senn et al., in press), this response rate appears to be what can be expected for a survey on sexual experiences in the general population of men.

Perhaps, one of the most salient concerns in the current study, however, involves the parents' sexual views scale since it had non-parallel wording and low Cronbach alpha levels. The non-parallel wording limited the value and appropriateness of reverse scoring survey items which made it difficult to make contrasts among the measures. Some researchers have found negatively worded items to yield more inconsistencies than positively worded items, and reliability and validity have been found to be undermined as a result of using surveys containing negatively worded items (e.g., Magazine, Williams, & Williams, 1996). Thus, one must be alerted to the limitations of reverse scored items when interpreting our findings. Since the parents' sexual views scale had low overall reliability ($\alpha = .51$), items were examined individually and then grouped according to whether they pertained to mothers, fathers, or both parents. However, the Cronbach alpha levels of these grouped items ($\alpha = .19, .50$, and $.29$, respectively) were also very low. These low values suggest that responses were not consistent across items and that the scale did not measure a single construct but rather, had more than one dimension. While the scale was aimed at measuring parents' sexual attitudes, it appears to have measured two different issues, namely views about casual sex and multiple partners. Reconstruction

of items to include more sexual issues than only two may be necessary to produce greater reliability among scale items.

One could argue that overall number of partners is difficult to measure with a cross-sectional age group of men. Yet, early adulthood is the age period where respondents reported having the most partners, and more than 75% of our sample were at least 30 years old. Therefore, the majority of men were no longer adolescents or early adults. Again, keeping cohort effects in mind, the younger age periods appear to be times of increased sexual activity and therefore, overall number of sexual partners appears to be more influenced by these age groups, rather than the later age periods.

Finally, it is important to be cautious in the interpretation of the regressions. The correlational nature of regressions makes it necessary to avoid overstating causality. For example, while we found parental comfort to predict age of first sexual relationship, we cannot be certain as to whether parents' comfort in having sexual discussions actually preceded their sons' first sexual relationship.

Summary

The current study provides a descriptive account of men's sexual behaviors and relationship experiences. As well, we were able to identify some variables related to sexual behavior. We found that parents do not typically discuss sex with their sons and they feel uncomfortable in having these discussions, even though it may be important for parents to communicate openly about sexual issues in order for their values to be expressed. We also know that fathers' views are predictors of sexual behavior. Men generally do not receive much pressure from peers to change their amount of sexual

activity, yet teen pressure to increase activity contributes to increased numbers of overall sexual partners. Parents and peers do appear to play a role in determining male sexual behavior. Future research could usefully examine other factors in men's lives which contribute to their sexual and romantic relationship experiences. Finally, as has been found in past literature, variables related to sexual relationships are more clearly defined than those related to romantic relationships. Thus, our understanding of sexual behavior is better established, and although our study provides descriptive information about relationship experiences, the need to identify determinants of romantic relationships still exists.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A

Background Information

1. What is your age (in years)? _____

2. What is your current sexual identity?
   - heterosexual (straight) _____
   - gay _____
   - bisexual _____
   - not sure _____

3. What are your present living arrangements?
   - in a private home/apartment _____
   - in a university/college residence _____
   - in a nursing or rest home _____
   - in a senior citizen residence _____
   - in a group home _____
   - other, please specify _____

4. Do you live alone? Yes _____ No _____

   4a. What is the relationship to the person(s) you live with?_____

5. Do you have a religious affiliation? Yes _____ No _____

   5a. If yes, with which religion are you affiliated? _____

   5b. How important is your religious affiliation to you? (please circle the number which best represents your view)

1	2	3	4	5
not very important		somewhat important		very important

6. To what ethnic or cultural group(s) do you belong? _____

   6a. How important is your ethnic/cultural background to you?

1	2	3	4	5
not very important		somewhat important		very important

7. Are you a student? Yes _____ No_____

   7a. Are you? full time _____ part time _____

   7b. Are you in? (check as many as needed)
   high school _____
   university _____
   college _____
   trade/technical _____
   other (please specify)_____

8. Please state the highest level of education you have completed: _____

9. What is your employment status?
   employed full time _____
   employed part time _____
   retired _____
   not currently employed _____
   other (please specify) _____

10. Are you currently involved in a sexual relationship?

    Yes _____ No _____

11. Are you presently cohabiting with a sexual partner, married, or in a common-law relationship?

    Yes _____ No _____

Appendix B

Influences on Sexuality

1. As a teenager, how much pressure did you receive from your male friends or relatives to engage in more sexual activity?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
no pressure			moderate pressure			extreme pressure

1a. As a teenager, how much pressure did you receive from male friends or relatives to engage in less sexual activity?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
no pressure			moderate pressure			extreme pressure

1b. How much did their views influence your behavior?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all			somewhat			completely

2. As an adult, how much pressure have you received from your male friends or relatives to engage in more sexual activity?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
no pressure			moderate pressure			extreme pressure

2a. As an adult, how much pressure have you received from your male friends or relatives to engage in less sexual activity?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
no pressure			moderate pressure			extreme pressure

2b. How much did their views influence your behavior?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all			somewhat			completely

Appendix C

Friendship Networks

1. How would you describe your friendship network?

1	2	3	4	5
all male	mostly male	mixture of male and female	mostly female	all female

2. How important are your friendships with men to you?

1	2	3	4	5
not very important		somewhat important		very important

3. How important are your friendships with women to you?

1	2	3	4	5
not very important		somewhat important		very important

Appendix D

Sexual and Relationship History

For all of the following questions, please answer for your heterosexual (male/female) relationships only.

1. At what age did you start your first sexual relationship? _____

2. At what age did you start your first romantic relationship? (for example, fall in love) _____

3. Please tell us about your relationship history by filling in the following chart. Check the type of relationships that BEST describe your relationship history for each of the age periods that are appropriate. That is, which type of relationship did you have the most of at that time. You should have only one check under each age period.

	12-18	19-29	30-49	50+
sexual, no romantic attachment	___	___	___	___
sexual with romantic attachment	___	___	___	___
nonsexual, romantic attachment	___	___	___	___
romantic and sexual with one person, and sexual with others	___	___	___	___
no relationships	___	___	___	___
other, please specify _____	___	___	___	___

_____

4. Approximately how many sexual partners have you had in each of the age periods listed?

12-18	19-29	30-49	50+	overall
___	___	___	___	___

5. Approximately how many romantic partners have you had in each of the age periods listed?

12-18	19-29	30-49	50+	overall
___	___	___	___	___

6. Since you began having sexual or romantic relationships, has there ever been a time when you stopped having them? Yes _____ No_____

   If yes, for how long? _____

   Why did you stop having relationships? _____

Appendix E

Parents' Sexual Views

Please mark each statement according to how much you agree or disagree with it by circling the appropriate number.	**strongly agree**	**agree**	**neither agree nor disagree**	**disagree**	**strongly disagree**
1. My mother would have felt okay about my having sex with many different people.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My mother would only have approved of me having sex in a serious relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My father would have felt upset if he'd thought I was having sex with many different people.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My father would have felt okay about my having casual sexual encounters.	1	2	3	4	5
5. According to my parents, having sexual intercourse was an important part of my becoming an adult.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My parents would have stressed that sex and intimacy should always be linked.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My parents would have disapproved of my being sexually active.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My parents encouraged me to have sex with many people before I got married.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix F

Parental Sexual Communication

1. Did your parents talk about sex with you?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all			sometimes			all the time

2. How comfortable are your parents about talking about sex with you?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all			somewhat			completely

Appendix G

Examples of Testing Individual Mother Items Separate from Summed Items

Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analysis Predicting Age of First Sexual Relationship Separating Individual Mother Items (N = 163)

Variable	B	SE B	t
Parents' comfort in discussing sex	-0.55	0.22	-2.52*
Fathers' sexual views	-0.41	0.19	-2.13*
Teen pressure to increase sex	-0.35	0.24	-1.44
Teen pressure to decrease sex	-0.33	0.31	-1.08
Parents' sexual views	-0.17	0.18	-0.98
Item 1 (recoded) for mothers	0.12	0.37	0.31
Highest level of education	0.02	0.14	0.14
Current age	0.01	0.03	0.43

Note. $R^2 = .14$
*p<.05.

Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analysis Predicting Age of First Sexual Relationship Separating Individual Mother Items (N = 163)

Variable	B	SE B	t
Parents' comfort in discussing sex	-0.48	0.22	-2.24*
Fathers' sexual views	-0.41	0.19	-2.15*
Teen pressure to increase sex	-0.39	0.24	-1.61
Parents' sexual views	-0.22	0.17	-1.29
Item 2 for mothers	0.21	0.24	0.90
Teen pressure to decrease sex	-0.16	0.31	-0.52
Highest level of education	0.02	0.14	-0.14
Current age	0.01	0.03	0.45

Note. $R^2 = .16$
*$p<.05$.