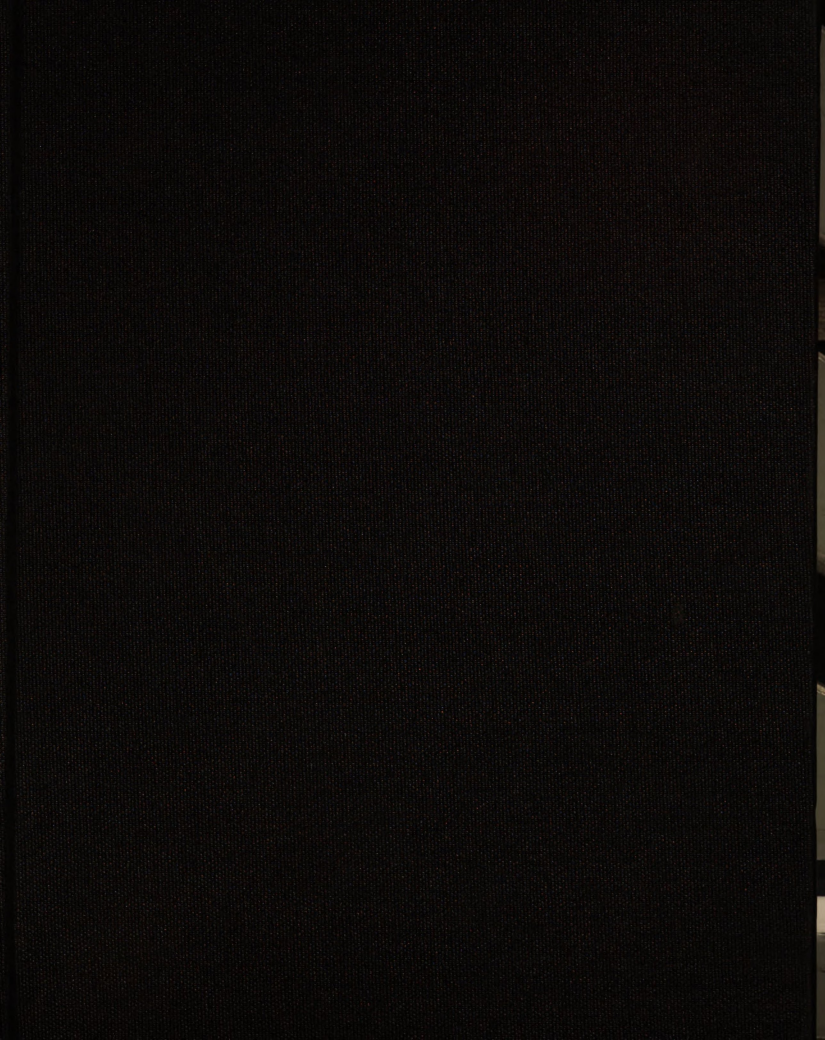




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**THE “TRADITIONAL SEXUAL SCRIPT:” EXAMINING THE CONTENT OF
PARENT-CHILD SEXUAL COMMUNICATION**

By

Jennifer Marie Heisler

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

THE “TRADITIONAL SEXUAL SCRIPT:” EXAMINING THE CONTENT OF PARENT-CHILD SEXUAL COMMUNICATION

By

Jennifer Marie Heisler

With the growing rates of teenaged pregnancy, the debates about condoms in schools, and recent attention given to sexual images in the media, researcher have taken a renewed interested in the sexual education. However, there have been mixed results regarding the role of parents in the sexual education of their children. Further, the content of these parent-child talks has been largely ignored. The goals of this study included identifying the topics parents and adolescents recall discussing regarding sexuality and relationships and famial satisfaction with these discussions. Additionally, the content of recalled conversations were examined as potential sources of gender role socialization as identified in the Traditional Sexual Script (Byers, 1996). Two hundred and eight student-mother-father triads completed self-report surveys requesting a description of an actual conversation about sexuality between parent and child, their satisfaction, openness regarding this topic, and regrets. Results indicated that most (77%) participants have discussed sexuality with their parent/child. Most frequent topics included relationships, morals, and pregnancy. Mothers reported being the most satisfied with and open about sexuality conversations with children while students' satisfaction reports were only moderate. Content analysis of conversations revealed strong evidence for traditional sexual socialization, particularly in messages directed towards daughters. However, the majority of student-participants reported relying on friends as their main source of sexual

information, with mothers ranking fifth and fathers following at eighth. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed with suggestions for future research.

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**To my family who gives me strength and especially Doug, my partner
in rewrites, laughs, parenting and love.**

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**The “traditional sexual script”: An examination of the content of
parent-child sexual communication**

With the prevalence of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases “sexual education” has become a primary concern in America. Eighty-six percent of males and 75% of females reported having initiated intercourse by high school graduation, and 16% reported having four or more partners. However, less than one half of sexually active teens acknowledge using condoms regularly (Center for Disease Control, 1998). As a result, one in eight teenagers contract a sexually transmitted disease (STD) each year (Wasserheit, 1994). Further, one million adolescents become pregnant each year, 74-85% unintentionally, with 500,000 live births each year (Amba & Piccinino, 1994; Ventura, Taffel, & Mosher, 1988). These growing trends in adolescent sexual activity have led to disagreement over the role of responsibility in the sexual education of children in America.

Children are receiving input about sex from a variety of sources, including school (Green & Sollie, 1989; Nelson, 1995), peers (Bennett & Dickinson, 1980; Dickinson, 1978; Jaccard & Dittus, 1993; Lock & Vincent, 1995; Rozema, 1986), and television (Heights & Chapin, 2000; Kunkel, Cope, & Biely, 1999). Despite all this input, when asked who they would like to receive information from, children have been shown to desire their parents as their primary sexual educators (Davis & Harris, 1982; Fisher, 1986; Gilbert & Bailis, 1980; Inman, 1974; Neer & Warren, 1988). However, participation in this education is not equal; biological sex determines both the amount of participation by parents and the topics thought to be appropriate to discuss (Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982; Miller, Norton, Jenson, Lee, Christopherson, & King, 1993). Topics

such as masturbation and wet dreams are reserved for males while reproduction and physiological sex differences are thought to be essential for females. While the specific content of parent-child sexual communication has not been previously explored, the different topics approved for male and female children suggests sexual communication may be a source of gender role socialization.

Although some scholars have argued that traditional gender roles for males and females currently are in a state of transition (Moen, 1992; Wood, 1999), individuals still are socialized into gendered categories on the basis of biological sex. Women have entered the workforce in overwhelming numbers yet remain the predominant caretakers for home and family (Greenstein, 1996; Hochschild, 1987). Men are too often expected to remain emotionless and stoic (Farrell, 1991; Reid & Fine, 1992). Similarly, appropriate sexual behavior is assigned on the basis of biological sex. The Traditional Sexual Script (TSS) is a pre-established cognitive script reserved for romantic, sexual relationships (Byers, 1996). In general, these cognitive scripts provide individuals with socially acceptable behaviors in unfamiliar or new situations. Often, these TSS scripts are utilized in beginning romantic relationships. Linked to traditional gender roles, the TSS portrays men as ardent sexual pursuers and women as gatekeepers to men's advances.

Because parents have been identified as one of the primary agents in a child's socialization (Maccoby, 1992) and scripting is a product of socialization (Simon & Gagnon, 1986; Byers, 1996), it may be possible that parents "teach" cultural scripts, and specifically the TSS, to their children. Certainly, parents provide information about a variety of interpersonal situations, such as romantic relationships. For example, between 30-60% of kids reported that they have had some form of sexual talk with at least one

parent (Jaccard & Dittus, 1993; Newcomer & Udry, 1985). Therefore, the goal of this paper is to identify the content of sexual communication between parents and children and to determine if the TSS is being passed down from parent to child. Specifically, the talk parents and their children recall regarding sexual behaviors and morals will be examined for TSS themes and sex differences. To begin, literature on sexual education will be reviewed, followed by an explanation of social learning theory (Rotter, 1954) as a guiding framework. Next, the research on the Traditional Sexual Script (TSS) (Byers, 1996) will be examined. Finally, a discussion of sex differences in parent-child communication about sexual topics will be presented

Review of Literature

Sexual Education and Sources of Information

There are a variety of sources for information on sexual behavior and attitudes, including media, family, and peers. Messages regarding sexual attitudes and behaviors are particularly abundant in television media; children watch an average of 11 sexual behaviors per hour during prime time (Lowry & Towles, 1989b), for a total of almost 2,000 hours of sexual references each year (Brown, Childers, & Waszak, 1990). However, these shows often do not portray their characters in safe or responsible behaviors. Lowry and Towles (1989a) found sexual partners shown in daytime dramas are 24x more likely to be single than married. The authors argued that the ratio reinforced the messages that sexual behavior is more likely (and more fun) outside of marriage. References to the potential outcomes of sexual acts, such as pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, are almost nonexistent (Brown, Childers, & Waszak, 1990; Perry, Kelder, & Komro, 1993).

Yet, children do not rely solely upon media for information, several researchers have noted the influence of peers on sexual development. For instance, adolescents with sexually experienced friends are more likely to be sexually experienced themselves (Billy, Rodgers, & Udry, 1984; Billy & Udry, 1985; Shah & Zelnik, 1981). Even perceptions of peers' sexual experience have been shown to influence sexual behavior (DiClemente, 1991; Fisher, Misovich, & Fisher, 1992; Holtzman & Robinson, 1995; McKusich, Coates, & Morin, 1990; Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, & Ham, 1999; Romer, et al., 1994). For example, DiClemente (1991) found that incarcerated youths were five times more likely to use a condom if they perceived their peers supported this behavior. In addition, Fisher et al. (1992) reported that college students' perceived peer norms about condom usage predicted actual condom usage two months later. Friends are not the only peer group with sexual influence; recent studies have suggested that older siblings have an influence on the timing of younger siblings' initial sexual experience (Moore, Miller, Gleib, & Morrison, 1995). Second-born siblings have been shown to be more sexually active than first-born children (Rodgers, Rowe, & Harris, 1992) and older siblings' ages for first sexual intercourse are positively correlated with younger siblings' ages at initiation of sexual activity (Haurin & Mott, 1990).

Several authors have suggested that family, particularly parents, played a greater role in sexual socialization than peers or media influence. Zimbardo and Formica (1963) have suggested that firstborns use their parents as references and that second borns use both older siblings and parents. In his study of 183 sibling pairs, Widmer (1997) discovered parental attitudes regarding sexual permissiveness had a greater influence on adolescents' timing of first intercourse than other potential role models. The author

concluded “parental influence has a stronger impact than sibling effects on the odds of a younger sibling being a nonvirgin. When tested independently, the parental effects have a chi-square of 34.4 ($df = 4$, $p < .001$), compared with 14.8 ($df = 4$, $p < .01$) for sibling effects. [Thus], sibling influence is somewhat marginal, compared with parental influence” (p. 932). Recent work examining the influence of parents and peer groups indicated that both predicted sexual behavior (Jaccard & Dittus, 1993) yet in opposite directions: Parental communication decreased the number of sexual partners while peer communication increased the number of sexual partners (Holtzman & Robinson, 1995). Jaccard, Dittus, and Gordon (2000) further suggested that parental communication moderates peer group influence on sexual behavior such that in families with high amounts of parental communication peer group influence decreases significantly.

In addition, children expressed a desire for parents to provide sexual education (Davis & Harris, 1982; Fisher, 1986; Gilbert & Bailis, 1980; Neer & Warren, 1988). When Mueller and Powers (1990) asked adolescents where they would like to receive information, participants were most likely to list parents as their preferred source. Furthermore, children agreed that parents should be responsible for sexual education: Most students (50% of males and 64% of females) assigned parents the primary responsibility for teaching young people about sexual matters. The majority (60% of males and 51% of females) felt that both parents should take equal responsibility for the sex education of all their children, whereas the remainder preferred that when parents were involved in sex education each parent should take primary responsibility only for the sex education of children of his or her own gender (Fisher, 1986, p. 267).

In summary, it appears that children receive sexual information from a variety of

sources including peers, siblings, and even school or religious organizations. Yet, adolescents desire and were most influenced by the communication that occurs between them and their parents. The next section reviews the current literature on parent-child communication about sex. This review addresses parental attitudes toward their role as sexual educators, the effects of parent-based education, and the characteristics of parent-child communication about sexual activity.

Parent-Child Sexual Communication. Parents have expressed a desire to be active in their role as socializing agents, particularly in the area of sexual information. Mueller and Powers (1990) determined “[p]arents, especially fathers, seem to want to become more involved as the primary source of sexual information” (p. 34). Other researchers echo the sentiment that parents want to be the primary educators of their children (Abramson, Moriuchi, & Perry, 1983; Gordon & Dickman, 1977; Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982) and parents’ attempts at sexual education appeared to be effective. Several scholars have found parental communication decreased risky sexual behavior (Fisher, 1989; Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 1996; Kallen, Stephenson, & Dougherty, 1983; Miller, et al., 1998) and had some influence on adolescents’ sexual decision-making (Dittus, Jaccard, & Gordon, 1999; Schreck, 1999). In some studies, parent-teen communication about sex increased the likelihood of teen-partner communication (Shoop & Davidson, 1994; Whitaker, Miller, May, & Levin, 1999). Further, parental communication about contraceptive choices was a deterrent to teenaged pregnancy (Adolph, Ramos, Linton, & Grimes, 1995). Although some researchers found limited effects for parent-child sexual education (Fox & Inazu, 1980; DiClemente, Lanier, Horan, Lodico, 1991), it is important to consider the amount of parental communication when assessing influence. Jaccard and

Dittus (1991) found that the extent to which mothers communicated with teens about sex was important in predicting adolescent behavior such that the impact of maternal disapproval of sexual activity on teen behavior was moderated by the extent of communication about sex that had occurred: the more parents talked, the greater the impact of parental disapproval.

In spite of the connection between parental communication and adolescent sexual behavior, parents were often uncomfortable addressing sexual topics with their adolescents (Aldous, 1993; Brooks-Gunn & Ruble, 1982; Ram, 1975). Further, there were mixed results regarding parents' satisfaction with the type and amount of sexual discussion with children. Roberts, Kline, and Gagnon (1978) found that fathers more often than mothers were dissatisfied with their contribution to their child's sexual learning, yet were unwilling to acknowledge any need for help to increase their impact. However, in their survey to determine parents' topics and desires for discussion, Koblinsky and Atkinson (1982) found that most of the parents would add relatively little to their sexual communication with children. Several studies have found that parents' reports of sexual communication did not match their adolescents' reported amounts of conversation with parents about sexual topics (Furstenberg et al., 1984; Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 1998; Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, & Ham, 1998). Researchers reported that parents, particularly mothers, indicated talking more frequently over a greater variety of topics than their adolescents. Whitaker, Miller, May, & Levin (1999) supplied parent-adolescent dyads with checklists of potential conversation topics regarding sexual behavior. Each subject indicated the degree to which they had discussed the topic(s) with their parent/child. Researchers found only low agreement across each of the topics (sex

risk discussion $r=.26$). Thus, it is unclear whether parents were satisfied with their participation in children's sexual education. However, it is apparent that parents' perceptions of their participation differed substantially from their children's perceptions.

When parents and adolescents did communicate about sex, discussions usually began when the adolescent was between 10-13 years old (Fox & Inazu, 1980). Most parent-child sex communication consisted of biology and physiology discussions, with topics ranging from issues like menstruation and puberty, to contraception (Marsiglio & Mott, 1988; Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, & Ham, 1998). In his study of amount and sources of female adolescent sexual knowledge, Tucker (1989) found "72.8% [of teens] had received medium to large amounts of information about the menstrual cycle; 76.8% had received medium to large amounts of information about sex; and 57.1% had received medium to large amounts of information about contraception" (p. 272). When asked what information they would like to add to their conversations with children, most parents included "body differences, birth, and reproduction" followed by sexual morals (Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982, p. 31). Parents seemed most uncomfortable with discussions about abortion, homosexuality, masturbation and wet dreams (Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982; Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, & Ham, 1998). So although children and parents did appear to be talking about sex, these conversations appeared to be general, and perhaps more flippant and noncommittal than serious (Aldous, 1993). This general pattern paralleled the survey findings of Welch-Cline, Johnson, and Freeman (1992) where only 21% of sexually active individuals acknowledged discussing specific measures necessary to prevent STDs and AIDS, or communicated personal detail about sexual risk. The remaining sexually active participants (43%) discussed sexual

activity generally, in vague and abstract contexts (e.g., “it would stink to have AIDS.”) while 14.8% did not report discussing AIDS or sexual activity at all.

Apparently, parents and children are interested in sexual education and communication about sexual behaviors. Although it is unclear whether parents were satisfied with their participation in this education, children were receiving information about the biological aspects of sexual behaviors. These analyses of parent-child communication topics can be misleading, however. While several studies have reported the topics most frequently discussed, researchers have yet to address the particular content of parent-child sexual communication (Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, & Ham, 1998). Traditionally, researchers have relied on self-report lists of topics. With these lists in hand, researchers ask parents to identify the topics they discuss most frequently with their children. These studies “ignore the content of communications or the kind of information a parent conveys to a teenager” (Jaccard & Dittus, 1993, p. 336). No one has examined *how* these sexual messages were conveyed to adolescents. Koblinsky and Atkinson (1982) have also identified this lack of attention on specific parental strategies: “The seeming discrepancy between parental wishes to provide sex education and their actual teaching practices suggests a need to examine the specific ways in which parents plan to participate in children’s sexual socialization” (p. 30). One way to examine the specific ways parents participate in children’s sexual socialization is to focus on the content of parent sexual education messages. Therefore:

RQ1: What is the content of messages communicated by parents concerning sex to their sons and daughters?

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RQ2: How satisfied are parents with the amount and type of sexual communication they have with their sons and daughters?

RQ3: How satisfied are sons and daughters with the amount and type of sexual communication they have with their parents?

In summary, adolescents receive information about sexual activity from a variety of sources, such as peers, siblings, media, and even school or religious organizations. Research has indicated that parents, above other potential role models, affect adolescents' sexual activity. This sexual influence mirrored parents' and their children's desires for parental participation, in spite of parents' discomfort with sexual topics. Research suggested that parental communication about sex benefits children in a variety of ways. However, this communication also may be instructing children in appropriate gendered behaviors. Specifically, parental messages may socialize children into traditional relationships following stereotypical gender roles. The following section will highlight Rotter's (1954) social learning theory as a potential theoretical explanation for the process of parental communication about sexual activity. First, Social Learning Theory (Rotter, 1982) will be explained and offered as a theoretical framework for the current study. Second, the literature on parental socialization of gender roles and, more specifically, sexual attitudes will be discussed. Finally, research supporting the presence of Traditional Sexual Scripts (TSS) in American romantic relationships will be reviewed.

Socialization of Sexual Gender Roles

Social Learning Theory. According to social learning theory, individuals develop personality, attitudes toward others, and even gender identities, through observation and imitation of others. Children especially mimic and imitate those around them, particularly

peers, parents, and even mass media role models. However, only some of the copied behaviors will be met with praise and approval. Social learning theorists have argued that children were most likely to repeat those behaviors that were rewarded. As a result, the rewarded behaviors became reinforced and shaped the child's worldview. The current study sought to examine the communicative processes that occur during reinforcement of these behaviors. Specifically, this study focused on the talk between parents and their children regarding sexuality and relationships. This communication was thought to be one potential method of reinforcement of gender. Thus, the following paragraphs detail the history, process, and recent research in the area of learning theories highlighting Social Learning Theory.

From the standpoint of the amount of research produced, the social learning paradigm was noteworthy. Taken from earlier works in Behaviorism (e.g., operant conditioning, classical conditioning), the modern version of social learning theory originated in the work of Rotter (1954). While several scholars in the late twentieth century have expanded on Rotter's original ideas (see Bandura, 1969 or Mischel, 1973 as examples), current works share many of the original assumptions and variables, including rewards, punishment, and reinforcement.

However, there are several significant differences between traditional behaviorism and modern social learning theories. Most notably, social learning theory extended beyond classic behaviorism's "stimulus-conditioned response" model to include the potential for individual variance, or cognition. Traditional learning theories typically (e.g., Skinner) focused on behavior modification. For example, a son may be taught to clean his room if his mother immediately bakes cookies whenever the son straightens his

toys and folds his laundry. Likewise, the cookie “reward” could be replaced by punishment (the mother refuses to take her son to McDonalds for lunch) to reinforce her displeasure with the dirty room. This punishment could then be lifted when the son accomplished his task. If the rewards and punishments occurred over a period of time, learning theorists would argue the son’s messy habits would change. However, Rotter (1954, 1982) assumed that behavior was goal directed, and thus emphasized the role of anticipated rewards and perceived value of those rewards as the basis for modeling one’s behavior on that of others. For example, the son could witness his brother cleaning his room, hearing his mother offer praise and encouragement. Since the perceived value of his mother’s affection is high, the younger son may model his brother’s behaviors in anticipation of receiving his mother’s praise. If the younger son did, in fact, receive this praise, the behavior will be more strongly reinforced. In this case, the anticipation of rewards could substitute for the direct reinforcement (e.g., baking cookies). Further, Rotter’s inclusion of reward expectancies allowed that individuals could choose between a variety of possible behaviors based upon their anticipated reward (cleaning his room vs. leaving his dirty clothes on the floor).

In addition to sharing much of the same terminology, traditional learning theories and social learning theory shared two assumptions about human behavior. First, learning theories have assumed that people are social beings. People do not walk through their lives unaffected. Rather, individuals have a need for interaction with other individuals. Second, learning theories have assumed that people are aware of their environment(s). Interactions do not occur in a social vacuum. Learning theories acknowledged the influence of environment and context on behavior. For example, behavior modification

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may not work in particular environments. In the clean room example mentioned previously, the cookie reward may not work to change behavior if the mother's baking is poor, or if the son hates sweets.

These two assumptions served as the basis for examining the communicative elements within the learning process. Rather than attend to the outcomes (e.g., does the son actually clean his room?), the current study focused upon how communication occurs during reinforcement (what does his mother say about the room?). Individuals' need for connection with others often manifests in communication. In fact, the success of this connection may be determined by the quality and quantity of the communication. Further, communication itself requires social interaction. Finally, social learning theory takes context into account. Given previous research, parent-child interactions are a rich source of information about learning and role-modeling. Thus, examining parental communication that occurs during reinforcement is a natural first step in understanding the learning process in regards to sexuality.

A substantial proportion of research on teenaged sexual behavior and birth control has utilized the social learning paradigm. Although teenage pregnancy rates have slowed (Guyer, Strobino, Ventura, & Singh, 1995), approximately one million pregnancies per year are still reported (Forrest & Singh, 1990). Barth, Fetro, Leland, and Volkan (1992) reported the results of a social learning-based sexual education program presented to high school students in California. Over the course of 15 50-minute sessions, participants received information about birth control (including abstinence), observation of role models, and participated in role-plays. Results indicated that students demonstrated increased knowledge, increased intention to use contraceptives, and

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increased use of contraception, but no statistically significant decrease in pregnancy rates.

Social learning theory also has been applied to socialization of sexual behaviors within the family. Researchers have suggested that adolescents witnessing parents in violent relationships (role modeling) is predictive of coercive sexual behavior in the adolescents' future romantic relationships. Tontodonato and Crew (1992) examined a sample of male and female offenders and found that social learning variables, specifically knowledge of dating violence by others and experience with parent-child violence (both modeling related), predicted courtship violence among female adolescents.

Social learning theories can also be applied to the development of gender roles within the family. Oliver and Hyde (1993), in the course of an extensive meta-analysis of gender differences in sexual behavior, presented a social learning view of sexuality development. Since parents are thought to be the primary role models for their children (Smith, 1983; Smith & Self, 1980; Starrels, 1992; Lauer, Lauer, & Kerr 1990; Maccoby, 1992), children may learn about sexual behaviors and gender roles in their home. A great deal of this gender learning may occur during parent-child sex education. Although parents have difficulties communicating with children about sexual topics, the content of these talks may provide reinforcement for sexually traditional gender roles. For example, it appears that the type and amount of information received from parents may be mediated by the child's sex (Newcomer & Udry, 1985). Parents seemed to make distinctions between topics that are appropriate for boys and topics that are appropriate for girls. Gagnon (1985) found that almost half of the parents want their boys to have a positive attitude about masturbation while only about a third want their daughters to have such an attitude: twenty-five percent of mothers felt that masturbation is harmful for their

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daughters, compared to only 9% of mothers feeling the same way about their sons. This research suggested that parents have a sexual “double standard” regarding their children and appropriate behaviors. One way parents might be communicating their different expectations is through traditional sexual scripts.

Traditional Sexual Scripts

We encounter new people, places, and ideas daily. Each situation requires us to interact with remarkable adaptation. However, it would be impossible to respond uniquely to every situation. Therefore, when we enter new situations we rely on past behaviors that have proven successful. These behaviors are often combined with other learned actions and stored as cognitive scripts. Thus, cognitive scripts provide individuals with a preexisting set of behaviors that, when followed, will often guarantee uneventful interactions with other individuals. According to Byers (1996), scripts served as “cognitive frameworks for how people are expected to behave in social situations” (p. 8). The Traditional Sexual Script (TSS) is one example of a cultural script that acts as a guide for individuals’ behaviors when initiating romantic, sexual relationships.

Because the very nature of scripting is to provide individuals with ‘safe’ behavior in unfamiliar or new situations (e.g., a first date), it follows that scripting would occur frequently in new romantic relationships (e.g., the first few dates/interactions). This pattern of scripting behavior follows Miller and Steinberg’s (1975) conceptualization of interpersonal communication. According to Miller and Steinberg, as a relationship progresses it moves from scripted communication to more idiosyncratic communication. At the beginning of a relationship communication occurs at more abstract levels. As an individual enters a new situation, he/she pulled from a list of cognitive scripts already

developed in his/her mind. These scripts provide the individual with appropriate behaviors, both verbal and nonverbal, for this unfamiliar interaction. As the individual gains more knowledge about his/her once unfamiliar situation, the use of the preprogrammed script discontinues, replaced by Miller and Steinberg's interpersonal (i.e., more idiosyncratic) communication.

Several researchers have examined TSS use in steady dating relationships (Byers, 1996; O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992). Byers (1996) outlined six major assumptions of the Traditional Sexual Script. These six assumptions have been condensed into three major beliefs that guide the TSS. Each of these will be discussed in turn, along with research regarding each assumption.

Men as initiators/Women as gatekeepers. According to the TSS, men are sexually permissive, avidly pursuing the next available opportunity for sexual interaction. Women, on the other hand, are the sexual 'gatekeepers,' refusing men's initiations and offers. It is important to note that these TSS stereotypes appear most noticeably in new relationships. As relationships develop unique cognitive scripts of their own, the TSS was discarded in favor of more personal, idiosyncratic communication. In new or unique romantic relationships, however, the TSS exists as a guideline for sexual attitudes and behaviors. Men continue to be the sexual initiators while women refuse sexual advance (Gager & Schurr, 1976; LaPlante, McCormick, & Brannigan, 1980; McCorminck, 1979; Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1977).

Several studies have found men to be the sexual initiators in relationships (Byers & Lewis, 1988; Fischer, 1996; Korman & Leslie, 1982). O'Sullivan and Byers (1992) used a modified diary method (consisting of a series of take-home questionnaires and

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journals) to examine if and how sexual initiations were being made. The researchers found that men were much more likely than women to initiate sexual behaviors. The authors concluded, "that men and women still appear to be guided by the traditional sexual script with respect to initiations, but women may no longer serve as the restrictors of sexual activity as women respond positively to initiations as frequently as men do" (p. 444). Because research has shown that women are more likely to condone sexual activity in committed (rather than casual or uncommitted) relationships (Sprecher & Hatfield, 1996), O'Sullivan and Byers' (1992) claims about women as restrictors must be interpreted according to their sample: steadily dating couples. The role of initiation, however, seemed to be uncontestedly male. Additionally, these 'initiation attitudes' did not only apply to traditional and male populations. McCormick (1979) found that pro-feminist college students were just as likely as students with traditional sex role attitudes to categorize initiating coitus as masculine and avoiding coitus as feminine. Jessner's (1978) study found females are more likely than males (35% vs. 16%) to believe that men are turned off by assertive women. This dislike for assertive women translated into a 'receiver-only' role for women. If assertive women are evaluated negatively by other women, it is unlikely women in new relationships will challenge this sexual script. Thus, it appears that men may remain responsible for initiation of sexual activity.

If men are the initiators and women are the gatekeepers, it follows that disagreements would exist between men and women about the level of sexual activity in a relationship. In fact, several studies have reported men desire more sexual involvement than women (Byers, 1980; Koss & Oros, 1982; McCabe & Collins, 1984; Mynatt & Allgeier, 1985). Byers and Lewis' (1988) study of disagreements over level of sexual

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involvement found that men do most of the initiating, even in steady relationships. When disagreements about the level of sexual activity exist (e.g., moving from kissing to touching genitals, or from petting to intercourse) between couples, the male partner desires a greater level of sexual activity significantly more often than the female partner. Byers and Lewis (1988) admitted that these sexual disagreements were not as common as predicted, however, lack of disagreements could be a function of studying steadily dating couples. Disagreements did not disappear in steadily dating relationships, but in fact, men sometimes viewed a more involved relationship as an excuse for pressuring their partners into higher levels of sexual activity (Christopher, 1988; Zellman, Johnson, Giarruso, & Goodchilds, 1979). In a sample of 262 college-aged females, Christopher (1988) found that 95.3% of women had been pressured into at least one sexual behavior. Fifty-eight percent of the women admitted to being pressured to touch a man's genitals. Furthermore, a variety of coercive strategies were revealed. One out of four college men reported lying to receive sexual intercourse (Fischer, 1996). The most common lies included 'caring and commitment' (e.g., I love you, marriage, etc.) and 'not a one-night stand' (e.g., promises to call, go out again).

Consistent with TSS claims of men as sexual initiators and women as defenders, several studies examining strategy use have found women used more strategies to avoid sexual activity while men were more likely to use strategic communication to initiate sex (LaPlante, McCormick, & Brannigan, 1980; McCormick, Brannigan, & LaPlante, 1984). Although thoughts do not necessarily match actions, perceptions of 'male' and 'female' strategy use seemed to mirror actual use. Testing the persistence of the sexual script, McCormick (1979) asked college men and women to indicate which gender would be

most likely to use various strategies for having and avoiding sexual intercourse. She found that when given a list of strategies including sexual initiation and decline, both men and women were significantly more likely to view all the strategies for sexual initiation as masculine and strategies for avoiding sex as feminine. In their study on strategy use, LaPlante, McCormick, and Brannigan (1980) used 38 descriptions of ten strategies for having sexual intercourse and 9 strategies for avoiding sexual intercourse. As expected, surveyed students stereotyped all strategies for having sex as being used predominately by men and all strategies for avoiding sex as being used predominantly by women. When asked what strategies they used in sexual relationships, “[m]en reported that they personally used both direct and indirect strategies significantly more than women to influence dates to have coitus...[while] in contrast, women indicated that they personally used both direct and indirect strategies significantly more than men when the goal was to avoid sexual intercourse with a date” (p. 347). Thus, it appears that when sexual activity was suggested in a relationship, men were more likely than women to initiate this activity utilizing a variety of strategies. At the same time, women continued to play the ‘gatekeeper’ role, refusing men’s advances with a combination of direct and indirect strategies.

But, what happens when the strategies men used didn’t work? When declined by their female partner, men were more likely to pout (Jessner, 1978) or simply go without sex despite their urge (Mercer & Kohn, 1979). In some cases, however, coercion was used to gain sexual compliance. As stated previously, the number of women who reported being pressured into sexual activity is alarmingly high (Christopher, 1988; Zellman, Johnson, Giarruso, & Goodchilds, 1979). Byers (1988) used role-plays to assess

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the impact of arousal level, sexual intimacy, and rape supportive beliefs on men's responses to their date's first and second refusal of their sexual advances. Byers criticized past research which portrayed men as 'using any and all strategies to 'persuade' women to engage in more intimate sexual activities" (p. 250). However, Byers reported only 4 men (8.7%) continued sexual coercion after the women's second refusal. This definition of 'coercion' hid more troublesome findings. Byers' data indicated that, after the second refusal, 30.8% of men would try the same 'refused' behavior again later that evening, 14.1% would try again on the next date, and 14.1% would try again on a future date. By Byers' account, these men were non-coercive. However, 59% (n=78) of men would try to repeat the same behavior the women refused. While Byers may not have identified delayed requests as sexual coercion, these findings showed support for TSS in dating interactions. Men, consistent with TSS predictions, continued to initiate sexual advances after women have fulfilled their 'gatekeeper' duties.

The TSS also portrayed men as sexually experienced and women as sexually naïve. Men reported more sexual partners (Townsend, 1995) and men reportedly think about sex almost three times as often as women in the course of a day (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). Numerous studies indicated that males tended to be more interested in physical sexuality than females (Greer & Buss, 1994; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Sprecher, 1989; Sprecher & McKinney, 1993). In a study of why college men and women remain virgins, men were significantly more guilty and embarrassed about their virginity while women reported significantly more positive affect (such as pride and happiness) about their virginity (Sprecher & Regan, 1996). Furthermore, the same study reported that significantly more men than women expected

to become a non-virgin in the near future (Sprecher & Regan, 1996). Thus, men not only consider virginity a negative state, but also seek to rid themselves of this state as quickly as possible.

With this in mind, it follows that men would be more permissive of sexual activity than women. Several studies have shown that women were less permissive of 'casual' sex in non-committed (or low commitment) relationships (Sprecher & Hatfield, 1996; Sprecher & McKinney, 1993; Wilson & Medora, 1990). When first-year college students were asked if it is acceptable for two people to engage in sex if they liked each other, even if they had only recently met, 66% of men but only 38% of women answered 'yes' (Dey, Astin, & Korn, 1991). In their study of sexual permissiveness and the 'double standard' of sexual activity, Sprecher and Hatfield (1996) found that in initial dating relationships, women were significantly less likely to approve of sexual activity. Men also held to the double standard for women, reporting that it was more acceptable for a hypothetical male than a hypothetical female to engage in sexual intercourse on the first date. Overall, men believed much more strongly that it was okay to engage in casual sex than women. However, female permissiveness increased as relational commitment increased (e.g., from 'first date' to 'steady date' to 'engaged,' etc.). At high levels of commitment, gender differences disappeared. Thus it appears that the TSS served as a guideline for appropriate sexual behavior in new or unique relationships. At high levels of commitment (and intimacy), new scripts were written where people engaged in idiosyncratic verbal (and nonverbal) behaviors.

To summarize, the TSS suggests that men avidly pursue sexual relations while women refuse these advances. Men not only initiated sex more often than women, but

also have more sexual partners. In keeping with this stereotype, men were more permissive about casual sex than women. This difference disappeared, however, when the intensity of the relationship increased. But what happens to women who did not decline or refused to 'gatekeep'?

Women's sexual experience as decreased worth. As a woman's sexual experience increases her value in society decreases. According to the TSS, women with sexual experience are evaluated negatively. With sexual experience a woman's worth, unlike a man's worth, will decrease. While a man with sexual experience is hailed as a 'playboy' or 'stud,' a woman with the same experience is a 'slut' or 'whore.' Research supports the TSS's negative depiction of sexually knowledgeable women, but perhaps the most powerful statement about women's worth is seen (or heard) in descriptive language.

In her book, Spender (1981) declared that sexism is inherent in American English. For example, research by Stanley (1977) indicated that while approximately 220 words exist to describe sexually experienced women, only 20 words exist in the English language to describe a sexually experienced male. When the content of the two lists was examined, a striking difference in connotation emerged. Specifically, the male terms had both negative and positive connotations, but the female terms were decidedly negative in their connotation. A 'playboy' was sexually experienced and often 'uses' women. However, he is just as commonly portrayed as wealthy, debonair, charming, and handsome. The term slut, on the other hand, is synonymous with dirty, sleazy, cheap, and uneducated women.

At the same time, women are at a disadvantage in biological sexual language. Because female sexuality is considered a dirty or negative occurrence, references to

female sexual functioning and biology often are ignored. Mosbacher (1984) asked college students, physicians, and mental health professionals what their parents had told them about their genitals during childhood. They found that in childhood,

Forty percent of males and 29% of females learned accurate names for males' genitals, but only 18% of males and 6% of females learned correct names for female genitals. Those who did not learn the correct names learned either no names or euphemisms for genitals...Furthermore, males, on the average, had a complete vocabulary for their genitals by age 11.5, but females did not learn a complete vocabulary for theirs until 4 years later (p. 112).

Similarly, in Gartrell and Mosbacher's (1984) study, only 1 of 115 females reported learning the word 'clitoris' in childhood.

Words are important components of human thought and understanding. Having a name for penis helps boys think, talk, ask, and learn about their sexuality at a much earlier age compared to girls. Women, on the other hand, learn quickly that female sexual activity is 'bad' and should not be discussed, let alone participated in. Girls also learn that any woman who is knowledgeable about sexual functioning, conversant in the terminology, or sexually experienced is doomed to negative evaluation. According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Sapir, 1964), our perception of reality is determined by our thoughts, and our thoughts are influenced by our language. Hence, if words have the power to shape our reality, then the TSS may be founded in our language.

These negative evaluations extend from language into perceptions of males and females such that women who engage in sexual activity are consistently evaluated negatively by peers. Sprecher, McKinney, and Orbach (1987) asked college students to

evaluate a fictitious person, who could be either male or female, who had first intercourse at either 16 or 21, being on a casual date, or in a steady relationship. Female characters were evaluated more negatively than males for having sex at 16 or in a casual relationship. Thus, the double standard encouraged casual sex for adolescent males but made same-age females feel more inhibited about sex without love. A similar study of college students found that both men and women were more likely to evaluate a woman who has had sex with 'a great many men' as immoral or sinful than men who had intercourse with 'a great many women' (Robinson, Ziss, Ganza, Katz, & Robinson, 1991). Although it is argued that the sexual double standard has declined in recent years (Bolton, Morris, & MacEachron, 1989; Sonenstein, 1986), others report that separate expectations and evaluations for men and women exist (Kalof, 1995; MacCorquodale, 1989; Walsh, 1989). Fromme and Emihovich (1998) asked 17 college-aged men of various ethnicities how they would feel about a woman who willingly participated in sexual activity with them on the first date. The resulting comments "presented a contradiction in which women were divided into two categories: good ones who are chaste, marriageable, and socially acceptable partners and bad ones who are sexual and unacceptable for marriage" (p. 179). Drew, an African American student, commented

Honestly, I would give more respect to a girl for telling me no than I do for saying yeah. Especially if they really are turned on and everything like that and they want to but they're still like, "No, no . . ." then that means that they got a good head on their shoulders and they're strong minded and they're not going to fall for the peer pressure. They have an agenda, they have something on their mind that they want to accomplish before. I like that quality.

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Fromme and Emihovich argued that the comments from participants illustrates how males divide females into two distinct groups: those who say no are to be admired and respected, whereas those who say yes are not viewed as acceptable candidates for an ongoing relationship. In conclusion, the researchers noted, "There appears to be no recognition among these young men that they are engaging in the exact same behavior that they are denouncing in the women" (p. 180). Consequences of the double standard did not affect women only. It was found that more men than women had engaged in unwanted sexual intercourse, with the double standard dictating "real men never say no" being cited as an important reason (Muehlenhard, 1988). In addition, adolescent males perceived their ability to say no to unwanted sex as lower than that of their female counterparts (DeGaston et al., 1996; Zimmerman, Sprecher, Langer, & Holloway, 1995), again illustrating the initiator role.

In summary, the language we have in America for sexually active men and women paints a very different reality for each sex. For men, sexual experience has positive connotations. For women, however, admitting sexual experience only leads to negative evaluation. These judgments extend beyond words into evaluations of behavior. When women and men participate in similar sexual behaviors, women consistently are evaluated more negatively. Thus, two assumptions to the TSS have been reviewed and supported. Next, the third assumption, that women are more emotional and men are more instrumental, will be presented and relevant research will be reviewed.

Women as emotional/Men as instrumental. Relationship "self-help" books, such as John Gray's "Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus" (1998), have numerous readers discussing male 'caves' and hiding places. Perhaps Gray's advice struck a chord

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with readers because it resonated with the scripts the American people already were following. Like Gray, the TSS characterized women as nurturing and men as instrumental. Women, inherently attuned to emotional needs, were relationship oriented. Men, on the other hand, bonded through activities. These preferences for relationship involvement extend to sexual interactions. Men are much more accepting than women of 'casual' sexual interaction (DeGaston et al., 1996; MacCorquodale, 1989; Marsiglio, 1988; Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993). Women, however, require emotional attachment to precede sexual contact.

"Emotional attachment" is a combination of empathy for one's partner and reciprocal self-disclosure/listening (Fox, Gibbs, & Auerbach, 1985; Sherrod, 1989). Women need this emotional attachment to precede sex with their partner (Baldwin & Baldwin 1997; Carroll, Volk, & Hyde, 1985; Jessner, 1978). When this emotional attachment is absent, women have difficulty maintaining the sexual relationship (Townsend, 1995, 1987). Even when the emotional attachment is gone temporarily (e.g., during anger or a fight) women found it difficult to engage in sexual relations (Townsend, 1995). Women are so serious about the emotional component that studies show that women end relationships that do not meet their emotional needs (regardless of the quality of the sexual relationship). When partners do not meet women's standards for investments of time, resources, and nurturance, feelings of love decreased and sexual relations became less desirable and satisfactory (Roche, 1986; Townsend, 1987). Moreover, Whitley (1988) found that women were more likely to see "expression of love" as a motivation to engage in sexual activity while men listed "pleasure" more frequently. Furthermore, in a population of college students, Feigenbaum, Weinstein, and

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Rosen (1995) found that males were five times more likely than females to cite physical attractiveness as a sufficient reason to have sexual intercourse. In the same study, twice as many females (65.7%) as males (31.1 %) believed that sexual intercourse should be reserved for love involvements only. Thus, it appears women avoid 'pleasure-only sex' in favor of 'relationship sex.'

If women do continue these emotionally deplete sexual relationships, they report experiencing anxiety and/or depression. According to Townsend (1987), female medical students experienced intensely negative emotional reactions when they tried to maintain sexual relationships that involved insufficient emotional commitment. At the same time, men were more likely to condone sexual involvement "with no particular affection" (Roche, 1986, p. 82; Townsend, 1995). In the rare circumstance when women initiated sexual interactions without plans for emotional involvement, they found it difficult to avoid feeling emotional attachment to their (casual) partner (Townsend, 1995).

Overall, it appears that women are more likely than men to require emotional attachment as a prerequisite to sexual interaction. Without this attachment, women avoid sexual interactions, end their relationships, or continue their relationships with feelings of anxiety. With such extreme requirements for sexual interaction, it appears that the TSS is accurate in characterizing women as having need for emotional connections. Typically more sexually permissive than women, men do not require this emotional attachment. This fits with the traditional conceptualization of instrumental masculinity, where competitiveness, winning, stoicism, and breadwinner status is embraced (for examples see Barth & Kinder, 1988; Marks, 1994; Wellman, 1992; Wood, 1999). Researchers suggest that this gendered behavior may originate within the family. As children mature,

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parents provide information, both verbally and nonverbally, which is incorporated into the child's self-concept and worldview. This influence extends to the child's sexual socialization. Because the TSS is a socialized script, perhaps parents are one of the prime sources responsible for TSS socialization. Therefore:

RQ4: How does the content of parents' talk about sex reflect the TSS assumptions?

Sex Differences in Parent-Child Dialogue

The gendered stereotypes evident within parents' language may also be reflected in parental behaviors. Children witness their parents engaged in activities on the basis of sex; mothers as caretakers and fathers as playmates (Nugent, 1991; Russell & Russell, 1987). Although parents want to be the primary sexual educators of their children (Abramson & Moriuchi, & Perry, 1983; Alter, Baxter, Cook, Kirby, & Wilson, 1982; Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982; Mueller & Powers, 1990), parents' desires do not appear to reflect their actions. Fathers typically are not involved in the sexual education of children (Bennett, 1984; Dickinson, 1978). Roberts, Kline, and Gagnon (1978) found that fathers more often than mothers were dissatisfied with their contribution to their child's sexual learning, yet were unwilling to acknowledge any need for help to increase their impact. Interestingly, the strongest predictor of a father's involvement in his child's sexual education was household chores. Baldwin and Baranoski (1990) found that as the proportion of housework a father completed increased, his likelihood to take an active role in parent-child sexual communication also increased. Since fathers appear to be squeamish about discussing sexual education with children, the task often falls to mothers (Fisher, 1986; Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982; Nolin & Peterson, 1992). Thus, mothers

report greater amounts of sexual communication with children (Fox & Inazu, 1980; Jaccard & Dittus, 1991; Miller, Norton, Jenson, Lee, Christopherson, & King, 1993).

This inequity in parent-child communication about sexual activity mirrors previous research on women and relationship maintenance issues. Cultural stereotypes have assigned women to the role of “relationship expert” in most romantic relationships (Cancian, 1987; Wood, 1993). As experts, women are socialized to attend to relationship issues, including being more attuned to the health and status of the relationship than their male partners (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Wood, 1993; Wood & Lenze, 1991). As a result, women have been shown to monitor their relationships more closely than men, be more likely to confront disagreeable issues and approach conflict resolution than their male partners (Thompson & Walker, 1989). Although the majority of the relationship maintenance literature has been conducted on romantic attachments, it is likely that women assume many of the same responsibilities once a romantic relationship has grown into a family. Just as single women are more attuned to issues within romantic relationships, mothers may take on the role of negotiating relational health within the family. This expanded role as family relationship expert may offer explanation for mothers’ increased participation in sexual communication with children. As children grew older and enter romantic relationships, mothers (the relationship experts) are cognizant of growing interest in sexual activity. Thus, because mothers shoulder the burden for family relationship health, mothers may take on the responsibility of talking about sexual activity with both sons and daughters.

In contrast, several researchers have argued that parents take primary responsibility for the same-sex child, including the sexual education of that child.

Females are more likely to seek out their mother for sex education (Hepburn, 1981; Tucker, 1989) while males receive the benefit of both mother and father's knowledge (Bennett, 1984; Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982; Miller et al., 1993; Mueller & Powers, 1990). Bennett and Dickinson (1980) found that high levels of parent-child rapport affected sons and daughters differently. As father-son rapport increased, mothers were less likely to participate in general sex education. As levels of daughter-father rapport increased, however, the greater the involvement of both parents in sex education.

Psychoanalytic theories (e.g., Chodorow, 1989) identify the family's role in the creation of an individual's gender attitudes. As children, individuals either recognize their similarity or difference to their primary caregiver. This identification occurs as the caregiver, typically a mother, interacts differently with male and female children.

"Mothers tend to be more nurturing and to talk more about personal and relationship topics with daughters than sons. This intense closeness allows an infant girl to import her mother into herself in so basic a way that her mother becomes quite literally a part of her own self" (Wood, 1999, p. 53). Mother and their male children, on the other hand, are not capable of the same identification and closeness. According to Psychoanalytic theory, boys recognize this difference and develop their gender identities by separating from mothers. Perhaps more importantly, mothers also recognize the difference. Thus, it is possible that mothers would continue this differential treatment throughout their children's adolescence. In this case, it seems that mothers would talk with daughters more than sons about intimate topics, such as sexual behaviors.

Thus, a difference exists within the literature. Mothers, as the primary caretakers of family relational health, may be more likely to discuss sexual activity with both male

and female children. Yet, Psychoanalytic theory (Chodrow, 1989) would argue that identification and internalization issues leads parents to discuss sexual education primarily within same-sex parent-child dyads. Given these two opposing viewpoints, two competing hypotheses were developed:

H1: Mothers will participate in more sex communication with children than fathers, regardless of the child's biological sex.

H2: Same-sex parent-child dyads will discuss sexual behavior more often than opposite-sex parent-child dyads.

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Methods

Variables

For both the participant and the parent(s), “sex” was conceptualized as two mutually exclusive, biological categories: male or female. Furthermore, these biological sex categories were used to categorize student-participants as “son” or “daughter” and classify female parents as “mothers” and male parents as “fathers.” The messages received from all participants consisted of verbal communication originating from the student-participant’s parents. These messages were then examined for content containing traditional sexual scripts. A message was categorized as “traditional scripting” when the content reflected references to behaviors, emotions, or attitudes consistent with traditional sexual stereotypes. These stereotypes included but were not limited to men initiating sexual activity, women declining sexual advances, condoning male sexual experience/criticizing female sexual experience, separating sex and love for men, combining sex and love for women.

In addition to messages and sex, participants’ feelings regarding the communication episode, such as openness and satisfaction, were assessed. “Communication openness” was conceptualized as breadth and depth coverage of topics related to sexual activity and attitudes. “Satisfaction” reflected participants’ gestalt appraisal of previous communicative events in two areas: overall positive/negative affect and amount of communication.

Participants

Because this research sought to examine the content of messages communicated by parents to their children, and the rate of sexually transmitted diseases among college

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students is escalating, the focus of this study was university students and their parents. Eight hundred and ten questionnaires were distributed to potential parent/adolescent participants via communication students at a large Midwestern university. Six hundred and twenty-four completed surveys were returned (response rate = 77%). The returned surveys yielded 176 completed mother-father-student triads. One hundred and seventeen female and 59 male student-participants averaged 20.1 years in age ($SD=1.75$). The majority of student-participants lived with their biological parents ($n=148$, 85.5%) or with a divorced biological parent ($n=19$, 11%). The remaining student-participants described their family as “other” ($n=6$, 3.5%), such as “living with sibling,” “living alone,” or “foster care.” Student-participants represented predominantly Caucasian ($n=144$, 83.7%), African American ($n=10$, 5.8%), Asian ($n=7$, 4.1%), Latino/Latina ($n=3$, 1.7%) and “other” ($n=8$, 4.7%) ethnicities. Approximately two-thirds of the students sampled indicated they were currently sexually active ($n=120$, 70.6%) beginning their sexual activity at an average age of 17.19 years ($SD=1.73$, range=11-21 years).

Among those parent-participants, the average age was 48.62 years for mothers ($SD=4.58$, range=37-71) and 51.23 years for fathers ($SD=5.16$, range=26-73). Parent-participants were well-educated with the majority of mothers (50.4%) and fathers (61.4%) having college degrees or advanced education. Similar to student-participants, parent-participants represented mostly Caucasian ($n=285$; 81%), African American ($n=20$; 5.7%), Asian ($n=13$; 3.7%), Latino/Latina ($n=7$; 1.7%), or other ($n=9$; 2.6%) ethnicities. During their student’s childhood, 32.7% ($n=55$) of mothers reported they did not work outside the home. However, this number decreased during the child’s adolescent and teen years (14.9%, $n=25$). Fifty-eight percent of mothers ($n=98$) reported

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working full-time outside the home during their child's adolescent years while only 36.9% (n=62) worked outside during their child's early years. Fathers, for the most part, worked outside the home throughout their child's lifetime; 98.2% (n=163) and 96.4% (n=160) of fathers worked outside the home during their child's early and adolescent years, respectively.

Instrument

In order to assess the extent to which parents' communication reflects traditional sexual attitudes, participants were asked to describe their communication about sexual behavior with their child/parent(s) (see Appendix A). First, participants were asked to list any topic related to sexual activity and attitudes that they have discussed with their child/parent. This thought-listing task was followed by participant recall of any communicative incident(s) where sexual behavior was the topic. Participants were instructed to focus on the communication that occurred during this interaction, including what was said by each individual. Instructions were as follows:

Now, please think of a memorable time when you and your father discussed sexuality and relationships. This may have been informal, such as a car ride home from school, or a more formal "talk," perhaps prompted by a health class during your early school years. We are interested in WHAT YOUR FATHER SAID TO YOU about sexuality and relationships. This may have been instructive (what should or shouldn't be done) or may have been informative (information and facts). We realize that you may or may not be able to recall one conversation, but only pieces of several conversations you had over the years. Any information you can recall would be useful. In the space provided below, please recall the actual

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conversations, dialogue or words, you had with your father about sexuality and relationships.

Next, participants identified the morals and values. Parent-participants were asked to list the “the values or ideals that you wanted to instill in your son/daughter about sexual relationships and men/women.” while student-participants reported their perceptions of the values their mothers/fathers were communicating. In a final open-ended question, participants were asked to reflect on information they felt was missing from their communication about sexuality. Participants were instructed “Looking back on it now, what is the ONE THING you wish [your mother/father/you] had told [you/your son or daughter] about sexuality and relationships? To facilitate understanding and completeness in the open-ended items, student-participants were asked to respond to separately for mothers and fathers. In addition, student-participants questionnaires contained an additional item seeking sources of information about sexuality and relationships. Student-participants were provided with a list of twelve possible sources of sexual education including “mother,” “father,” “brothers,” “sisters,” “school,” “doctor,” “religious organization,” “movies,” “television,” “books,” “friends, or “other.” Student-participants were asked indicate their “main source of information about sexuality and relationships.” A follow-up questionnaire addressed the influence of parents specifically: “Looking back at the list above, IF MOTHER/FATHER WERE NOT YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION about sexuality and relationships, where would you rank them on a scale from 1 to 12?”

In the second section of the questionnaire participants completed a measure of communication openness (Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, & Ham, 1998) containing

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10 Likert-type items utilizing a 7-pt. response scale (1=strongly agree; 7=strongly disagree). Items reflected the participant's general willingness and comfort discussing sexual topics with his/her child or parent ("There are topics I avoid discussing with my child," "My son/daughter can ask me the questions he/she really wants to know about topics like this," "I avoid discussing these issues with my father," "I try to understand how my mother feels about topics like these"). In the case of student-participants, items were listed separately and reworded to reflect the participant's openness communicating with his/her mother and father. Parent-participants responded while thinking of the student-participants.

Following the communication openness scale, participants completed a measure of their satisfaction with communication about sexuality and relationships. All participants were asked to indicate the degree to which each item reflected their feelings about their conversations with their parent/adolescent. The 10-item scale consisted of two satisfaction dimensions: amount of communication and valance. Each dimension included a directional prompt to participants and five items arranged in a semantic differential format. The prompts included: "Taken as a whole, the information [I/your mother/your father] gave [you/my son/daughter] about sexuality and relationships was..." (amount dimension) and "How do you feel about the information[you/your mother/father] gave about sexuality and relationships?" (valence dimension). Participants were instructed to "circle the number that best represents your response" along a 7-point Likert scale for each item. Sample items included "complete/incomplete," "enough/not enough," "comprehensive/not comprehensive," "good/bad," and "happy/unhappy."

The third section of the questionnaire consisted of various demographic items,

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such as parental employment, education, age, and family status. Parent-participants were asked to report on their employment status during both their child's elementary and high school years, as well as their education level. Both student- and parent-participants were asked to describe their family status and relationship (adoptive, biological, step-parent) and education. Student-participants were asked whether they were sexually active and, if so, their age at first intercourse.

Procedures

Data were collected during the fall semester of the academic year. Potential student subjects were recruited during a typical class period, in an academic building on campus. Interested individuals were instructed to report to a separate location, outside of the class period, to receive instructions and study materials. All student-participants were given three separate research packets. Each research packet was a standard manila envelope containing an introductory letter describing informed consent, a survey with an identifying code number (such as "100A," "100B," and "100C"), and stamped return envelope for the completed questionnaire. One research packet was for the student-participant recruited during the class period. The student-participant was instructed to complete his/her consent form and survey on his/her own time (outside of the class period). The student-participant then returned his/her completed questionnaire and consent form in a sealed envelope to a predetermined location in an academic building on campus. The remaining two research packets were addressed to the student-participants' parents. Potential student-participants were instructed to address one parental research packet to "the person you feel fills the role of mother in your life" and the other to "the person you feel fills the role of father in your life." In the case of single-parent families,

student-participants were instructed to address a single research packet to the “parent they live with the majority of the time.” Once addressed, the parental research packets were collected by the researcher and mailed. Once the completed questionnaires were returned, student and parent-participant questionnaires were matched using the identifying code number. Then, consent forms were verified and separated from the completed questionnaires for further analyses.

Analyses

Prior to statistical testing of the research objectives, confirmatory factor analyses were run for the communication openness and the communication satisfaction scales. For the communication openness scale, tests of internal consistency yielded a unidimensional solution after two items were eliminated (“I wished [my father/mother/son/daughter] and I talked about these issues more often” and “I am satisfied with how often [my father/mother/son/daughter] and I discuss these topics and issues”). Coefficient alpha reliabilities for parent and student versions were as follows: student $\alpha=.822$, mothers $\alpha=.862$, fathers $\alpha=.882$. All items were recoded such that higher scores indicated greater openness and comfort when discuss sexuality and relationships. Confirmatory factor analyses of the communication satisfaction scale were consistent with a two-dimensional solution (amount of communication and valence). Reliability coefficients were .96 and .975 respectively.

Coding. Prior to statistical testing of the hypotheses and research questions, a coding scheme was developed for open-ended questionnaire items. Four open-ended questions were utilized in this project. These four questions included two thought-listing items (e.g., “what topics did you discuss with your [parent/child]?” and “what topics do

you wish you had talked about?”). The remaining two items asked participants to recall parental conversations and values. Thus, the open-ended items are described in two distinct sections: conversation/values and discussion topics.

Discussion topic items. The two discussion topic open-ended items requested participants recall any topics previously discussed or desired in families. For these thought-listing, open-ended questions, approximately 10% of the questionnaires (n=20 student-mother-father triads) were utilized as representative responses to create coding categories. The result was a single coding scheme with fourteen representative categories. (See Appendix B for a list of all categories). Each category reflected the topics parents and adolescents had discussed previously (or wished they had discussed) regarding sexuality and relationships. Sample categories included: “talked about sex in general,” “pregnancy,” which included pregnancy prevention or discussion of child-birth, “emotions” addressed the emotions that accompany sex and relationships, such as love, fear, or trust, “self esteem” included body image, respecting oneself, being independent, and “physical differences” which addressed biological differences between males and female including menstruation, puberty, or hormones.

Conversation/Values items. The remaining two open-ended items were concerned with the actual communication that occurred between parents and adolescents. Once again, a single coding scheme was utilized for both items. However, unlike the grounded approach used for discussion topic categories, the conversation/value coding scheme was based on Byers’ (1996) conceptualization of the Traditional Sexual Script. Byers’ original conceptualization included three major categories: “ male as initiator of sexual experience/female as gatekeeper/declining sexual activity,” “male sexual experience

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positive/female sexual experience negative,” “females as emotional/males as instrumental.” Using Byers’ original themes as guides, a coding scheme of fifteen categories was developed based upon current literature on interpersonal relationships and sex differences (for a complete list see Appendix C). Sample categories included “Women are emotional” (emotional/instrumental), “Men are playboys or should ‘sow wild oats’” (male experience positive), “Men are dangerous and will use sexual force” (male initiators), “Women avoid and don’t like sex” (female gatekeepers), “Women should be sexually naïve” (female experience negative), and “Men fear commitment” (emotional/instrumental). For instance, one father suggested “I told my son that he should be sure he was ‘compatible’ with any girl he wanted to marry. Its no good to find out after [being married] that the sex isn’t good.” This father’s statement reflected Byers’ original “male sexual experience positive” theme and would be coded under the category “men are playboys and should ‘sow wild oats.’”

The coding scheme developed from the Traditional Sexual Scripts (Byers, 1996) focuses on gender-stereotypical behavior. However, in the case a message conveyed nontraditional gender attitudes it was placed into the appropriate category based on content. Then the message was assigned a negative value. For example, one male participant recalled his mother stating, “It’s important to save yourself for marriage. Sex outside of marriage is a sin.” Based on content (remaining abstinent) this message was categorized as “women should be virgins/remain abstinent.” However, when the student-participant’s sex was considered, the message from his mother becomes nontraditional. Therefore, the message remained in the TSS category but was assigned a negative value (representing its nontraditional content). All categories were designed to be absolute (see

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Appendix C for a list of each category).

In addition, for the conversation/values open-ended questions, the unit of measurement for each participant response was identified at the level of “thought groupings.” Thus, a single participant-recalled message could contain several categorizable units of analysis. For example, one mother wrote: “I remember saying that she shouldn’t give herself away [sexually] to just anyone. She needs to look out for herself and stand up for what she wanted.” In this example, two units of analysis were present in the single recalled message: (1) disapproval of casual sexual relationship, and (2) independence/relationship equality. Therefore, this message’s two thoughts were treated as distinct units of analysis and thus categorized separately.

Coding reliabilities. With the coding categories established, all questionnaires were submitted to evaluation by two trained coders. Cohen’s kappa for all thought-listing open-ended items was .80 (SE=.031, $p<.01$). Coding reliability for the conversation/values open-ended items reached significant agreement (Cohen’s Kappa =.663, SE=.039, $p<.01$). All coding disputes were resolved through discussion resulting in universal agreement across all categories.

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Results

Topics Recalled

The first research question addressed the content of messages communicated by parents concerning sexuality and relationships to adolescents. Participants were asked to list any topics they recall discussing with their parent/adolescent in the past (See Table 1). On average, mothers recalled 5.89 topics (range 0-13, SD=2.83) and father recalled 3.04 topics (range 0-12, SD=2.29). The average number of topics student-participants recalled discussing with parents were as follows: mothers $M=3.78$ (range 0-12, SD=2.33) and fathers $M=2.07$ (range 0-9, SD=2.19). Pearson correlations were run to assess the agreement between messages recalled by student-participants and those recalled by parents. While the number of messages recalled by mothers and student-participants was not significant ($r=.142$, ns), the number of topics remembered by student-participants and fathers was positively correlated ($r=.258$, $p<.001$).

One hundred and sixty-eight mothers listed a total of 802 discussion topics. The most commonly listed maternal topics included sexually transmitted diseases, such as condom usage for safety, 'safe sex,' or AIDS ($n=81$), morals, such as religious beliefs or codes of conduct ($n=117$), and relationships, including dating advice, marriage and divorce ($n=126$), and pregnancy, such as avoiding pregnancy, birth control or child-birth ($n=112$). Mothers were less likely to recall discussing infidelity ($n=9$), peer pressure ($n=11$), or homosexuality ($n=13$) with their adolescent. Student-participants were also asked to recall conversation topics they had discussed with their parents. Similar to mothers' topics, 165 student-participants recalled discussing pregnancy ($n=111$), morals

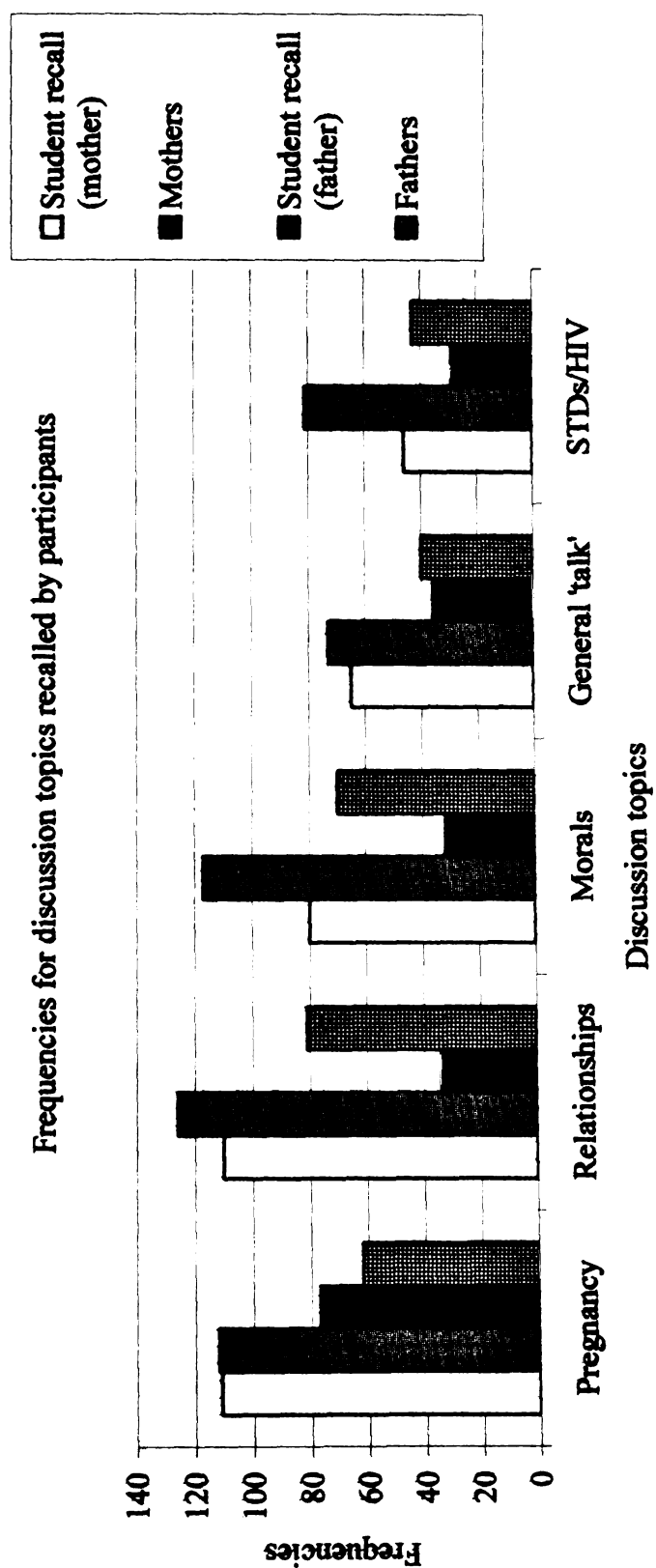


Figure 1. Most frequently recalled discussion topics by participants for thought listing questionnaire item.

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(n=80), and relationships (n=110) most frequently with mothers. In addition, student-participants had few memories of discussing abuse, such as violence or date rape (n=9), homosexuality (n=9), peer pressure (n=2), infidelity (n=7), or self esteem (n=2) with mothers.

One hundred and forty-six fathers recalled 428 sexuality and relationships topics. Fathers most frequently discussed relationships (n=81), morals (n=70), and pregnancy (n=62). Fathers recalled discussing homosexuality (n=3), peer pressure (n=4), infidelity (n=5), and timing of sexuality, such as the conditions necessary for a 'good' relationship or being sure you have commitment (n=5) least with adolescents. Student-participants recalled slightly different paternal topics (N=290). Student-participants recalled discussing relationships (n=77), general 'sex' talk (n=36), pregnancy (n=34), and morals (n=32) most frequently with fathers while discussing peer pressure (n=0), self esteem (n=2), timing of sexuality (n=3), abuse (n=3), and homosexuality (n=3) least often.

Chi square analyses were run for student-participant sex by parental recalled topics to determine whether parents discussed different topics with their adolescent on the basis on biological sex (Table 2). Three significant differences were observed in parental topics: Mothers' were less likely to discuss "self esteem" issues with their male offspring ($X^2=7.93$, $p=.005$) than with daughters while fathers were less likely to have "general sex talk" ($X^2=6.65$, $p=.01$), or discuss "physical differences" ($X^2=5.63$, $p=.02$) with daughters than have these talks with their sons.

Student and parent-participants were also asked to recall one topic they wished they had discussed with parents/adolescents (Table 3). Sample "desired" topics included "more openness" reflecting a desire by participants to communicate more about these

topics in general. This category was evidenced in one female respondent's comments: "I wished my mother and I had talked more about anything! I'd like that kind of [open] relationship." Additional topics included "consequences of sexual activity" which included a desire to talk about sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy more often, "seriousness of sexual activity" referenced a desire to talk about the emotional aspects of engaging in sexual activity. For example, one male participant requested his mother explain "what having sex does to a relationship...how [sex] complicates things, like jealousy and stuff." Other participants desired more communication about "biological differences" and "gender differences" such as "what women really want," "why women get so crazy and emotional about everything," and "how all men think about is sex." For student-participants, the "one thing" question was answered separately for mothers and fathers. However, most students (approximately one-third of those responding) indicated they had "nothing" more to discuss with parents (n=53; 39%). Aside from wishing for nothing, student-participants wanted mothers to have "more openness" (n=16; 12%), discuss relationships issues (n=13; 10%), the "seriousness of sexuality" (n=12; 10%), gender issues (n=11; 9%), and received more "approval of sexual activity" (n=13; 10%). Student-participants' desires for conversation with fathers were similar to their requests from mothers. In addition to wanting "nothing" from fathers (n=26; 20.2%), student-participants desired more communication about "gender issues" (n=21; 16%), more "openness" (n=16; 13%), "approval of sexual activity" (n=9; 9%), "relationship issues" (n=10; 9%), and "seriousness of sexuality" (n=9; 6%). Additionally, student-participants would have liked fathers to provide more information on "biological differences" (n=11; 10%). Parent-participants were also asked to provide lists of desired communication

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topics. Like their adolescents, many mothers and fathers believed they had covered all the necessary topics with their children (n=66). Fathers, slightly more than mothers, felt the need for “more openness” with children (n fathers=17; n mothers=14) and more emphasis on “abstinence” (n fathers=9; n mothers=5). Both parents, however, agreed for the need to include more discussion of “relationship issues” (n fathers=9; n mothers=15). Several topics that appeared as “wished for” by student-participants failed to appear on parental lists. In spite of student-participant desires, mothers did not wish to discuss birth control more often. Fathers did not include increased discussions of “masturbation,” “approval of sexual activity” or “biological differences.” No participant expressed a desire to discuss “homosexuality” more often.

Parental Satisfaction

The second research question assessed the level of parental satisfaction with communication about sexuality and relationships. To accomplish this goal, parent-participants completed the 10-item measure of satisfaction assessing their satisfaction with amount communication and valance of feelings about their communication with their adolescents/parents. Each factor was recoded such that higher scores indicated greater satisfaction. For mothers, the average satisfaction score included 5.11 (satisfaction with amount, SD=1.47) and 5.42 (valance, SD=1.40). Mean scores for fathers’ satisfaction were as follows: amount M=4.23 (SD=1.52) and valance M=4.72 (SD=1.44).

T-test analyses were conducted between parental satisfaction and student-participant sex to determine whether parent-participants’ satisfaction was significantly influenced by adolescent sex. No significant differences were observed for mothers’

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(amount $t=.151$, $df=1$, ns; valance $t=.501$, $df=1$, ns) or fathers' (amount $t=.312$, $df=1$, ns; valance $t=.245$, $df=1$, ns) level of satisfaction based upon adolescent biological sex.

T-tests were also run for parental satisfaction by parental-recalled topics (See Table 4). For mothers, those who discussed general "sex" talk (amount $t=2.65$, $df=154$, $p<.01$; valance $t=2.92$, $df=154$, $p<.01$) and pregnancy (amount $t=3.63$, $df=154$, $p<.000$; valance $t=2.54$, $df=154$, $p<.01$) were significantly more satisfied with the amount of communication and had more positive feelings about their communication than mothers who did not discuss these topics with their children. In addition, mothers who discussed physical sex differences (valance $t=1.96$, $df=154$, $p<.05$) with their children had significantly more positive feelings about their communication with their children. Among fathers, those who discussed general "sex" talk ($t=3.38$, $df=140$, $p<.001$), morals ($t=2.12$, $df=140$, $p<.05$), physical differences ($t=1.95$, $df=140$, $p<.05$) and pregnancy ($t=2.52$, $df=140$, $p<.01$) were more satisfaction with the amount of communication about sexuality and relationships shared with adolescents than noncommunicative fathers. Additionally, fathers who reported discussing general "sex" talk ($t=2.16$, $df=136$, $p<.05$), pregnancy ($t=2.74$, $df=136$, $p<.01$), and emotions ($t=2.12$, $df=136$, $p<.05$) had more positive feelings about their conversations with adolescents than fathers who did not discuss these topics.

To assess the relationship between breadth of communication and parental satisfaction, Pearson correlations were run for the number of topics listed by parents and parental satisfaction (amount and valance). For fathers, satisfaction and topic recall were positively correlated such that the more topics fathers recalled discussing, the greater their satisfaction with the amount of communication with children ($r=.406$, $p<.01$) and

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the more positive their feelings about their communication ($r=.397, p<.01$). Mothers' satisfaction levels were also positively correlated with the number of topics they recalled discussing with children (amount $r=.202, p<.05$; valance $r=.249, p<.01$).

Adolescent Satisfaction

The third research question asked "how satisfied are sons and daughters with the amount and type of sexual communication they have with their parents?" Average satisfaction scores from student-participants reflecting upon communication with mothers were near the midpoint (amount $M=3.22, SD=1.84$; valance $M=4.06, SD=1.66$). Similarly, satisfaction scores for student-participants who recalled paternal messages regarding sexuality and relationships were mid-range (amount $M=2.45, SD=1.91$; valance $M=3.40, SD=1.89$). T-test were performed to assess the influence of participant (student and parents) biological sex on satisfaction. Results indicated that male student-participants were significantly more satisfied with the amount of communication by their fathers ($t=-2.601, df=166, p<.01$) and had more positive feelings about that communication ($t=-2.154, df=168, p<.05$) than female student-participants. No significant differences in satisfaction (amount $t=.148, df=165, ns$; valance $t=-1.25, df=170, ns$) were noted between male/female student-participants concerning mothers' messages. However, Pearson product correlations were run for the number of topics recalled by student-participants and satisfaction levels. With mothers, student-participants' satisfaction with the amount of communication ($r=.475, p<.01$) and positive feelings about their communication ($r=.316, p<.01$) was significantly related to the number of topics student-participants recalled discussing. The number of topics student-

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participants talked about with fathers was also positively correlated with satisfaction (amount $r=.604$, $p<.01$; valance $r=.438$, $p<.01$).

In each case, student-participants who recalled discussing sexuality and relationships were more satisfied than those student-participants who did not recall a discussion (see Table 5). Specifically, student-participants recalling general “sex” talks (amount $t=7.27$, $df=159$, $p<.01$; valance $t=5.26$, $df=161$, $p<.01$), HIV or sexually transmitted diseases (amount $t=4.45$, $df=159$, $p<.01$; valance $t=3.95$, $df=161$, $p<.01$), or information about dating and relationships (amount $t=3.15$, $df=159$, $p<.01$; valance $t=3.12$, $df=159$, $p<.01$) with mothers were more satisfied overall than those student-participants who did not discuss these topics. In addition, student-participants talking about physical and biological differences ($t=3.14$, $df=159$, $p<.01$), emotions ($t=2.13$, $df=159$, $p<.05$), and morals ($t=2.92$, $df=159$, $p<.01$) were more satisfied with the frequency and amount of maternal communication about sexuality than those who did not recall such discussions. For fathers, student-participants who discussed physical differences (amount $t=2.95$, $df=121$, $p<.01$; valance $t=2.03$, $df=120$, $p<.05$), pregnancy (amount $t=6.54$, $df=121$, $p<.01$; valance $t=4.26$, $df=120$, $p<.01$), morals (amount $t=3.93$, $df=121$, $p<.01$; valance $t=2.88$, $df=120$, $p<.01$), and general “sex” talk (amount $t=4.31$, $df=121$, $p<.01$; valance $t=3.47$, $df=120$, $p<.01$) were significantly more satisfied with the amount of communication and had more positive feelings about the communication than participants who did not discuss these topics. Student-participants’ satisfaction with the amount of paternal communication was greater for those who talked about sexually transmitted diseases ($t=2.66$, $df=121$, $p<.01$), and other miscellaneous topics ($t=2.78$, $df=121$, $p<.05$) than student-participants not recalling these topics. The two exceptions to

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these findings were student-participants who recalling talking to mothers about abstinence($t=-2.16$, $df=159$, $p<.05$) and fathers about homosexuality (amount $t=-2.30$, $df=121$, $p<.05$; valance $t=-2.33$, $df=120$, $p<.05$) expressed less satisfaction with the content and frequency of parental communication than those families who did not discuss these topics.

Traditional Scripts and Messages

The fourth research question examined whether the content of parental messages recalled by student and parent-participants reflected the traditional attitudes seen in Traditional Sexual Scripts (TSS) (Byers, 1996). To determine this, participants were asked to recall both a specific conversation about sexuality and relationships and, separately, any values that were communicated by parents.

Conversation topics. One hundred and thirty student-participants (70%) were able to recall the dialogue of one conversation with a parent regarding sexuality and relationships. These participant responses yielded a total of 374 units of analysis, or “messages.” Student-participants were slightly more likely to recall messages from mothers ($N=215$) than fathers ($N=159$). These recalled conversations were then categorized using a coding scheme developed from the TSS literature (see Table 6). Although approximately 30% of all student-participants ($n=53$) had no response when asked to recall a conversation (e.g., left the questionnaire blank), some participants responded by writing about their lack of communication with parents. Eighty-two (22%) messages included student-participants indicating they had not discussed this topic with a parent (i.e., “We never talk about this!” or “Nothing”). However, these non-discussed messages were often paired with descriptions of dialogue within the same student-

participant-response. Once the “non-discussed” messages were discarded, a total 187 maternal and 109 paternal messages were recalled by student-participants. Within these dialogues, discussions of abstinence (n=67, 22%) and sexuality responsibility (n=68, 22%) were most frequent, followed by conversations about biology or “parts” (n=24, 8%). Students recalled discussing sex as an expression of love (n=2, .7%), homosexuality (n=2, .7%), self-esteem (n=1, .5%), equality in relationships (n=2, .7%), and being proud of one’s sexual choices (n=1, .5%) least often. Twelve recalled messages (4%) were unable to be categorized due to miscellaneous or irrelevant content.

In addition to examining the overall content of each message, the biological sex of the participant was taken into account to establish the presence of traditional messages in parental communications about sexuality. Chi square analyses were run for each type of recalled message (student recalled for mother and student recalled for father) by student-participants’ biological sex. First, those messages consistent with the gender stereotypes present in Byers’ (1996) TSS was considered. One hundred and twelve (60%) of the 187 categorizable maternal messages recalled by student-participants were traditional. When the content of these messages recalled by student-participants were considered, female student-participants were significantly more likely to recall messages about remaining abstinent before marriage (n=27), protecting their reputation (n=7), taking responsibility for sexual behavior and outcomes (n=29), men’s greater desire for sexual activity (n=6), and sexual gate keeping/being responsible for saying ‘no’ (n=11) than male student-participants ($X^2=48.48$, $df=11$, $p=.000$). For fathers, student-participants recalled 61 messages (56%) reflecting traditional sexual stereotypes.

Conversation topics recalled by participants

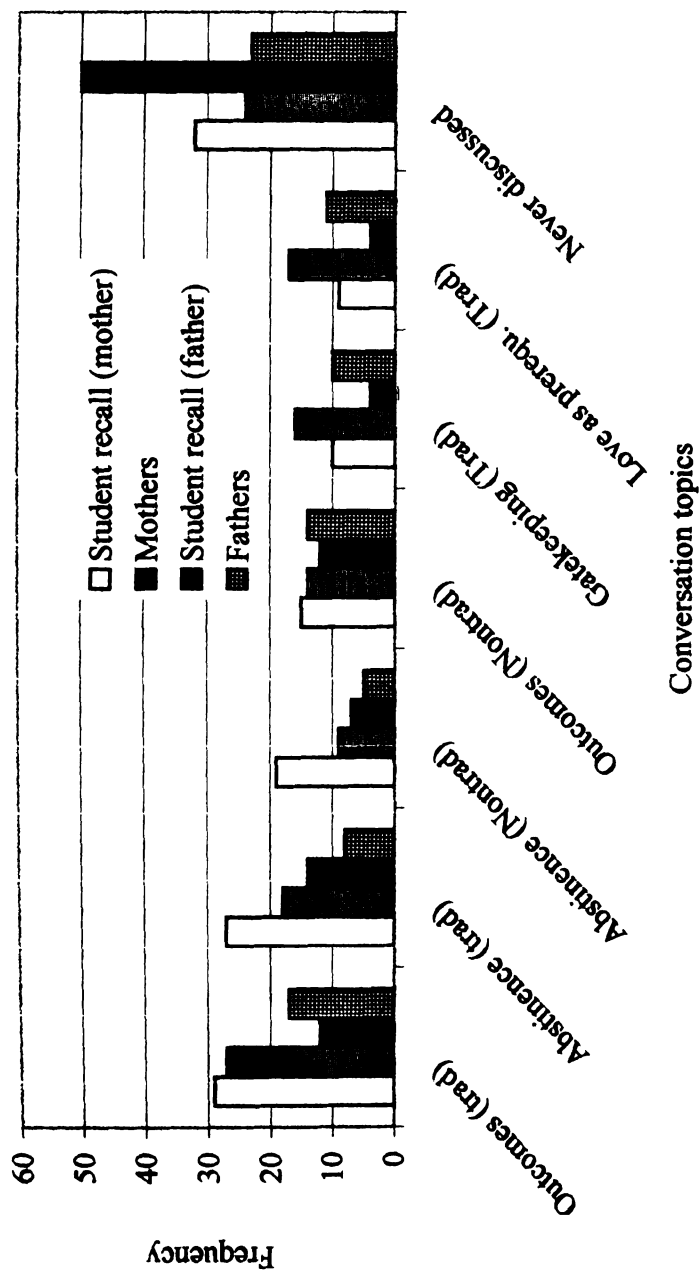


Figure 2. Frequencies for conversation topics recalled by participants. These categories emerged from participants' recalled actual conversations with parents/students and were coded for Traditional Sexual Script content.

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Chi square analyses of recalled paternal message category by student-participant sex revealed no significant differences for paternal messages ($X^2=15.31$, $df=13$, ns). However, a trend similar to those messages recalled for mothers emerged: female participants were more likely to recall messages about taking responsibility for sexual behavior and outcomes ($n=11$), sexual gatekeeping/being responsible for saying 'no' ($n=6$), and remaining abstinent before marriage ($n=15$) than male participants. For those messages that were nontraditional according to Byers' TSS assumptions, student-participants recalled 53 (38%) maternal messages and 25 (23%) paternal messages. Male-student participants were more likely to hear messages about love being a prerequisite to sexual activity ($n=6$), taking responsibility for sexual behavior and outcomes ($n=12$) than female student-participants ($X^2=18.60$, $df=9$, $p=.02$). However, once again no significant differences emerged for student-participants' recall of nontraditional messages from fathers ($X^2=3.11$, $df=7$, ns).

Next, mothers' and fathers' messages were examined for content and TSS emphasis (see Table 7). Mothers and fathers recalled a total of 407 categorizable units of analysis. Once again, several parents ($n=47$; 11%) indicated in their surveys that they had not discussed or could not recall a specific conversation with their son/daughter. Of the remaining 360 messages, mothers recalled 215 and fathers recalled 145 messages given to their children. Overall, parent-participants remembered discussing taking responsibility for sexual activity and outcomes ($n=70$, 20%), love as a prerequisite to sexual activity ($n=41$, 12%), abstinence ($n=38$, 11%), and deceit/honesty during sexual encounters ($n=36$, 10%) most frequently. There were some topics, however, that parents did not

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recall discussing with student-participants. No parent recalled a discussion of relationship equality ($n=0$) or pride regarding sexual decisions ($n=0$) and very few discussed sexual techniques ($n=2$, .6%), homosexuality ($n=3$, .6%), emotional openness during relationships ($n=4$, .7%).

When the conversations recalled by parents were examined for evidence of traditional sexual scripting, traditional messages from mothers accounted for 59% ($n=126$) of the total 215 maternal messages while traditional messages from fathers numbered 83 (57%). However, mothers' messages were not significantly influenced by adolescent biological sex ($X^2=19.34$, $df=12$, ns). Trends within these results suggested that mothers sent daughters messages about remaining abstinent ($n=16$), making love a prerequisite to sexual activity ($n=15$), acting as the sexual gatekeeper or saying 'no' ($n=15$), and taking responsibility for sexual activity and outcomes ($n=25$) more often than they reinforced the complimentary traditional message for sons. Female adolescents also receive more traditional messages from fathers: fathers recalled discussing sexual gatekeeping or saying 'no' to sexual advances, taking responsibility for sexual activity and outcomes, being careful and alert for sexual assault, remaining abstinent, and love as a prerequisite to sexual activity with daughters more often than sons ($X^2=23.33$, $df=10$, $p=.01$).

Mother and fathers also recalled discussing nontraditional topics with children. Mothers and fathers remembered 54 (25%) and 32 (22%) nontraditional messages respectively. Mothers were significantly more likely to tell male adolescents love is a prerequisite to sexual activity and talk about taking responsibility for sexual activity and outcomes ($X^2=26.74$, $df=10$, $p=.003$) than to send daughters nontraditional messages

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about these topics. Fathers' messages were not significantly influenced by adolescent biological sex ($X^2=10.48$, $df=7$, ns). Yet, fathers did appear to send more nontraditional messages to sons about taking responsibility for sexual activity and outcomes ($n=13$).

Some additional categories stemming from participant responses were used in addition to the TSS. These response categories included general health or cleanliness issues, homosexuality, self-esteem messages, strictly biological discussions ("parts"), and technical or descriptive talk of sexually transmitted diseases. Student-participants recalled 22 (11%) messages from mothers and 23 (21%) messages from fathers. However, there were no significant differences in the content of these messages recalled by male and female student-participants (mother $X^2=3.92$, $df=4$, ns; father $X^2=4.63$, $df=4$, ns). Thirty-three of the messages units recalled by mothers (15%) and 30 of those messages recalled by fathers (21%) fit into the additional coding categories developed from participant responses. Once again adolescent sex did not influence maternal ($X^2=6.71$, $df=5$, ns) or paternal ($X^2=9.12$, $df=5$, ns) messages about miscellaneous issues.

Values topics. One-hundred and twenty seven student-participants were able to recall the values communicated by at least one parent (72% of total student subjects) resulting in 360 total categorizable parental values. Forty-four times (12%) a student-participant indicated he/she was not able to recall the values parents had communicated yielding a remaining 194 maternal values and 122 paternal values remembered. Overall, student-participants were instructed most frequently on abstinence ($n=90$; 25%), sexual responsibility and outcomes ($n=46$; 13%), love as a prerequisite for sexual activity ($n=39$; 10%), sexual morals ($n=31$; 8.5%), and honesty in sexual relationships ($n=29$; 8%).

Although each TSS category was represented at least once in recalled student-

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participant's values, several categories were minimally represented: pride about sexual activity ($n=2$; .4%), sexual techniques ($n=3$; .5%), sexual knowledge (regarding masturbation) ($n=3$; .5%), and emotional openness in sexual activity ($n=4$; 1%).

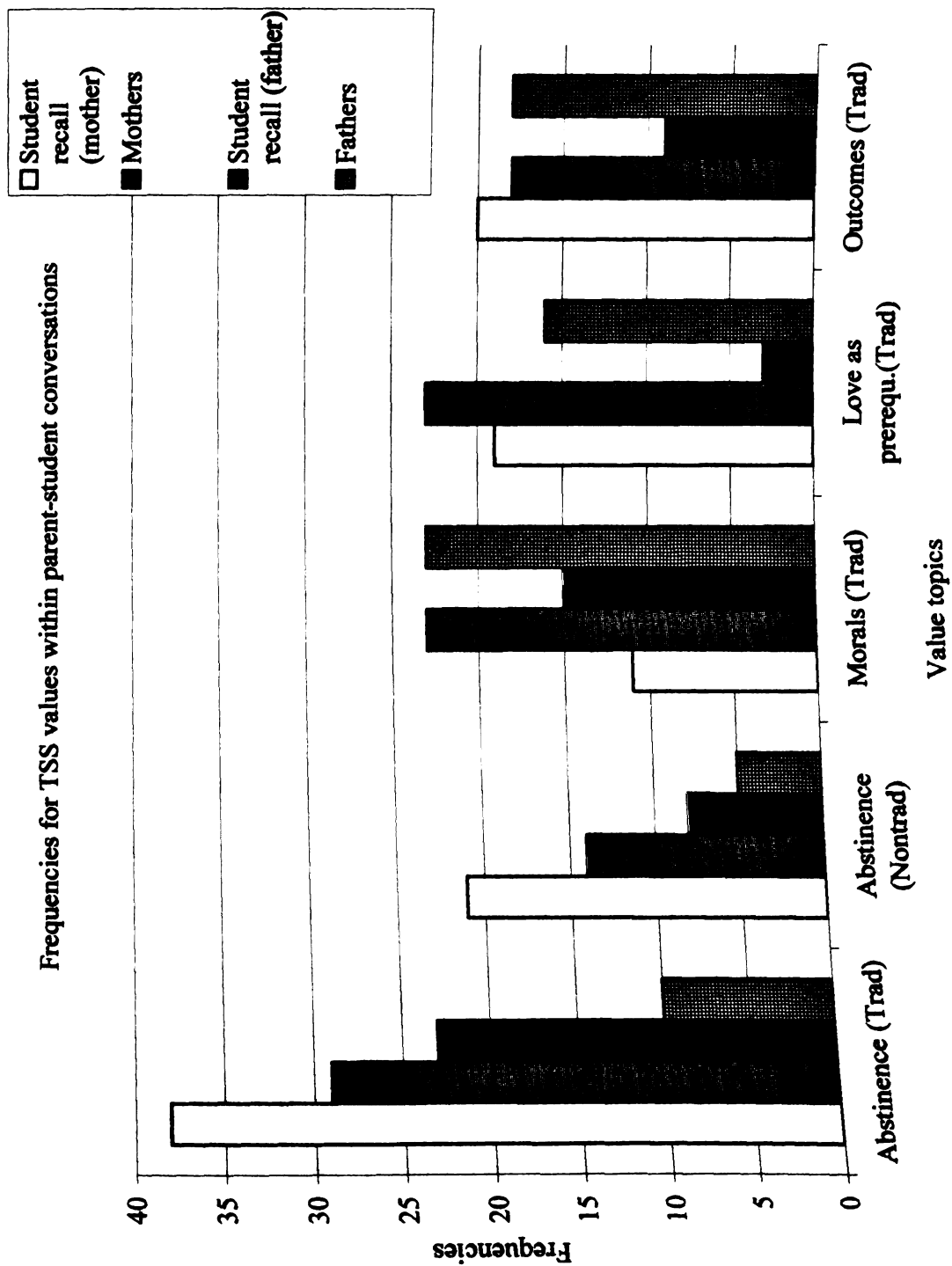
Next, the content of each recalled parental value was examined for evidence of traditional sexual scripting. Student-participants were able to recall 120 traditional values from mothers (62%) and 78 traditional values from fathers (64%). Among those student-participants recalling values, females were more likely to recall fathers communicating traditional values about abstinence, sexuality and morals, and love as a prerequisite to sexual activity than males ($X^2=25.39$, $df=9$, $p=.003$). No significant differences emerged for recall of maternal traditional values by student-participant biological sex ($X^2=15.48$, $df=12$, ns). Yet, daughters remembered being instructed to take responsibility ($n=19$), remain abstinent ($n=34$), and have love as a prerequisite for sexual activity ($n=19$).

Some communicated values evoked by student-participants contradicted the stereotypical messages in TSS by communicating nontraditional themes. Student-participants were able to recall 63 nontraditional values from mothers (32%) and 31 nontraditional values from fathers (17%). Student-participants were more likely to recall nontraditional values from mothers with sons receiving more nontraditional messages about love as a prerequisite for sex, remaining abstinent, taking responsibility for sexual activity and outcomes, and honesty in sexual relationships than daughters did about these subjects ($X^2=16.91$, $df=8$, $p=.03$). No significant differences were evident in student-participant's memories of paternal nontraditional values ($X^2=12.08$, $df=12$, ns).

Finally, student-participants recalled 10 (5%) maternal and 13 (10%) paternal miscellaneous values that were not directly reflective of traditional sexual scripts. Rather,

Frequencies for TSS values within parent-student conversations

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these miscellaneous values included references to homosexuality, healthcare, or self esteem values for example. However, no significant differences emerged in student-participants' lists of values for mothers ($X^2=3.65$, $df=3$, ns) or fathers ($X^2=2.04$, $df=3$, ns).

Mothers vs. Same-Sex Dyads

For the current study, two competing hypotheses were established assessing the moderating influence of parental and adolescent biological sex on the discussion of sexuality and relationships. Specifically, the goal was to determine whether mothers-child dyads or same-sex parent-child dyads were discussing these topics more frequently. To answer this question, student-participants were asked to choose their main source of sexuality information from a list including mother, father, sister/brother, friends, school, religious organization, doctor, books, television, movies, and other. Although participants were instructed to choose their main source of information, a large portion selected multiple "main sources" of information. Therefore, rather than eliminate those participants, all participant responses were included in the following analyses.

When asked to list their main source of information, 273 responses were given by student-participants. Of these responses, the single response grouping indicated that "friends" ($n=103$, 38%) were their main source of sexual information. Next, participants listed "mothers" ($n=38$, 14%), "school" ($n=36$, 12%), "television" ($n=27$, 10%), and "brother/sister" ($n=26$, 10%). Those sources listed least included "doctors" ($n=15$, 5%), "fathers" ($n=7$, 3%), "religious organizations" ($n=7$, 3%), "movies" ($n=4$, 1%), and "books" ($n=4$, 1%). The remaining 6% indicated they had "other" main sources of information about sexuality. In addition to the list of potential main sources of

information, student-participants were specifically asked to rank their mothers and fathers as sources of information (1=main source of info; 12=last possible source). On average, student-participants ranked mothers fifth ($M=5.38$, $SD=3.68$) and fathers eighth ($M=8.26$, $SD=3.50$). T-tests between male and female student-participants yielded a significant difference in the ranks of both mothers and fathers as sources of sexuality and relationships information. Female student-participants ranked mothers significantly higher than males did (female $M=4.72$, male $M=6.75$, $t=3.38$, $df=160$, $p<.001$). Male student-participants, however, ranked fathers as a higher source of information than female-participants (female $M=8.66$, male $M=7.49$, $t=-1.95$, $df=148$, $p<.05$).

In addition to gauging student-participants' rankings, the degree of openness about sexuality and relationship communication was assessed for all participants. Average openness scores for mothers and fathers were 5.59 ($SD=.96$) and 4.83 ($SD=1.19$), respectively. Student-participants were also asked to indicate their comfort levels discussing these topics with both mothers ($M=4.37$, $SD=1.22$) and fathers ($M=3.68$, $SD=1.29$). Male student-participants were significantly more comfortable discussing sexuality and relationships with fathers than female student-participants (female $M=3.53$, male $M=3.95$, $t=2.07$, $df=169$, $p<.05$). However, female student-participants indicated a significantly greater amount of openness with mothers than did male student-participants (female $M=4.58$, male $M=3.95$, $t=-3.29$, $df=169$, $p<.001$).

Post-Hoc Analyses

Although not previously hypothesized, it was determined that assessing the impact of parental communication on adolescent sexual behavior was necessary. To accomplish this goal, several t-test analyses were conducted using student-participants'

self-reported sexual activity as the grouping variable. No significant differences were observed between student-participants who reported being sexually active and those students who remained abstinent across number of topics recalled (mother $t=1.38$, $df=168$, ns; father $t=1.14$, $df=165$, ns), overall satisfaction (father $t=-.445$, $df=166$, ns; mother $t=.032$, $df=165$, ns), or satisfaction with the amount of communication (father $t=-.192$, $df=165$, ns; mother $t=.681$, $df=163$, ns), mother/father rankings as sources of information (mother $t=.412$, $df=158$, ns; father $t=-1.120$, $df=146$, ns), maternal ($t=-.277$, $df=158$, ns), paternal ($t=-.495$, $df=154$, ns), or student-participant openness (father $t=.203$, $df=166$, ns; mother $t=-.684$, $df=166$, ns).

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Discussion

Content of Parent-Child Discussions

The first research question raised in the current study sought to identify the sexuality and relationship topics addressed by parents and their adolescents. Consistent with previous research on parent-child sexuality research, parents and adolescents did appear to be having some discussion about sexuality and relationships (Fox & Inazu, 1980; Marsiglio & Mott, 1988; Tucker, 1989). A great majority of parents (168 mothers; 146 fathers; total N=177) were able to recall some discussion with adolescents. Further, student-participants confirmed parents' recollections; 165 students remembered at least one discussion with mothers and 125 students recalled at least one talk with fathers.

Given the previous research suggesting the positive impact parental communication about sexuality on sexual initiation and condom usage (Fisher, 1989; Whitaker, Miller, May, & Levin, 1998) the large number of parent-child discussions found in the current study was encouraging. Almost two-thirds of the students surveyed were sexually active. However, the average beginning age for sexual activity for this sample was (M=17.12yrs) above the national average. Although the outcomes of parent-adolescent discussions were not examined in this study, this sample's delay in the onset sexual activity could be related to the large number of parents willing to discuss sexual behavior and consequences.

In fact, when the number of topics listed by parents was considered, parents appeared to be very active discussing sexual activity and relationships. Mothers recalled covering an average of 6 topics with children while fathers listed an average of 3 topics. Yet, the number of topics recalled by parents was not unusually large, particularly given the potential positive impact parental communications may have on adolescent sexual

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behavior. Further, these numbers reflected parents' perceptions of parent-child conversations over approximately two decades. These topics, however, were not insignificant. In the current sample, there were both mothers and fathers who did not recall a single discussion regarding sexuality and relationships with their adolescent. The fact exists that some participants received no information regarding sexuality from parents. Yet, the average student in this sample received information across several topics from both mothers and fathers. Thus, while the overall breadth of topics may disappoint some family scholars, the existence of any communication within families should be encouraging.

Student-participants were also asked to recall the breadth of communication about sexuality and relationships within their families. Similar to parents, most student – participants had some discussion with mothers and fathers. Yet, not surprisingly, student-perceptions on the breadth of this communication differed from parents. When compared to parents' memories, students reported discussing fewer topics with both mothers and fathers. In the case of student-mother dyads, students recalled one-half the number of topics that mothers reported (M mothers topics=6; M student topics for mothers=3). Student-participants and father-participants were significantly more similar with fathers reporting an average of 3 topics to students' memories of 2 topics. Although some discrepancies in students' and parents' perceptions of topics might be expected, the large discrepancy between mothers and students was notable and directed attention to participant expectations and perceptions. It was impossible to determine whether mothers' or students' perceptions of the breadth of conversations was more accurate to actual conversations. In fact, some researchers suggest that both students' and mothers'

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perceptions may not reflect actual conversation at all. For instance, a family may be prompted into a “discussion” by a shared experience, such as viewing a public service announcement on safe sex practices. The parent, inspired to open communication by the advertisement, may comment on the actor starring in the commercial. The student may ignore the comment, respond superficially, or engage in conversation. The outcome (or even the beginning) of this conversation on sexuality may depend on that student’s perception of the parent’s intentions. Certainly it is easy to conceive of the student dismissing the parent’s comment. Later, the same student (as a participant) cannot recall any parental conversation while his/her parent recalls at least one! There were multiple explanations for the parent-adolescent perception discrepancies including the above example, not accounting for topical depth, or even faulty memory. Considering the similarity between students’ and fathers’ topical recall, one might argue that the large difference between students and mothers was the product of intense social desirability for mothers. Both fathers and students agreed that fathers and adolescents don’t talk a great deal about sexuality and relationships. The same students reported that mothers and adolescents don’t cover a great many topics either. However, mother-participants indicated discussing two-times as many topics as students’ recalled. This difference (in comparison to the considerable similarity of students and fathers) could indicate that mothers felt pressure to show they had talked with children. As family care-takers, mothers might feel a greater responsibility to protect other family members. This protection could include showing others (e.g., within the survey) they had managed and cared for their offspring through discussions about sexuality and relationships.

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In spite of discrepancies in the number of topics discussed, parents and students showed significant agreement across the types of topics recalled. Overall, there seem to be several “hot topics” in families. All participants reported discussing morals, such as religious beliefs or codes of conduct, relationships, including dating advice, marriage and divorce, and pregnancy, such as avoiding pregnancy, birth control or child-birth most frequently. The overwhelming agreement among mothers’, fathers’, and students’ memories suggested these topics were particularly salient among American families. The importance of these topics in families could reflect recent media attention and public service announcements addressing the consequences of sexual activity. Current public service announcements have capitalized on “star power” by featuring prominent media personalities in “safe sex” campaigns. Popular teen sitcoms have addressed pregnancy scares, sexually transmitted diseases, and romantic heartbreaks. Yet, parents and adolescents reported discussing pregnancy and relationships most while safe sex issues, such as sexually transmitted diseases, fell in the midpoint of topical discussions. This lack of “safe sex” discussion in families mimicked the findings of sexuality research on dating couples’ (Metts & Fitzpatrick, 1992; Welch-Cline, Johnson, & Freeman, 1992). Welch-Cline, Johnson, and Freeman (1992) have argued that most individuals discuss sexually transmitted diseases in general, non-specific manner (e.g., “Having AIDS would really suck”). Metts and Fitzpatrick (1992) suggested that these general talks are further complicated by the fact that individuals rely upon their intuition to pick “safe” partners. These “safe sex” myths may create a false sense of security among parents and adolescents alike leading to limited (or general) talk about sexually transmitted diseases in families. Rather, families concentrated on more “important” topics, such as pregnancy.

It may be that parents, in particular, focused on those topics thought to be the biggest threat. For example, one mother recalled telling her son that “a pregnancy will ruin your life – not just the girl’s.” The other most frequently discussed topic was “morals.” Similar to pregnancy, the “biggest threat,” parents discussing morals and religion may have focused on the topic they thought to be the biggest prevention. If the most frequently discussed topics reflect parents’ views of the biggest threats (or preventions) to sexual behavior, the least discussed topics may have indicated the “taboo” or unimportant topics.

In addition to similar reports of frequently discussed topics, parents and adolescents agreed on those topics not discussed within their families. Students, fathers, and mothers all agreed that homosexuality, infidelity, and peer pressure were rarely discussed. It was difficult to determine the reasons for the lack of discussion, although these topics mirror previous research on those topics avoided by parents (Koblinsky & Atkinson, 1982; Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, & Ham, 1998). One might speculate that these represent the most difficult discussion topics. Parents may remain uncomfortable with the prospect of their teenage son or daughter declaring attraction to a same-sex partner. Perhaps issues such as infidelity and peer pressure were dismissed or not fully understood by parents. Or, adolescents may not felt comfortable addressing the pressures they were facing from boy/girlfriends, infidelity, or their sexuality identity with parents (Aldous, 1993; Jaccard & Dittus, 1991).

Regardless of parental comfort, there appeared to be few sex differences in the topics parents recalled discussing with children. Mothers, in particular, didn’t seem to discriminate in the types of topics they discussed with their male and female children. Although the exact content of these discussions was not assessed, it appeared that certain

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topics were viewed as essential for all adolescents, regardless of biological sex. One significant difference in the topics discussed by parents was the lack of “general sex talk” by fathers with daughters. Like mothers, fathers discussed most other topics with male and female children, such as biological differences, pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, and relationships. This topical difference by fathers might have indicated paternal discomfort with sexuality and relationships talk. In other words, fathers may avoid casual conversation (or “general sex talk”) with daughters because of discomfort (Aldous, 1993; Jaccard & Dittus, 1991). Rather, fathers preferred to remain silent until a specific need or issue was raised, such as pregnancy or sexual violence.

However, it appeared that fathers may not be comfortable with their ‘silent’ role. Both mothers and fathers expressed a need for “more openness” about sexuality with their adolescent. Student-participants concurred; In addition to desiring more talk about relationships and gender issues, adolescents wanted “more openness” in general with parents. In fact, there were several topics that student-participants indicated they would have liked to discuss with parents that parents did not include in lists, such as “approval of sexual activity,” “birth control,” and “masturbation.” Parents, on the other hand, had an interest in discussing “relationship issues” and “abstinence” more. The contrast between parents’ prevention attitudes (e.g., more talk about abstinence) and adolescents’ requests for information exhibited a fundamental difference in how parents and adolescents perceive sexuality. Student-participants felt as though they could benefit from parental experiences. In general, student-participants expressed a desire to be more open with parents, hearing about parents’ difficulties and sharing their own. One female student responded by saying “I wish my mom and I talked about her more. I want to

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know when she had sex [first], and what her relationships were like.” Student seemed to understand their parents as sexual beings – student-participants acknowledged that parents carried multiple roles including mom, dad, lover, friend, etc. Thus, student-participants seemed to view sexuality as a natural part of relationships with others. This attitude was evidenced in the topics students wanted to discuss: birth control or emotions. However, student-participants were also aware that parents did not share this view of sexuality. Several student-participants expressed a desire to talk about the positive aspects of sexuality, indicating a lack of this type of family discussion. In fact, student-participants may have been correct in their assessments of parents’ difficulties. Most parents expressed no desire to add additional topics and those who did wanted additional emphasis on relationships and abstinence. Thus, parents may have had difficulty viewing their adolescent outside the role of “daughter,” “son,” or “child.” Discussing sexuality in a positive manner, or accepting sexual activity by discussing birth control would force parents to acknowledge the multiple roles their children play, such as “lover,” “friend,” and possibly “partner.” Parents’ difficulty in or unwillingness to acknowledging these same roles for their adolescents may further explain the dearth of parent-child communication about sexuality.

Communication and Satisfaction

The second and third research questions addressed the satisfaction levels of parents and adolescents with their communication regarding sexuality and relationships. Previous research on satisfaction levels was unclear as to whether or not parents and adolescents were satisfied with their communication. The results of the current study may offer an explanation for previous ambiguity. Overall, it appeared that all participants,

students, mothers, and fathers, were moderately satisfied with their communication about sexuality and relationships. When asked about their overall positive feelings about their communication, participants' scores ranged between 3-5 on the 7-point scale (recoded so higher scores corresponded with greater satisfaction). However, when participant scores focused on the amount of communication, the satisfaction variance increased to 2.5-5.5 on the 7-point scale. Thus, participants appeared to distinguish between overall satisfaction feelings and their feelings regarding the amount of communication shared with parents/adolescents. These conceptual distinctions between amount of communication and overall feelings about communication could be key to understanding satisfaction within parent-adolescent sexual education: Parents, in particular, may feel as if they "did their best" educating their children about sexuality and relationships. Yet, these same parents may worry they "left something out." These competing tensions were summed up by one mother-participant who expressed her sentiments in the margin of her survey: "Is there ever enough talk about this?"

Student-participants may have experienced similar feelings. As with the parents, student-participants were mostly neutral about talks with parents. However, student-participants were more satisfied when reflecting on their overall feelings about interactions than they were about the amount of communication with mothers and fathers. Students may view parents as doing an adequate job providing overall information, especially if this information was evaluated in terms of accuracy or factual content. Yet, the lower amount of communication satisfaction scores suggested that students want more communication with parents. Correlations between communication breadth and satisfaction scores were strongly related for parents and student-participants. Thus,

student-participants, in particular, want more communication with parents, but feel mostly neutral about their overall communication interactions.

An examination of participants' expectations for communication about sexuality and relationship may offer one explanation for these seemingly contradictory satisfaction results. Expectancy Violation Theory (see Burgoon, 1978; Burgoon & Hale, 1988) posits that an individual's expectations for what should happen during interactions will greatly effect that individual's satisfaction with that interaction. For instance, a daughter has minimal expectations that her mother will discuss sexuality and relationships. The mother meets her daughters' expectations by never approaching the subject of sexuality. Thus, this daughter may desire more talk with her mother, but is relatively satisfied because her expectations for parent-child interactions were confirmed. The student-participants in this sample may have had few expectations for parents regarding sexuality and relationships. Previous research (Brown, Childers, & Waszak, 1990; DiClemente, 1991; Moore, Miller, Gleib, & Morrison, 1995) and the current study suggested that adolescents receive the majority of their sexual information for non-parent sources, such as friends or school. Thus, student-participants may be moderately satisfied with their (lack of) discussion with parents because the students don't expect to receive (or need) this information from parents. The expectancy violation explanation for satisfaction scores was further strengthened by the sex differences between fathers and adolescents. All student-participants wanted more interactions with fathers. Yet, the lowest satisfaction scores (both overall and with amount) were reported by daughters. Female students, more than anyone else, were unhappy with fathers' participation. Given the amount (or lack thereof) of communication fathers and students reported for this topic, it appeared as though

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students were not happy with fathers' silence. Yet, overall satisfaction scores were more neutral and a good number of student-participants couldn't think of any other topic they would have liked to discuss with their fathers. Since previous research has indicated a father may have more difficulty discussing these topics with children, the children (and the fathers) may not expect fathers to participate in sexuality education. In fact, parents' satisfaction may also be influenced by expectations for communication about sexuality and relationships. Unlike student-participants' satisfaction that was influenced by parental biological sex, adolescent biological sex had no influence on parental satisfaction. Mothers and fathers' feelings about sexual communication didn't appear to be linked to whom they talked to. Rather, mothers' and fathers' satisfaction with sexual communication may be tied to parental expectations about what topics parents "should" be talking about with children. For instance, a mother may feel that "parents should talk about pregnancy and AIDS, but not masturbation" with her children. If this mother covers these topics (meeting her expectations) she will report higher satisfaction scores, regardless of whether she talked to her son or daughter. This conclusion is corroborated by the large number of parents who didn't believe there was any additional information to discuss with their children. Thus, parental satisfaction may be a function of meeting internal expectations rather than external context, such as adolescent sex or age.

Overall, scores indicated that parents and adolescents wanted to talk more about sexuality and relationships. However, mothers seemed particularly satisfied with the amount of communication they described within their families. Given the strong positive relationship between amount of communication and satisfaction, mothers' feelings were most likely related to the large number of topics mother-participants recalled discussing.

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Yet, this number contrasted sharply with the number of topics recalled by student-participants. These findings mirrored Sillars, Pike, Jones, and Murphy's (1984) examination of satisfaction and conflict topics in marital couples. Husbands and wives were asked to self-report measures of satisfaction and conflict topics as well as provide their perceptions their spouses' responses. Results indicated that perceived similarity (the similarity of one's own score and the perception of spouse's response) was positively correlated to satisfaction for both husband and wives. However, understanding (similarity between your perception of spouse and your spouse's actual answer) in couples was negatively related to satisfaction. Sillars et al. concluded that couples' perceptions of similarity, regardless of their actual agreement on conflict issues, were better contributors to overall marital success. Sillars et al.'s findings related to parents' satisfaction scores as well. Mothers' satisfaction scores were greater than fathers' scores. According to Sillars et al., this difference could be attributed to the discrepancy between mothers' understanding scores and perceived similarity. Mothers were happier because they overestimated the number of topics they had discussed with adolescents. Fathers, on the other hand, had greater understanding of the topics they had actually discussed with their children. As a result, fathers were less satisfied than mothers. Like Sillars et al.'s married couples, parental perceptions were a stronger indicator of communication satisfaction than actual agreement between adolescent and parent memories.

Gender and Communication about Sexuality

The fourth research question sought to determine whether or not parental messages and values about sexuality and relationships served as an origin of sexual

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stereotypes (TSS). To reach an answer, participants were asked to recall the dialogue of one particular conversation and any parental values communicated.

Regarding actual conversations, a large number of participants (students 70%; parents 62%) were able to remember the details of a specific dialogue regarding sexuality and relationships. The large number of recalled messages suggested parents and children did speak about these topics. And, consistent with topical findings above, participants agreed that mothers conversed more often than fathers. Overall, it was particularly interesting that most recalled messages contained multiple units of analysis. Both parent and student-participants recalled specific conversations, but those conversations frequently included multiple parts.. For example, one participant remembered his mother saying “She told me that if I wasn’t mature enough to go into a store and buy condoms than I shouldn’t be having sex. She talked about taking care of my girlfriend and respect.” Research on cognitive processing has suggested that these memories probably represent multiple conversations cognitively combined into a single dialogue. This confusion was best represented in the number of times student-participants who wrote multiple messages such as “we never discussed this at all!” and then included “my father told me that I should wait to have sex.” Thus, it was difficult to determine whether the combined messages within a single conversation were characteristic of actual conversations between parents and children or were a function of participants’ memories.

Participants also had multiple responses to items requesting values about sexuality and relationships. These multiple responses were even more numerous than the multiple conversation units described upon. However, the frequency of lengthy “value” lists across all participants may have reflected the survey format: The previous item requested

a single conversation while the value item elicited “any of the values.” Yet the plethora of values recalled was theoretically meaningful when the wording of the value item was more closely examined. The questionnaire item specifically requested “any of the values that you [your mother/father] wanted to instill in your son/daughter [you].” This item requested that participants reflect upon the teaching or instruction of parents: a summary of the “educator role” parents may have filled. Some participants could not identify with this role and indicated so by leaving the item blank or writing “nothing,” “didn’t do this,” “or “I cannot recall a single value my father tried to teach me.” Yet, a large number of participants could respond, suggesting that parents (and adolescents) accepted, and perhaps expected, parents to teach, instill, and educate their children. These responses would have predicted by advocates of learning theories. According to Social Learning Theory (see Rotter, 1954), individuals develop personality, attitudes toward others, and even gender identities, through observation and imitation of others. Children especially mimic and imitate those around them, particularly peers, parents, and even mass media role models. Social Learning Theory would suggest that the multiple responses from parents and adolescents simply reflected this learning process. Parents were acting as instructors and their children acknowledged this role by recognizing (and repeating) the values parents tried to instill.

Social Learning theorists would argue this transmission of values from parent to child should manifest in the child’s behavior. Yet, the goals of the current study did not include assessing outcome variables directly, such as whether or not student-participants adhered to the same parental values. Rather, the current study examined the communicative process within Social Learning theory and, it was believed, also offered

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support for the utility of learning theories in the context of family relationships. This support was seen as particularly convincing when the similarity between values and actual conversation topics was considered. Although multiple values were listed, most conversations mirrored these same values. For example, parents and student-participants acknowledged parents believed in abstinence and talked about abstinence. Indeed, parents appeared to be taking action in their role as “life instructors” of their adolescents demonstrating in the verbal transmission of values.

Overall, the presence of traditional sexual scripting was very evident within the values and conversations recalled by parents and children. Given that participants were unaware and not prompted to recall a specific type of message (other than the topic “sexuality and relationships”), the emergence of these gendered themes was even more noteworthy. It suggests that everyday conversations about sexuality and relationships within families were framed around gender stereotypes. Further, the values being taught by parents were founded on a sexual double standard for “what boys should/can do” and “what girls should/can do.” Over 50% of all parental messages reflected traditional assumptions about sex roles. And, male and female children receiving traditional messages were hearing very different content. Traditional messages to females involved gate keeping and resisting sexual advances in order to remain abstinent while traditional messages to males centered on condoning sexual activity. Certainly the frequency and content of the traditional messages in families was evidence of society’s sexual double standard: “Women should say ‘no’ and men should be careful.”

Some parents, however, did reject TSS stereotypes by discussing and promoting nontraditional sexual attitudes. Nontraditional messages included those advocating

abstinence or gatekeeping duties for men and encouraging sexual activity and exploration for women. However, when examined by participant sex, results revealed sons received the majority of nontraditional messages. Female participants, on the other hand, could not recall many messages reinforcing nontraditional sexual attitudes. Instead, female participants received messages encouraging TSS themes of abstinence and sexual naivety. At first glance, the “traditional” and “nontraditional” division between male/female messages from parents appeared to be reinforcing gender inequity: Men were free to break with prescribed roles while women were subject to constraints. However, the content of these messages and values revealed that both male and female student-participants were being given identical messages. Both male and female students were being instructed to take responsibility for sexual activity/outcomes and make sure they were in love before sexual activity. The similarity in topics could have reflected parents’ greater comfort with their sons’ sexuality. Parents may have assumed that their sons would be sexually active. Therefore, the nontraditional messages to sons focused on protection. The traditional messages to daughters, however, may have reinforced prohibition as sending daughters nontraditional messages about sexuality would have acknowledged and offered approval of women’s sexual activity. The similarity of topical messages to sons and daughters could have also represented verbal declarations of parental higher order goals: keep the kids safe, teach responsibility. Parents viewed certain topics as important regardless of adolescent sex. Thus, some beliefs about romantic relationships transcended the specific relationship context (e.g., adolescent sex or age).

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In spite of these overarching values, the fact remained that parents did socialize daughters differently than sons. For the most part, mothers of daughters discussed abstinence and sexual gatekeeping more frequently than mothers of sons. Fathers talked to their daughters about the chance of sexual violence. In fact, only 2 mothers and 5 fathers discussed saying “no” to sexual advances with their sons. Although it may be an exaggeration to say these sexual stereotypes originated within the family, particularly when most adolescents receive the majority of their information from source outside the family, it was safe to conclude that families may be reinforcing these traditional sexual beliefs. And, student-participants recollections of discussions matched their parents’: female students were aware parents want them to remain abstinent while male students were being told to take responsibility for their actions (e.g., use a condom, since we know you’ll have sex).

The practical implications of these double standards point toward sexual education practices in general. All adolescents were being told to avoid casual sexual relations and, for the most part, to remain abstinent. However, women were given the responsibility to say “no” to the sexual advances. In addition, only women were being told to “be careful” and stay informed about sexual assault. The myth of the male sex drive, on the other hand, presupposed it would be difficult or impossible for men to avoid sexual interactions. If abstinence, or safer sex practices, are the goals of current sexual education programs than these programs need to examine their underlying assumptions. Programs (or families!) which endorsed abstinence by instructing women to “just say no” and to “be careful” of the uncontrollable male animal are unfair to both sexes (Burt, 1980). Men are demeaned by viewing them as irrational and dangerous while women’s

sexuality is ignored completely. The underlying TSS in American society's communication about sexuality may be causing more harm than the lack of discussion. In other words, how we talk about sexual activity is more dangerous than how little we talk. Reinforcing sexual stereotypes cannot possibly make sexual education programs more successful in preventing disease or unwanted pregnancy. Rather, equal and normalized attention needs to be given to male and female sexual activity. Instruction should address female sexuality (not simply reproduction) and men's responsibility as sexual gatekeepers. Perhaps American society has assumed too long that "real men don't say 'no'" when, in fact, they aren't sure how to say "no." Further, women were left struggling with their own sexual feelings and the responsibility of the gatekeeper role. Facilitators of sexual education, whether parents or professional, need to provide both male and female students with the tools to discuss their own sexuality and develop problem-solving skills.

Mothers vs. Same-Sex Dyads

Previous literature has been ambiguous as to which parent took primary responsibility for communication about sexuality and relationships in families. Psychodynamic theorists (see Chodorow, 1989) suggested that same-sex dyads would most often be the context in which parents discussed these topics. Other literature (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Miller, Norton, Jensen, Lee, Christopherson, & Lee, 1993; Wood, 1993), however, predicted that mothers, as females and family care-takers, would feel the need to educate their children, regardless of the child's biological sex. In terms of amount of communication, it appeared that students and parents agreed that mothers do more talking than fathers. For example, 165 student participants recalled messages from mothers while only 125 students recalled messages from fathers. Yet, these messages

represented topical breadth, not depth. One assessment of topical depth could be communication openness and comfort. Although these two concepts were not synonymous, communication openness about sexuality was most likely present among individuals who discuss sexuality in great depth. Once again, all participants indicated that conversations with mothers were characterized by more comfort and openness than those with fathers. Student-participants indicated that they were more comfortable discussing sexuality and relationship with mothers. Correspondingly, mothers indicated greater comfort with these topics than did fathers. Participants' comfort scores, on the surface, appeared to support the "mother as family manager" model: Students were more comfortable talking with mothers, mothers were more comfortable talking than fathers. Thus, mothers must do the majority of the educating.

However, these openness scores contained an interesting sex difference. Parental openness scores did not differ by adolescent biological sex. Mothers were comfortable talking to male and female children while fathers were uncomfortable talking to male and female children. However, male and female student-participants did differ in their comfort levels. Male students appeared to prefer talking to fathers while female student-participants preferred mothers. This sex difference was interesting, yet deceiving unless average comfort scores were examined. In other words, both male and female student-participants were uncomfortable talking with fathers about sexuality, male participants were simply *less* uncomfortable than their female peers. In contrast, both male and female student-participants were at or above the midpoint of the comfort/openness scale. It is important to note, however, that parents expressed greater comfort with these topics than student-participants. While students were more open with mothers, overall student-

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participants were not particularly enthusiastic about sharing information about sexuality with parents.

One could suggest multiple reasons that an adolescent would not feel comfortable discussing sexuality with his/her parents. First, parent-participants reports of feeling above average comfort with these topics could have been influenced by social desirability. Parents may feel intense pressure (or hold expectations) to be open with their children when, in fact, they were embarrassed and uncomfortable. Some parent-participants openly admitted their fear or discomfort with this topic by writing explanations within the survey margins. For instance, one father indicated “I believe it is the school system’s responsibility to educate my children. I do not talk to them about sex.” “My husband [wife] took care of this...” was not an uncommon response from parents. One might picture a parent who proclaims his/her openness and boasts of high comfort only to judge, criticize, or nonverbally disapprove when approached. This parent later exclaims “I’m open to talking...my student doesn’t want to talk to me!” A second reason might center on the adolescent’s embarrassment. Student-participants may fear judgment or condemnation from parents, even if parents are open to discussion. These adolescent fears were reflected in student-participants’ responses to “what do you wish you had talked about” with parents. A large number of student-participants wanted to hear “approval of sexuality” from parents. In several cases, student-participants indicated they did not want parents to condone reckless or frequent sexual activity but, rather, inform them of the positive aspects of sexuality. One female participant wrote: “I wish my mother told me how beautiful sex can be, when you are with the ‘right’ person. Instead she just tried to scare me off [having sex]. I think hearing how special [sex] is

would make me want to wait for the right guy.” These sentiments may be particularly salient for sexually active adolescents who have moved beyond simple abstinent messages but still would like parents’ advice in negotiating the difficult emotional aspects of sexuality.

Participant comfort levels gave some indication that mothers may be taking on the responsibility for family sexual education. Examining student-participants’ ranking of their sources of information regarding sexuality and relationships may confirm this conclusion. Student-participants were first asked to indicate their primary source of information about sexuality and relationships. Participants chose between a variety of possible information sources, such as school, mother, father, siblings, friends, etc. According to student-participants, adolescents rely predominantly on friends to provide information about sexuality and relationships. Mothers were ranked second (although a full 60 people behind first place “friends”). Fathers, however, ranked significantly lower, equal in information to “religious organizations” and not too far ahead of “movies” and “books.” In this sample, student-participants were more likely to turn to television for information about sexuality than their own fathers. Further conformation of fathers’ silence is the individual parental rankings. Student-participants were also asked to rank their parents (mother and father separately) on a 1-12 scale where “1=main source of information” and “12=last source.” Results once again indicated that mothers supplied more information than fathers, with mothers averaging fifth and fathers eighth. And, although sons ranked fathers significantly higher source of information than daughters, sons still paced fathers seventh while they ranked mothers sixth. Further examination of the standard deviation scores suggested that mother could fall into the “second/third”

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ranking position for a significant number of people. Fathers, however, had little chance of moving beyond a ranking of fourth.

These findings offered support for maternal model of parental socialization. Although student-participants were more comfortable and more likely to seek information from sources outside the family, mothers were the “in family” expert on sexuality and relationships. This perspective offers interesting practical application in regards to sexual assault and violence. Currently, the focus of sexual assault prevention has been on education. Women are being instructed to “be careful” and men are being instructed that “no means no.” Unfortunately, this education falls short as women are more likely to be attacked, raped, injured, or killed by current or former male partners than by any other type of assailant (Browne & Williams, 1993; Langan & Innes, 1986). The introduction of “date rape drugs” suggests that sexual violence is on the increase, rather than decline. Perhaps one way to affect these statistics is the modification of current educational messages targeted solely at late adolescence to include parents. Mothers appeared to be providing the majority of the information about sexuality and relationships in families. Therefore, encouraging mothers to include discussions of sexual consent presents an opportunity to shape adolescents’ attitudes about sexual violence. Although mothers and student-participants recalled some talks about sexual violence (see Table 1), these conversations were salient for less than 20% of the sample. Targeting maternal education on sexual assault and violence could offer another avenue of sexual assault prevention.

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Post-Hoc Analyses

Although the current study sought to examine the communication processes surrounding sexuality education in families, the outcomes of these processes cannot be ignored. Therefore, the relationship between communication variables such as openness with sexuality topics, satisfaction, breadth of topic discussion, and primary course of information was assessed in regard to student-participants' sexual activity. Previous studies have indicated that variable specificity was crucial when examining causal relationships, such as the factors leading to adolescent condom usage and abstinence. Certainly, the post-hoc analyses conducted in the current study failed to meet the specificity requirements. One may not expect a student's ranking of his/her parent as a primary source of information, or a student's openness in discussing general sexuality issues to predict actual sexual behavior. However, with the obvious limitations raised, the lack of significant findings in this area were interesting. Previous studies have indicated that increased parental communication about sexual behavior led to postponement of sexual activity in adolescents (Whitaker & Miller, 2000). However, very little research has examined the predictors of adolescent abstinence, a variable slightly different than timing of sexual activity onset. Approximately one-third of the student-participants sampled were self-identified as abstinent, or "virgins." However, these student-participants did not differ from their sexually active peers in terms of openness, satisfaction, source of information, or breadth of communication. Thus, the current study suggested that adolescent sexual activity was not affected by external predictors. Instead, an adolescent's decision to remain abstinent may be internally motivated. Thus, remaining abstinent, or choosing to delay sexual activity may lie in the same belief

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systems that motivate some students to attend graduate school, some to train for the Olympics, and others to work 60+hours per week. While some external factors were influential, the crux of these decisions may lay in personal motivation. If this was the case, these findings suggested the need to alter the focus of current sexual education programs. Generic “be safe” public service announcements that did not target specific personal motives would be expected to fail. Further, school curriculums designed to educate adolescents about the dangers of sex and need for protection may not reach those students whose decisions about sexual activity rest in personal beliefs about sexuality. These students would ignore generic messages about condoms and sexually transmitted issues. While the current study should not be used to discount the role of external preventive programs, it may provide a new framework for future program structure incorporating motive and possible peer education.

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Conclusion

The goals of the current study included identifying the content of parent-student dialogue about sexuality and relationships. Overall, it appeared that parents and their children were talking somewhat about these issues. Findings mirrored previous research on topics talked about and avoided (pregnancy and relationships vs. homosexuality and infidelity). Further, both male and female adolescents were discussing the same types of topics: Parents did not seem to discriminate by biological sex. Although previous studies have expressed mixed satisfaction results, participants in the current study revealed low to moderate satisfaction with their communication. Overall, participants agreed that increased communication about sexuality and relationships was necessary and desirable. Indeed, results indicated that satisfaction was positively related to the number of topics discussed by parents and adolescents. This relationship was especially strong for mothers, who appeared to take on the role of family “sex educator” regardless of her child’s biological sex. In general, fathers appeared to be less involved in the sexual education of their female *and* male offspring. In terms of social learning theory, the current study offered evidence of parents as instructors of children. Most student-participants were cogniscent of the parental values and the explicit manner in which these values were shared. In many instances, these conversations had the potential to teach adolescents about gender roles. However, traditional sexual scripts served as predominant theme for messages and values. Thus, familial interactions may offer another potential source of sexual inequity.

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Limitations

On the whole this research demonstrated the content, satisfaction, and gendered beliefs evident in parent-adolescent discussions of sexuality and relationships. However, there were several results and difficulties that were not predicted at the onset of this project. First, although the goals of the current study did not include assessing the direct influence of parental messages upon adolescents' own behaviors, the lack of outcome measures could be considered a limitation. Social Learning Theory centers upon the prediction of modeled behaviors by those experiencing the reinforcements of role models. In this study, parental messages were evident, yet the impact of these messages was not assessed through any meaningful measures. Understanding this connection between communication and practice could have offered valuable theoretical and practical implications to others.

Second, the generalizability of the current study was potentially limited by the sample's demographic make-up. The current sample was predominantly Caucasian, living in intact families with two biological parents. Previous research has found ethnicity to be a moderating factor in the frequency of parent-adolescent communication about sexual activity (Furstenberg, et al., 1984; Inazu & Fox, 1980; Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 1998; Leland & Barth, 1993). Further, research has shown that one-parent families have more fluid gender roles than traditional two-parent families (Amato, 1991; Leve & Fagot, 1997; Leaper, Leve, Strasser, & Schwartz, 1995). Thus, the findings particularly related to Traditional Sexual Script themes must take family status into account.

Third, and finally, a methodological issue may have created a bias in participants' answers. Participants were asked to recall a specific conversation about sexuality

followed by a measure of openness. These measures were not counterbalanced during data collection. Thus, participants' openness scores could be a direct function of the single, recalled conversation. For example, a daughter could recall a single, salient conversation when her mother was particularly busy, unresponsive, or uncomfortable. Despite this mother's overall openness with her daughter regarding sexuality, the daughter's memory of this singular incident might cloud her responses the openness and comfort items immediately following. For this reason, results concerning satisfaction and openness, in particular, should be considered tentative.

Future Research

The objectives of the current study focused on understanding the role of communication in parent-adolescent interactions. Primarily, parent-adolescent communication about sexuality and relationship was examined. While the results addressed several issues surrounding parental satisfaction and communication, additional questions were raised by this research. First, the current study did not overtly distinguish between the parental messages received by abstinent and sexually active student-participants. Thus, future research should examine the influence of these parental messages upon adolescents' sexual decision-making. In addition, the content of parental messages and values might vary among those adolescents choosing to avoid sexual activity.

Expectancy Violation Theory offers a second area for future research. The current study determined that adolescents and parents were moderately satisfied with their conversations, yet the majority didn't express a desire to change current interactions. One explanation could involve participants' expectancies. Participants who don't believe

parents have much to offer regarding sexuality may be happy with little input.

Conversely, individuals who feel parents are primary educators could be hurt by limited discussion. This was most evident in the satisfaction and discussion differences between mothers and fathers. Therefore, future research should consider the role of expectations in parent-adolescent communication about sexuality and relationships.

Table 1

Frequency of Topics Discussed by Participant

Topic	Student for mother	Mother	Student for father	Father
Abstinence	28 (4.8%)	27 (3.4%)	11 (3.8%)	16 (3.7%)
Abuse	9 (1.5%)	28 (3.5%)	3 (1%)	16 (3.7%)
Emotional differences	13 (2.2%)	23 (2.9%)	8 (2.8%)	16 (3.7%)
Emotions	20 (3.4%)	54 (6.7%)	11 (3.8%)	21 (4.9%)
General 'sex' talk	65 (11.1%)	73 (9.1%)	36 (12.4%)	40 (9.3%)
HIV, STDs	46 (7.8%)	81 (10.1%)	29 (10%)	43 (10%)
Homosexuality	9 (1.5%)	13 (1.6%)	3 (1%)	3 (.7%)
Infidelity	7 (1.2%)	9 (1.1%)	4 (1.4%)	5 (1.2%)
Morals	80 (13.6%)	117 (14.6%)	32 (11%)	70 (16.4%)
Miscellaneous	18 (3%)	28 (3.5%)	10 (3.4%)	15 (3.5%)
Peer pressure	2 (.3%)	11 (1.4%)	–	4 (.9%)
Physical differences	56 (9.5%)	58 (7.2%)	27 (9.3%)	20 (4.7%)
Pregnancy	111 (18.9%)	112 (14%)	34 (11.7%)	62 (14.5%)
Relationships	110 (18.7%)	126 (15.7%)	77 (26.5%)	81 (18.9%)
Self esteem	2 (1.9%)	20 (2.5%)	2 (.7%)	11 (2.6%)
Timing of sex	11 (1.9%)	22 (2.7%)	3 (1%)	5 (1.2%)
TOTAL	587	802	290	428

Note. Dashes indicate no participant response matched the category. Parentheses contain the percentage of the total number of messages for each group.

Table 2

Chi-square Analyses for Participant Sex by Parental Topics

Topics	<u>Fathers</u>		<u>Mothers</u>	
	X ²	Significance	X ²	Significance
Abstinence	.198	.65	1.61	.204
Abuse	2.39	.122	1.95	.162
Emotional differences	2.39	.122	2.76	.097
Emotions	.634	.426	.057	.811
General 'sex' talk	6.65	.010**	.089	.766
HIV, STDs	.276	.60	.238	.626
Homosexuality	1.74	.186	.597	.44
Infidelity	.031	.861	2.25	.134
Morals	.796	.372	.93	.335
Miscellaneous	.064	.801	1.18	.278
Peer pressure	2.34	.126	2.99	.084
Physical differences	5.63	.018*	1.90	.168
Pregnancy	.66	.415	1.88	.171
Relationships	.693	.405	2.03	.154
Self esteem	1.69	.194	7.93	.005**
Timing of sex	.031	.861	1.15	.283

Note. For all cases, df = 1.

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

Table 3

“One Thing I Wished We Had Discussed” Topics

Topics	Students for mothers	Students for fathers	Mothers	Fathers
“Nothing”	27	26	35	31
Seriousness of sexual activity	12	6	7	2
More openness	16	16	14	17
Rape/violence	2	1	3	1
Consequences	10	8	3	3
Relationship issues	13	10	15	9
Abstinence	2	1	5	9
Gender issues	11	21	5	1
Values	--	1	2	2
Approval of sexual activity	13	9	1	--
Biological differences	6	11	4	--
Homosexuality	--	--	--	--
Birth control	7	5	--	2
Masturbation	--	1	--	--
Miscellaneous	--	1	1	3
Total	119	117	95	80

Note. Dashes indicate no participant response matched the category.

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Table 4

Parental-Participant Satisfaction with Communication by Topic

Topics	Mothers		Fathers	
	Amount ^a t value (p)	Valance ^a t value (p)	Amount ^b t value (p)	Valance ^c t value (p)
Abstinence	-.204 (.84)	.151 (.88)	1.43 (.16)	1.03 (.30)
Abuse	.393 (.70)	.818 (.42)	.487 (.63)	.546 (.59)
Emotional differences	-.837 (.40)	.05 (.96)	.157 (.88)	-.27 (.79)
Emotions	.10 (.92)	.778 (.44)	.578 (.56)	2.12 (.04)*
General 'sex' talk	2.65 (.01)	2.92 (.00)	3.38 (.001)**	2.16 (.03)*
HIV, STDs	.774 (.44)	.706 (.24)	1.89 (.06)	.95 (.34)
Homosexuality	1.16 (.25)	1.45 (.15)	1.59 (.12)	.779 (.44)
Infidelity	-.954 (.34)	-.386 (.70)	-.405 (.69)	.282 (.78)
Morals	-1.62 (.11)	-1.10 (.27)	2.12 (.04)*	1.63 (.11)
Miscellaneous	-.62 (.54)	.15 (.88)	.457 (.65)	-.224 (.82)
Peer pressure	-1.65 (.10)	-.516 (.61)	1.12 (.27)	.961 (.34)
Physical differences	1.84 (.07)	1.96 (.05)*	1.95 (.05)*	1.40 (.16)
Pregnancy	3.63 (.00)**	2.54 (.01)**	2.52 (.01)**	2.74 (.01)**
Relationships	.546 (.59)	.353 (.73)	.672 (.50)	1.51 (.13)
Self esteem	.798 (.42)	1.43 (.16)	.132 (.89)	.259 (.80)
Timing of sex	.499 (.62)	1.23 (.22)	.491 (.62)	1.25 (.21)

^adf = 154. ^bdf = 140. ^cdf = 136.

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

Table 5

Student-Participant Satisfaction with Parental Communication by Topic

Topics	Mothers		Fathers	
	Amount ^a t value (p)	Valance ^b t value (p)	Amount ^c t value (p)	Valance ^d t value (p)
Abstinence	-2.16 (.03)*	-1.74 (.08)	-.224 (.83)	-.308 (.77)
Abuse	-.688 (.49)	-.799 (.43)	.93 (.37)	.274 (.78)
Emotional differences	-.570 (.57)	.296 (.77)	1.49 (.14)	1.05 (.30)
Emotions	2.13 (.04)*	.860 (.39)	.543 (.59)	.644 (.52)
General 'sex' talk	7.27 (.00)**	5.26 (.00)**	4.31 (.00)**	3.47 (.00)**
HIV, STDs	4.45 (.00)**	3.95 (.00)**	2.66 (.01)**	1.54 (.13)
Homosexuality	.711 (.48)	.195 (.85)	-2.30 (.02)*	-2.33 (.02)*
Infidelity	1.18 (.24)	.95 (.34)	.634 (.53)	.279 (.78)
Morals	2.92 (.00)**	1.83 (.07)	3.93 (.00)**	2.88 (.00)**
Miscellaneous	.423 (.67)	.616 (.54)	2.78 (.01)**	1.80 (.08)
Peer pressure	1.12 (.26)	.893 (.37)	--	--
Physical differences	3.14 (.00)**	1.52 (.13)	2.95 (.00)**	2.03 (.04)*
Pregnancy	-1.06 (.27)	-1.68 (.09)	6.54 (.00)**	4.26 (.00)**
Relationships	3.15 (.00)**	3.12 (.00)**	.293 (.77)	-.081 (.94)
Self esteem	-.290 (.77)	1.33 (.19)	-1.13 (.26)	-1.33 (.19)
Timing of sex	1.32 (.19)	.493 (.62)	-.130 (.90)	.897 (.37)

Note. Dashes indicate the t value was no calculated for that category.

^adf = 120. ^bdf = 159. ^cdf = 159. ^ddf = 121. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 6

Frequency of Student Recalled Messages by Traditional Sexual Script Category

Message	Mothers		Fathers	
	Conversation	Values	Conversation	Values
Nontraditional				
Meaning of sex	--	--	--	--
Love as prerequisite	5	12	2	5
Emotional openness	--	3	--	1
Reputation	2	--	1	1
Sexual knowledge	1	2	--	1
Morals	6	2	2	3
Abstinence/ experience	19	21	7	8
Sexual technique	1	1	--	--
Pride about sexuality	--	--	--	--
Relationship equity	2	3	--	3
Responsibility and outcomes	15	9	12	8
Sexual violence	--	--	--	--
Honesty/fidelity	--	8	--	--
Desire for sex	2	2	--	--
Sexual advances/gatekeeping	--	--	1	1
Traditional				
Sexual advances/gatekeeping	10	4	4	2
Desire for sex	6	2	1	2
Honesty/fidelity	6	9	4	12
Sexual violence	5	2	7	7
Responsibility and outcomes	29	20	12	9
Relationship equity	--	1	1	--
Pride about sexuality	1	2	1	--
Sexual technique	3	2	2	--
Abstinence/experience	27	38	14	23
Morals	2	11	6	15
Sexual knowledge	5	--	2	--
Reputation	5	6		1
Emotional openness	2	--	1	--
Love as prerequisite	9	19	4	3

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Table 6 (cont'd.)

Message	Mothers		Fathers	
	Conversation	Values	Conversation	Values
Additional topics				
Homosexuality	--	1	2	--
Health or cleanliness	--	--	--	--
"Never discussed"	32	20	50	25
STDs	5	1	3	2
Didn't fit TSS	6	6	6	7
Self-esteem	1	2	--	3
Biology or "parts"	10	--	14	1
Total	215	213	159	147

Table 7

Frequency of parent recalled messages by Traditional Sexual Script category

Message	Mothers		Fathers	
	Conversation	Values	Conversation	Values
Nontraditional				
Meaning of sex	--	--	--	--
Love as prerequisite	8	17	6	11
Emotional openness	2	4	1	1
Reputation	--	--	1	1
Sexual knowledge	1	1	--	1
Morals	4	8	--	6
Abstinence/ experience	9	14	5	5
Sexual technique	1	--	--	--
Pride about sexuality	2	1	--	1
Relationship equity	--	2	--	--
Responsibility and outcomes	14	10	14	9
Sexual violence	--	1	1	1
Honesty/fidelity	9	12	2	13
Desire for sex	2	--	--	--
Sexual advances/gatekeeping	2	2	2	3
Traditional				
Sexual advances/gatekeeping	16	7	10	8
Desire for sex	4	--	6	2
Honesty/fidelity	13	14	13	11
Sexual violence	13	5	6	3
Responsibility and outcomes	27	18	17	18
Relationship equity	--	1	--	2
Pride about sexuality	--	--	--	1
Sexual technique	1	--	--	--
Abstinence/experience	18	29	8	10
Morals	5	23	3	23
Sexual knowledge	4	--	1	--
Reputation	4	5	3	3
Emotional openness	1	5	--	4
Love as prerequisite	17	23	11	16
Meaning of sex	3	9	5	4

table continues

Table 7 (cont'd.)

Message	Mothers		Fathers	
	Conversation	Values	Conversation	Values
Additional topics			3	1
Homosexuality	--	--	3	1
Health or cleanliness	2	2	--	1
"Never discussed"	24	3	23	3
STDs	6	2	11	3
Didn't fit TSS	6	11	4	12
Self-esteem	7	10	4	7
Biology or "parts"	14	1	8	--
Total	239	251	168	184

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Appendix A

Sample Questionnaire (for Students)

General Instructions

This questionnaire addresses communication between parents and their sons/daughters. We are interested in understanding the specific content of messages that parents give to their sons/daughters about sexuality and relationships. This questionnaire will use the words “mother” to describe the adult female primarily responsible for raising you and “father” to describe the adult male primarily responsible for raising you. These caregivers may be your biological mother/father, step-parents, close relatives, adoptive parents, or another person. Whenever you see the words “mother” or “father” please think of your primary caregiver, even if this person was not your biological parent. No one in your family will see your answers, so please complete the following questions as openly and completely as possible.

MOTHERS

We are interested in the conversations you have had with your mother concerning all aspects of sexual behavior. These conversations may have included physical/biological differences, sexual activity, morals, relationships, dating, contraceptives/birth control, etc. In the space below, please list any topic related to sexuality and relationships that you have discussed with your mother.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Now, please think of a memorable time when you and your mother discussed sexuality and relationships. This may have been informal, such as a car ride home from school, or a more formal “talk,” perhaps prompted by a health class during your early school years. We are interested in WHAT YOUR MOTHER SAID TO YOU about sexuality and relationships. This may have been instructive (what should or shouldn’t be done) or may have been informative (information and facts). We realize that you may or may not be able to recall one conversation, but only pieces of several conversations you had over the years. Any information you can recall would be useful. In the space provided below, please recall the actual conversations, dialogue or words, you had with your mother about sexuality and relationships.

Once again thinking about the conversations above, please describe any of the values or ideals that your mother wanted to instill in you about sexuality and relationships. These could be religious beliefs, morals, or codes of conduct that your mother wanted you to live by.

The following questions ask about your openness and general comfort with the information your MOTHER has given about sexuality and relationships. Please think about this information IN GENERAL when answering these questions. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement. No one in your family will see your answers. For each statement, please circle the one number that best represents your response.

1. I wish my MOTHER and I talked about these issues more often.

Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly
Agree Disagree

2. I try to understand how my MOTHER feels about topics like these.

Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly
Agree Disagree

3. I know how to talk to my MOTHER about topics like this.

Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly
Agree Disagree

4. I am comfortable discussing these topics with my MOTHER.

Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly
Agree Disagree

5. My MOTHER and I talk openly and freely about these topics.

Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly
Agree Disagree

6. I would like to talk about these topics less often with my MOTHER.

Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly
Agree Disagree

7. I don't talk with my MOTHER about these topics.

Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly
Agree Disagree

8. I would like to talk more often with my MOTHER about these topics.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

9. I am satisfied with how often my MOTHER and I discuss these topics and issues.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

10. I try to avoid discussing these topics with my MOTHER.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

11. I get embarrassed talking about these topics with my MOTHER.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

The following questions ask about your feelings regarding the information your MOTHER has given you about sexuality and relationships. Please circle the one number that best represents your response.

**In general, the information my MOTHER gave me
about sexuality and relationships was...**

1. Adequate 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Inadequate

2. Thorough 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not thorough

3. Complete 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Incomplete

4. Comprehensive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not comprehensive

5. Enough 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not enough

**How do you feel about the information your MOTHER gave you
about sexuality and relationships?**

1. Good 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bad

2. Pleased 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Displeased

3. Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unsatisfied

4. Happy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unhappy

5. Content 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not content

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FATHERS

We are interested in the conversations you have had with your father concerning all aspects of sexual behavior. These conversations may have included physical/biological differences, sexual activity, morals, relationships, dating, contraceptives/birth control, etc. In the space below, please list any topic related to sexuality and relationships that you have discussed with your father.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Now, please think of a memorable time when you and your father discussed sexuality and relationships. This may have been informal, such as a car ride home from school, or a more formal “talk,” perhaps prompted by a health class during your early school years. We are interested in WHAT YOUR FATHER SAID TO YOU about sexuality and relationships. This may have been instructive (what should or shouldn’t be done) or may have been informative (information and facts). We realize that you may or may not be able to recall one conversation, but only pieces of several conversations you had over the years. Any information you can recall would be useful. In the space provided below, please recall the actual conversations, dialogue or words, you had with your father about sexuality and relationships.

Once again thinking about the conversations above, please describe any of the values or ideals that your father wanted to instill in you about sexuality and relationships. These could be religious beliefs, morals, or codes of conduct that your father wanted you to live by.

The following questions ask about your openness and general comfort with the information your FATHER has given about sexuality and relationships. Please think about this information IN GENERAL when answering these questions. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement. No one in your family will see your answers. For each statement, please circle the one number that best represents your response.

1. I wish my FATHER and I talked about these issues more often.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

2. I try to understand how my FATHER feels about topics like these.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

3. I know how to talk to my FATHER about topics like this.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

4. I am comfortable discussing these topics with my FATHER.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

5. My FATHER and I talk openly and freely about these topics.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

6. I would like to talk about these topics less often with my FATHER.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

7. I don't talk with my FATHER about these topics.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

8. I would like to talk more often with my FATHER about these topics.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

9. I am satisfied with how often my FATHER and I discuss these topics and issues.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

10. I try to avoid discussing these topics with my FATHER.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

11. I get embarrassed talking about these topics with my FATHER.

Strongly Agree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree

The following questions ask about your feelings regarding the information your FATHER has given you about sexuality and relationships. Please circle the one number that best represents your response.

In general, the information my FATHER gave me about sexuality and relationships was...

- | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------|
| 1. Adequate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Inadequate |
| 2. Thorough | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not thorough |
| 3. Complete | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Incomplete |
| 4. Comprehensive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not comprehensive |
| 5. Enough | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not enough |

How do you feel about the information your FATHER gave you about sexuality and relationships?

- | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| 1. Good | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Bad |
| 2. Pleased | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Displeased |
| 3. Satisfied | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unsatisfied |
| 4. Happy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unhappy |
| 5. Content | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not content |

content

Looking back on it now, what is the ONE THING you wish your parents would have told you about sexuality and relationships?

FATHER:

MOTHER:

OVERALL, who was your MAIN SOURCE of information about sexuality and relationships?

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| ☐ Mother | ☐ Religious organization (e.g., church) |
| ☐ Father | ☐ School |
| ☐ Brothers | ☐ Doctor |
| ☐ Sisters | ☐ Television shows |
| ☐ Friends | ☐ Movies |
| ☐ Other | ☐ Books |

Looking back at the list above, IF MOTHER/FATHER WERE NOT YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION about sexuality and relationships, where would you rank them on a scale from 1 to 12?

(1=main source of information; 12=last source of information)

☐ Mother ☐ Father

Your sex: Male ☐ Female ☐

Your age:

Are you currently sexually active? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If "yes," at what age did you FIRST engage in sexual intercourse?

Your ethnicity:

- ☐ African American
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Latino/Latina
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other

Which of the following statements best describes the family you spend the majority of your time with?

- ☐ Biological (birth) parents still married
- ☐ Parents divorced, I live with my mother
- ☐ Parents divorced, I live with my father
- ☐ Parents divorced, I live with another family member
- ☐ Adoptive family
- ☐ Other

Thank you for your participation in this study!

Appendix B

Coding for Thought-listing Items and “What I wished” Categories

Thought-listing topics

Abstinence

Abuse

Emotional differences (between sexes)

Emotions

General sex talk

Sexually transmitted diseases

Homosexuality

Infidelity

Morals

Miscellaneous

Peer pressure

Physical differences

Pregnancy

Relationships

Self-esteem

Timing of sexual intercourse

“What I wished for” categories

Nothing – they did good, ‘nothing at all’

seriousness of sex – emotions, commitment

more openness – wished we had been able to talk more. she always seemed embarrassed

rape/violence – date rape drug

consequences – stds, being pregnant

relationship issues – learning to stay together, the work relationships take, needs for success

abstinence – emphasized more, talked about strategies

gender issues – why men want sex, why girls are emotional

values – religious beliefs or morals

approval – how sex can be beautiful, sex is fun

parts – biology

homosexuality – approval, ‘coming out’

birth control – getting from doctor, how to use, instruction

masturbation

Appendix C

Coding Categories from Traditional Sexual Script (TSS) for Conversation and Values Items

(Initiators vs. Gatekeepers)

**Men as initiators of sexual activity (men will 'come on' to you)/can't be expected to wait
(women are responsible for saying 'no'; need to stop men's advances)/peer
pressure**

**Men like sex more; men want sex more (all the time); men think about sex all the
time/visually stimulated
(women avoid sex; women don't like sex)**

**Men are deceitful not honest(when it comes to sex); men lie (say 'I love you'); cheating
(women are chaste, pure, and trusting; need to respect women, treat them 'right')**

**Men will use force, are dangerous; men rape; date rape drug
(women are vulnerable; women need to 'be careful'; women need to be
protected)**

**Women are responsible for outcomes; women need avoid pregnancy ('no glove, no love')
(men hate condoms; men will try to avoid condoms; men don't think about preg)**

**Women shouldn't be aggressive/assertive; assertiveness is unattractive/not equal in
rel'ships
(men should call for dates/men chase women; men are 'in charge' of relationship)**

(Women with Experience are Bad)

**Men are/should be embarrassed about virginity
(women should be proud of virginity)**

**Men know a lot about sex (be "good in bed")
(women should be sexually naïve, not know about the details)**

**Men "sow wild oats"; Men need experience; playboy/acceptance/expectation of
experience
(women should be virgins! Abstinents; no sex until marriage)**

**Women who have lots of sex are 'sluts' or immoral ("two types of women"); morals
objection to sex
(men with experience are cool; men are 'studs')**

Appendix C (cont'd).

**Men should know about their 'parts'; masturbation talk; male orgasms/pleasure
(women don't talk about orgasms, or sexual pleasure)**

**Sex is costly for women (emotionally, watch your reputation)/need to be selective
(men can be relaxed about sex; no big deal)**

(Emotional vs. Instrumental)

**Women are emotional; want to share feelings/be open and honest
(men are closed; fear of intimacy)**

**Men more accepting of 'casual sex' (no committed relationships)
(women only have sex if they are "in love" and committed relationship – be sure
you 'love' him)**

**Women view sex = love; sex is an expression of love
(Men see sex as pleasurable, not about love; fun)**

Additional Topics

Heterosexuality vs. homosexuality

Health and care for body; cleaning

"Did not talk about it;" "Gave reading materials;" "None"

Blank space – no written answer

STDs – descriptions or facts but NOT condoms or responsibility

Didn't apply/fit any category

Self-esteem message

Strictly 'parts' talk

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