

A Mixed-Methods Exploration of Peer Communications of Sexual Scripts and Emerging Adults'  
Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

by

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**DEDICATION**

To Mom, Dad, Sally, and Susan

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                           |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>DEDICATION.....</b>                                                                    | <b>ii</b>  |
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>                                                              | <b>iii</b> |
| <b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>                                                                | <b>ix</b>  |
| <b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>                                                               | <b>xi</b>  |
| <b>ABSTRACT .....</b>                                                                     | <b>xii</b> |
| <b>CHAPTER 1 Introduction .....</b>                                                       | <b>1</b>   |
| Sexual Scripting Theory: A Framework to Understand Sexual Socialization .....             | 2          |
| Prominence of the Heterosexual and Hookup Scripts for Emerging Adults.....                | 3          |
| Peer Sexual Socialization Agents: Four Functions/Roles .....                              | 7          |
| Contributions to the Field .....                                                          | 9          |
| Developmental Significance of Emerging Adulthood .....                                    | 10         |
| How do Peers Become Influential? A Theoretical Explanation .....                          | 13         |
| Characteristics of Peer Sexual Communication .....                                        | 15         |
| How Does Gender of Peers Influence Sexual Socialization? .....                            | 18         |
| Associations among Gendered Sexual Scripts, Sexual Attitudes, and Behaviors.....          | 21         |
| Associations Between Peer Sexual Communication and Emerging Adults' Sexual Behaviors..... | 25         |
| Limitations in Previous Research on Peers .....                                           | 27         |
| <b>CHAPTER 2 STUDY 1: Analysis of Peer Sexual Communication Patterns by Gender .....</b>  | <b>31</b>  |
| Methods.....                                                                              | 32         |
| Measures .....                                                                            | 33         |

|                                                                                              |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Results.....                                                                                 | 34         |
| Discussion.....                                                                              | 43         |
| <b>CHAPTER 3 Study 2: Analysis of Young Women's Reports of Peer Sexual Communications ..</b> | <b>53</b>  |
| Method.....                                                                                  | 55         |
| Results.....                                                                                 | 60         |
| Discussion.....                                                                              | 65         |
| Limitations and Future Directions .....                                                      | 72         |
| <b>CHAPTER 4 Study 3: Analysis of Women's Sexual Decision-Making Within the Hookup</b>       |            |
| <b>Context.....</b>                                                                          | <b>75</b>  |
| Methods.....                                                                                 | 80         |
| Results.....                                                                                 | 84         |
| Discussion.....                                                                              | 87         |
| <b>CHAPTER 5 Grand Discussion .....</b>                                                      | <b>93</b>  |
| Central Role of Gender in Sexual Socialization.....                                          | 95         |
| Absence of Sexual Desire and Feelings in Women’s Sexual Socialization.....                   | 97         |
| Implications for Theory and Methods .....                                                    | 98         |
| Real World Applications .....                                                                | 100        |
| Directions for Future Research.....                                                          | 101        |
| <b>REFERENCES.....</b>                                                                       | <b>128</b> |

## LIST OF TABLES

### TABLE

|                                                                                                             |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 2.1 Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent Variables for Women.....                           | 103 |
| 2.2 Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent Variables for Men.....                             | 104 |
| 2.3 Zero-Order Correlations between Demographic Variables and Dependent Variables for<br>Women and Men..... | 105 |
| 2.4 Zero-Order Correlations between Demographic Variables and Discourse Variables for<br>Women.....         | 106 |
| 2.5 Zero-Order Correlations between Demographic Variables and Discourse Variables for<br>Men.....           | 107 |
| 2.6 Analysis of Variance across Non-Discourse Variables.....                                                | 108 |
| 2.7 Analysis of Variable for Race Differences across Variables.....                                         | 109 |
| 2.8 Inter-correlations between Women’s Reports of Female and Male Peer Communication of<br>Discourses.....  | 110 |
| 2.9 Inter-correlations between Men’s Reports of Female and Male Peer Communication of<br>Discourses.....    | 111 |
| 2.10 Participant Gender Differences across Overall Levels of Peer Communications of Sexual<br>Scripts.....  | 112 |
| 2.11 Differences within Undergraduates’ Reports of Peer Communications of Sexual Scripts by<br>Gender.....  | 113 |
| 2.12 Linear Mixed Model Predicting the Effects of Sex on Communications.....                                | 114 |

|                                                                                                                 |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 2.13 Estimated Marginal Means for Peer Communications.....                                                      | 115 |
| 2.14 Regression Analyses Testing Which Discourses Best Predict Gender Beliefs among<br>Undergraduate Women..... | 116 |
| 2.15 Regression Analyses Testing Which Discourses Best Predict Gender Beliefs among<br>Undergraduate Men.....   | 117 |
| 3.1 Code Development of Common Peer Messages Regarding Sex and Relationships.....                               | 118 |
| 3.2 Comparison of Peer Sexual Communications from Men and Women.....                                            | 119 |
| 3.3 Percentage of Code Co-Occurrence in Reports of Female Peers' Communications.....                            | 120 |
| 3.4 Percentage of Code Co-Occurrence in Reports of Male Peers' Communications.....                              | 121 |
| 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent Variables.....                                         | 122 |
| 4.2 Inter-correlations between all Variables.....                                                               | 123 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

### FIGURE

|                                                                                    |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 4.1 Measurement Model for the Consideration of Sexual Reputation.....              | 124 |
| 4.2 Measurement Model for the Consideration of Sexual Pleasure and Attraction..... | 125 |
| 4.3 Theoretical Model.....                                                         | 126 |
| 4.4 Full Model.....                                                                | 127 |

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation sought to examine peer sexual communications and to identify whether such communications entail expectations that differ by gender. Unlike men, women who are sexually assertive, experienced, and unabashedly enjoy sex are typically perceived as promiscuous, immoral, and troubled. Is there still support for this sexual double standard? To answer this question, the current studies were designed to explore the messages that peers convey to young people and to identify associations between these messages and college students' sexual beliefs and behaviors.

The studies were conducted at a public university in the Midwest. College students completed surveys assessing sexual communications, motivations, attitudes, and experiences. The dissertation consisted of three studies, each with distinct goals: 1) to identify whether patterns of sexual communications varied by recipient gender and peer gender and contributed to sexual attitudes and experience level, 2) to describe the nuances within sexual messages targeted to undergraduate women, and 3) to discern the directionality and associations among peer communications, sexual motivations, and behaviors. Each study also used different methods, including mixed models, thematic analysis, and structural equation modeling.

Findings demonstrate that what emerging adults say and who they convey these messages to are gendered. Emerging adults reported receiving more messages about sex and relationships from their same-sex peers than their other-sex peers. Yet, communications from other-sex peers were more often linked to college students' sexual attitudes and experiences. For example, female peers' communications of the Heterosexual Script and the hookup script each predicted more sexual experience and higher levels of endorsement of masculine ideology among young men. For undergraduate women, messages about sex and relationships frequently signaled a lack

of unqualified support for women's sexual agency. Unsurprisingly, undergraduate women reported greater consideration of reputational consequences than their own feelings and desires when making sexual decisions. This preoccupation with reputational consequences was not associated with sexual assertiveness. Implications for sexual health and agency were discussed.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“You should enjoy being a female and not feel hindered by stereotypes and really enjoy your sexuality but do it *in secret*. Don’t be outward with sexual promiscuity.”

21-year old *female* college student, on what her *female* friends told her about sex and relationships

“If you aren’t having sex within the first month, he is going to dump you. Guys like you based on how much you pleasure them. Guys are going to talk about things and joke about things with their guy friends.”

20-year old *female* college student, on what her *male* friends told her about sex and relationships.

“It feels really good. It should be done whenever you want; no reservations on who or when.”

19-year old *male*, reporting on what his *male* friends told him about sex and relationships

“Treat girlfriends respectfully. Don’t cheat on them. Looks matter. Don’t push people into sex. Respect boundaries.”

21-year old *male* college student, on what his *female* friends told him about sex and relationships

Young people’s sexual explorations can take many forms, including anything from spontaneous and alcohol-fueled one night stands to romantic, monogamous, long-term sexual relationships, and everything in between. The individual sexual decisions comprising these explorations are shaped by a lifetime of exposure to cultural scripts that define “appropriate” sexual goals, expressions, and relationships. These cultural scripts are conveyed by numerous forces, including parents, media, and religious institutions. Missing from the extant literature is a nuanced focus on peers. Popular press, anecdotes, and scholarship (e.g., Freitas, 2013; Holman & Sillars, 2012; Swartout, 2013) frequently depict peers as sources of sexual pressure and negative influence that put young people at risk for making less than optimal sexual decisions. At the same time, young people consistently nominate their peers as top sexual informants and referents (e.g., Epstein & Ward, 2007; Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2012). Indeed, findings indicate that young

people and their peers share similar beliefs regarding sexual exploration and protection and provide each other support in taking or avoiding sexual risks (Menegatos, Lederman, & Hess, 2010; Patrick, Morgan, Maggs, & Lefkowitz, 2011; Thompson, Swartout, & Koss, 2012; Wright, Randall, & Hayes, 2012). Via the advice and support provided, peers not only convey broad societal norms and expectations regarding sexuality and expected sexual roles, they also convey values more proximal and relevant to their cohort based on their shared experiences, contexts, and sociohistorical influences. These sexual norms and sexual values are often highly gendered, including differing expectations and roles for women than for men. As a result, young people likely convey and receive a good deal of gender-specific sexual messages from their peers. Yet, the role of gender in peer sexual communications has been understudied. I anticipate that peer sexual communications, both general and gender-specific, contribute greatly to young people's sexual beliefs and experiences. Across three studies, I examine peer sexual socialization agents more closely by analyzing reports of peer communications, investigating links between communication of sexual values and sexual attitudes, and modeling longitudinal associations among peer communication and sexual motives.

### **Sexual Scripting Theory: A Framework to Understand Sexual Socialization**

The sexual communications youth receive from their peers are a part of the larger cultural scripts that outline expected sexual roles and behaviors. Sexual scripts are defined as the individual and collective meanings that guide values, beliefs, and expectations regarding sex and romantic relationships (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Sexual socialization is the lifelong process of learning sexual scripts. Simon and Gagnon (1986) formulated the sexual scripting theory that describes the process of how individuals learn, enact, and interpret sexual situations,

relationships, contexts, and behaviors. There are three levels of sexual scripts: the cultural, the interpersonal, and the intrapsychic.

The **cultural level** refers to the collective meanings regarding sexual roles, behaviors, expectations, and norms that are conveyed across various institutions such as religious doctrines, the media, and schools. For example, DeLamater (1989) has identified three dominant cultural scripts regarding the function of sexuality: procreational (focused on sex for procreation), recreational (focused on sex for pleasure and fun), and relational (focused on sex within the context of a loving, committed, relationship). The **interpersonal scripts** provide guidelines and expectations to follow for a specific situation and context in order to achieve the ideals and expectations set forth in the cultural scripts. Interpersonal scripts frequently represent applications and shared understandings of cultural scripts for a given subgroup such as college students. For example, undergraduates typically believe that college is an optimal time for sexual exploration, an enactment of the cultural script promoting recreational sex (Agostinelli & Seal, 1998; Bogle, 2008). At the third level, **intrapsychic scripts** refer to individuals' sexual attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs and reflect negotiations between what is socially acceptable (cultural scripts), what is common among individuals like themselves (e.g., interpersonal scripts), and what they personally desire. For example, a college student who does not have casual sex may believe that sex is for love (cultural script), may have many friends who do not have casual sex (interpersonal script), and may personally desire sex within a relationship (intrapsychic script).

### **Prominence of the Heterosexual and Hookup Scripts for Emerging Adults**

Multiple cultural sexual scripts abound, reflecting and shaping the diverse sexual experiences that are common in young people's lives. In the United States, dominant sexual

scripts are frequently gendered because of the cultural values surrounding gender and sexuality that meld the two together. Way (2011, p.29) eloquently states, "...we live in a culture where core human capacities such as emotional expression, responsiveness, empathy, and needs such as intimate friendships are given a sex (i.e., girl) and a sexuality (i.e., gay)." The sexual double standard is an exemplar of how sexuality and gender have been conflated; within this standard, the sexual experiences of men are celebrated, whereas the sexual experiences of women are closely scrutinized and policed. Specifically, having, pursuing, and fulfilling one's sexual needs and desires is considered a sign of virility- an affirmation of masculinity and heterosexuality – for men. On the other hand, women who express and advocate for their sexual desires – an expectation for men, not women – are considered "un-ladylike" and frequently face shame, guilt, and scrutiny.

The Heterosexual Script is a very *specific* and *gendered* cultural guide that prescribes the complementary and oppositional ways in which men and women are expected to think, feel, and behave in romantic and sexual encounters and relationships in the dominant North American culture (i.e., White, middle-class) (Kim, Sorsoli, Collins, Zylbergold, Schooler, & Tolman, 2007). The Heterosexual Script subsumes the sexual double standard and builds on it. Under the Heterosexual Script, boys and men are expected to *actively* pursue, initiate, and direct sexual relations, whereas girls and women are sexualized and expected to *passively* please men by emphasizing their bodies above all else (e.g., intellect, personality) and prioritizing men's needs and desires before their own. At the same time, women are expected to *actively* set sexual boundaries, often in response to men's sexual overtures. In terms of their orientations toward commitment, girls and women are expected to want commitment and monogamy, whereas the reverse is true for boys and men. Indeed, Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) coined the term

“relationship imperative” to describe this scripted expectation that women want to be in romantic relationships. The explicitness and clarity of the Heterosexual Script conveys not only the expectations of what girls/women and boys/men should do but also what they should not do. Specifically, girls and women are not expected to have sexual desires let alone act upon them, and boys and men are not expected to want emotional intimacy and long-term romantic relationships. The rigidity of the Heterosexual Script fosters gender inequities by dictating who should ask for what across relational and sexual situations and contexts (Kim et al., 2007; Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2006).

For boys/men, the Heterosexual Script conveys a straightforward albeit narrow ideal of masculinity, whereas for girls/women, the Heterosexual Script entails a complicated double bind. Boys/men face a laundry list of expectations that presents few dilemmas. In fact, it is possible for men to meet each and every expectation, because following one imperative (e.g., avoiding commitment) often facilitates following another imperative (e.g., remaining emotionally uninvolved). For girls/women, the Heterosexual Script presents extreme ideals. Philips’ (2002) description of the “pleasing woman” and Kim and colleagues’ description of the “good girl” (2007) each illustrate the same ideal: women need to look sexy, to not have (or show) sexual desire, to set sexual boundaries, and to please their partners. These expectations present numerous “lose-lose” situations, as women try to find the elusive balance between these extreme ideals and to follow the “rules” that narrowly define what is “appropriate” for female sexuality. For example, girls/women must be neither sexually inexperienced nor too sexually experienced; Tolman et al. (2005, p. 8) refers to this balancing act as the “slut/prude tightrope.” Girls/women are in charge of taking precautions to avoid pregnancy, but they are often stigmatized for showing that they are prepared (e.g., carrying condoms) (Hillier, Harrison, & Warr, 1998). “Only

if” rules illustrate that what is acceptable is often conditional. For example, girls and women can indicate their interest in boys/men *only if* it is done passively (e.g., acting coy, dressing provocatively). Girls and women can enjoy sex *only if* it takes place in a relationship. The simplicity of the Heterosexual Script belies the difficulties surrounding its execution.

During college, another sexual script gains traction – the hookup script. By definition, hookups are ambiguous, yet there is some consensus to suggest that a hookup is a casual sexual encounter between two people who do not have any future plans to see each other again. According to Aubrey and Smith (2013), the endorsement of the hookup *culture* entails the following set of beliefs: hooking up is fun and harmless; hooking up without commitment is best; hooking up is status-enhancing, and hooking up is symbolic of one’s sexual freedom and assertiveness. The hookup *script* refers to the ways in which hookups typically occur. A hookup typically begins when two individuals meet. This meeting usually takes place in a social context where alcohol is consumed. Upon conveying their interest to each other, both individuals will engage in some sexual behaviors, which may or may not include sexual intercourse. Both parties depart without any shared expectation for future interactions. The aforementioned sequence of events represents a prototypical hookup (Bogle, 2008). The lack of specificity in the hookup script regarding men’s and women’s sex roles renders this script malleable and potentially more egalitarian.

Enactment of the hookup script, like the Heterosexual Script, is easier for men than women. For young men, the recreational sex promoted in the hookup script is congruent with the expectations from the Heterosexual Script for young men to be sex-driven. For women, sexual exploration through hookups violates the Heterosexual Script’s expectations for women in three ways. First, women are expected to be sexual gatekeepers by saying no to sex or stopping

ongoing sexual activity from going “too far.” Secondly, women are not supposed to desire sex, especially outside of a relationship; indeed, women are expected to tie sex and love together. Finally, women are expected to prioritize others over themselves. Because of these expectations, women’s sexual behaviors are typically viewed as responses to men’s sexual initiation and desires, and pleasure.

Violations of the Heterosexual Script yield consequences for women and men. For women, exhibiting a lack of sexual restraint calls into question their morality. There are numerous labels that stigmatize women who are deemed immoral: hussy, slut, whore, loose, hoe, skank, tart, easy, tramp, harlot, and floozy. Whereas some of the aforementioned labels are dated, what all the labels have in common is that they are used to put down women who do not meet or appear to meet the narrow criteria for sexual respectability. For men, not appearing to have sexual interests, desires, and experiences calls into question their masculinity. Are they “real” men? Ultimately, the “jurors” that determine whether one is “guilty” of violating the Heterosexual Script are one’s own peers.

### **Peer Sexual Socialization Agents: Four Functions/Roles**

Peers are uniquely situated to influence young people’s sexual behaviors and attitudes in four ways. First, young people spend much of their time with their peers. College students report spending, on average, approximately 23 hours per week socializing with their friends (Finlay, Ram, Maggs, & Caldwell, 2012). This time spent with peers is more than the time spent in classes (15 hours per week) (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011). This proximity fosters more frequent, comfortable, and explicit communications about sensitive and taboo topics such as sex. Second, unlike parents and teachers, peers are not in a position of “official

authority.” As equals, peers may be more candid in their conversations with one another, creating safe spaces for open and supportive communication.

Peers do, however, exercise a form of *unofficial* authority, which brings me to the third point. Peers police one another for their gendered and sexualized performances and communications. For example, peers often harass, tease, and exclude individuals who violate gendered expectations (Wilson, Griffin, & Wren, 2005; Young & Sweeting, 2004). Although the majority of studies examining gender socialization focus on young children, the few studies that have investigated this process in adolescents and emerging adults yield similar findings (e.g., Fineran & Bennett, 1999; Hall, 2012). For example, adolescent boys with extracurricular activities and interests that are less traditionally masculine are more likely to be bullied than their male counterparts who have more traditionally masculine interests and activities (Young & Sweeting, 2004).

Finally, peer networks serve as a common site for the formation of romantic and sexual relationships (Cavanagh, 2007; Connolly, Furman, Konarski, 2000; Kuttler & La Greca, 2004; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002). For example, longitudinal analyses on a nationally representative sample of American adolescents demonstrate that adolescents’ development of romantic relationships is preceded by increases in other-sex members in their peer networks (Connolly et al., 2000). Emerging adults typically find potential romantic partners while spending time with their peers. Approximately 72% of college students report that they have identified potential romantic partners while interacting with friends, but only 26% report doing so when they were alone (Ackerman & Kenrick, 2009). Few emerging adults interact with potential romantic partners in the presence of their family (0.4%) and acquaintances (1.7%). Taken together, peers

and the peer context provide substantial opportunities to learn about and experience sexual and romantic relationships.

The dissertation consists of three studies, each examining the role of peers and gender in young people's sexual socialization. The study goals were as follows:

Study 1. The goals were to examine how often college students reported receiving messages about various sexual values from their peers, to identify whether communications varied according to who was speaking to whom, and to investigate connections between exposure to sexual values and sexual experiences.

Study 2. The central goal was to examine the prevalence of the Heterosexual Script and the hookup script in the peer socialization messages undergraduate women received, as measured by their responses to open-ended questions regarding sexual communication from same-sex and other-sex peers.

Study 3. The main goal was to analyze longitudinal associations among peer sexual communications and motivations for sexual decisions in a sample of undergraduate women.

### **Contributions to the Field**

Together, these studies depart from the current literature in three significant ways to contribute to our understanding of young people's sexuality. First, I shift the focus from examining *parent* sexual communication to *peer* sexual communication in an effort to capture peers' increasingly influential role in young people's lives. In doing so, I assess peers' influence through reports of their exposure to specific *values* communicated (e.g., importance of love) for all three studies. Previous research on sexual communication, particularly of parents, assesses whether or not a given topic was discussed and/or how frequently. Common topics include

sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. This approach has limited our understanding of what exactly is conveyed. For example, when young people report that their parents have talked to them about abstinence, it is not clear how it was discussed (e.g., “Wait for the right person” and/or “Abstinence is the only way to prevent unwanted pregnancies”). I believe that assessment of specific values as opposed to topics (i.e., fertilization, birth control) addresses the subtleties inherent in a value-laden subject such as sex and relationships. Secondly, I looked at peer sexual communication from same-sex and other-sex peers for studies 1 and 2. Because the hookup and Heterosexual Scripts present contradictory messages for young women and not young men, communication of these scripts may vary by the sex of the target recipient and the communicator. Finally, because peer influences on young people’s sexual attitudes and behaviors have largely been examined with cross-sectional designs, I include longitudinal analyses in study 3. With these analyses I can better test how formative peer communications predict later sexual explorations. The purpose of the dissertation is to lay the foundation for future work examining the inner-workings of peer influence and socialization of sexual attitudes, behaviors, and experiences among young people.

### **Developmental Significance of Emerging Adulthood**

All dissertation studies focused on emerging adulthood, a culture-bound developmental period of self-discovery and exploration of love, work, identity, and worldviews that spans from the late teen years through the 20s (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adulthood is most common in affluent Western countries, such as the United States (Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004). College students exemplify emerging adulthood, given their semi-independent state with their parents’ financial support and their self-guided exploration of various roles and interests. Emerging adults’ involvement in romantic and sexual relationships and experiences is normative and

commonplace, with 70% of youth having had sex by age 19 (Martinez, Copne, & Abma, 2011). Similarly, romantic relationships remain prevalent, with 70% of youth having had a romantic relationship by age 17 (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003). The stigma associated with young people's sexuality, particularly during adolescence, is mitigated not only by the legal adult status bestowed at age 18 but also by the age-graded norms for intimacy, marriage, and childbearing during the 20s. Yet emerging adults' explorations of love, in particular, remain complicated due to divergent sexual discourses and sexual scripts.

The coexistence of divergent sexual scripts contributes to the complexities and ambiguities surrounding the norms and developmental milestones of emerging adulthood. Marriage upon high school or college graduation is no longer the norm. In 1950, the median ages of first marriage for women and men were 20 and 23, respectively, but in 2009, the median ages of first marriage for women and men increased to 26 and 28, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Indeed, many college students do not expect to find their future spouses while in college, regardless of whether or not they want to or feel it is possible (Bogle, 2008; Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). This demographic change has resulted in an unprecedented length of time for young people to prioritize their lives to promote their individual growth and development, including time for multiple romantic and sexual relationships and experiences.

Emerging adults vary widely in the number of romantic relationships they form and dissolve. Analyzing the romantic relationship(s) of 511 young adults from the age of 18 to 25, Rauer et al. (2013) found five distinct patterns: steady (e.g., long-term relationships), later (i.e., minimal romantic involvement), sporadic (i.e., few short-term relationships), frequent (multiple short-term, frequent relationships), and long-term (i.e., one long-term romantic relationship). Further, this lack of expectation for finding future spouses during college coincides with the

expectation for meeting new people, enjoying one's independence, and having fun in college. Although hookup experiences are not new to this age group and context, many have argued the emergence of the hookup culture is a relatively recent phenomenon. Previously, small student subcultures enjoyed casual sexual encounters, which were still considered taboo. Now, approximately 80% of students report having had at least one casual sexual encounter before graduation (England & Thomas, 2006). With this critical mass of students partaking in casual sexual encounters, the hookup culture has become a part of mainstream culture (Heldman & Ward, 2010).

All dissertation studies looked at American college students. Compared to other WEIRD countries (i.e., Western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic), the United States, as a whole, is particularly ambivalent about the sexuality of young people, as evidenced by the moral panic and controversies surrounding sex education, access to reproductive health services, and the exposure to sexual content in the media. I primarily reviewed literature on adolescents and college students living in the United States, with a handful of studies on Canadian college students. Despite residing in a culture that espouses conflicting sexual messages, the majority of emerging adults studied here report positive sexual and romantic experiences and relationships (Impett & Tolman, 2006; Whitton & Kuryluk, 2012). Indeed, intimacy and relationships are believed to commonly serve as resources and assets to individuals, promoting health and well being (Demir, 2008). For example, Impett and Tolman (2006) found that 80% of late female adolescents described their most recent sexual experience as an event that "made them happy." Similarly, in one study of 484 college students, emerging adults' satisfaction with their romantic relationships was associated with fewer depressive symptoms (Whitton & Kuryluk, 2012).

Expanding research efforts to consider young people's sexuality as normative could help elucidate the developmental implications of these formative experiences.

Unfortunately, however, inquiries and concerns over young people's sexuality and health have typically focused on the *physical* (e.g., pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases) more than the *subjective* (e.g., sexual satisfaction, sexual shame). For example, previous research on sexual socialization has focused on age of sexual debut and level of sexual experience as indicators of sexual risk (e.g., Scott, Wildsmith, Welti, Ryan, Schelar, & Steward-Streng, 2011) and not indicators of developmentally normative sexual explorations. Because of this narrow emphasis on socialization factors predicting physical risk, less is known about socialization factors predicting positive and healthy sexual and romantic experiences and relationships. Yet a rich understanding into the context of young people's emergent sexuality requires investigation into sexual behaviors *and* subjective cognitions (e.g., sexual affect, sexual motivations). Moreover, additional focus on peers as key sexual socialization agents will increase our understanding of their important role in young people's exploration and maturation into adulthood.

### **How do Peers Become Influential? A Theoretical Explanation**

Multiple theories help explain how peers come to serve as influential sexual informants. Although these theories were not designed with sexual socialization in mind, they can still be applied to this domain. According to Social Learning Theory, individuals behave in ways that mimic what they see others do or think that others do (Bandura, 1969). The most influential role models are individuals with a high status (e.g., Ellis & Zarbatany, 2007; Shi & Xie, 2012) and who are perceived to be similar to us (i.e., sharing social identities) (e.g., Miller et al., 1988). From these observations and perceptions of other people's behaviors, individuals develop norms, beliefs that guide and regulate behaviors, by identifying which behaviors are and are not socially

acceptable. It is well documented that peers influence adolescents' and emerging adults' involvement in many risky behaviors such as binge drinking, smoking, delinquency, and aggression (Bosari & Carey, 2001; Cengelli, O'Loughlin, Lauzon, & Cornuz, 2012; Faris & Ennet, 2012; Ham & Hope, 2003; Low, Polanin, & Espelage, 2013; Prinstein, Brechwald, & Cohen, 2011). For example, frequency of peers' binge-drinking and perceived peer attitudes towards binge-drinking are the strongest predictors of college students' own binge drinking (Durkin, Wolfe, & Clark, 2005). Unlike overt behaviors such as smoking and drinking, sexual behaviors are generally private. Therefore, adolescents and emerging adults may have to discern what is considered normative from what is *said* and what they *perceive* rather than what is actually *seen*.

One common way that the norms and expectations developed come to influence individuals' behaviors is through comparisons between the self and others. Social Comparison Theory posits that individuals are motivated to compare themselves to others to determine how they fare (Festinger, 1954). Peers likely serve as referents for social comparisons in multiple domains. For example, the role of social comparisons to peers in young people's body satisfaction (or lack thereof) has been extensively studied (e.g., Jones, 2002; Tylka & Sabik, 2010) and informs my conceptualization of peers' potential influence on sexual socialization. In the extant literature on body satisfaction, individuals who perceive greater discrepancies between their bodies and the norms of the idealized body are more likely to report greater body dissatisfaction than their counterparts who perceive smaller discrepancies. Similarly, regardless of gender and relationship status, college students who perceive that they have far less sexual experience (i.e., fewer sexual partners) than their same-sex peers are more likely to report less sexual satisfaction than their peers who perceive smaller discrepancies between their level of

sexual experience and their peers' (Stephenson & Sullivan, 2009). Adolescents and emerging adults may be motivated to compare themselves to their peers on various indices of sexual experiences to gain a sense of confidence and comfort.

### **Characteristics of Peer Sexual Communication**

One important way that young people learn cultural scripts such as the hookup and Heterosexual Scripts from their peers is through direct communication. The growing body of literature on peer sexual communication during emerging adulthood yields two consistent findings. First, frequency of peer sexual communication exceeds frequency of parent sexual communication (DiIorio et al., 1999; Lefkowitz & Espinosa-Hernandez, 2007; Sprecher et al., 2008). Secondly, this difference is especially true for permissive, sex-positive messages such as the acceptability of casual sex. One pathway by which these sex-related discussions among college students and their friends frequently occur is via the sharing of personal stories about dating and sex (Lefkowitz, Boone, & Shearer, 2004). Indeed, 98% of college students report that in a typical hookup, students talk to their friends after hookups have occurred, especially if the hookup experience is positive (Paul & Hayes, 2002).

Variations within peer sexual communications, however, complicate negotiations of peer sexual norms and expectations. Adolescents' and emerging adults' reports of peer sexual communications demonstrate that such communications are not wholly permissive, positive, and supportive for all. Instead, sexual communications vary according to factors such as level of sexual experience, sexual attitudes, and religiosity. Assessing discussion of seven topics, Lefkowitz and colleagues (2004) found that abstinent students discussed abstinence more frequently with their friends than did sexually active students. Religious students discussed contraception and condoms less frequently than less religious students. Sexually active students

discussed sexual behaviors and feelings more frequently with their friends than did abstinent students. College students who held conservative attitudes about sex (e.g., sex is for marriage) discussed sexual dangers with their peers more frequently than college students who held more permissive sexual attitudes. Mixed peer sexual messages and high levels of peer sexual communications illustrate the complexity with which adolescents and emerging adults are reconciling diverse and often divergent sexual discourses.

Adding to the complexity of peer sexual communication is the ambiguity found in young people's conversations about sex. Bogle (2008) found that some college students express not knowing exactly what their friends meant when they said they "hooked up." As noted earlier, hooking up entails a wide range of sexual behaviors (Epstein et al., 2009). An undergraduate man may appear more sexually experienced than he is by telling a vague story about his hookup because the lack of specifics in his story may lead his friends to fill in the blanks in favorable ways that embellish his story (Flood, 2007). Similarly, an undergraduate woman may avoid being viewed negatively by her peers for saying she hooked up with someone because the lack of specific details in her story may allow her friends to underestimate the extent of the casual sexual encounter. Many young people who conform to the Heterosexual Script reap benefits (e.g., peer acceptance) and/or avoid harmful consequences (e.g., peer exclusion) (e.g., Kreager & Staff, 2009). Therefore, appearing to adhere to the Heterosexual Script can yield benefits, which explains why stories about hookups may be intentionally vague.

Peer sexual communication is prolific, in part, because adolescents and emerging adults often turn to their friends for help and advice on relationships and sex (Bay-Cheng, Livingston, & Fava, 2013; Bogle, 2008; Menegatos et al. 2010; Morgan & Korobov, 2012; Patrick et al., 2011). Morgan and Korobov (2012) conducted interviews with triads of same-sex friends and

identified five ways in which college students help their friends out with relationship issues, dating difficulties, and negative feelings and thoughts surrounding their sexual experiences. These five methods of peer support entail relating to the experience, providing encouragement and validation, joking about the problem, offering advice, and providing instrumental support. Peers are not only nominated as top sexual informants, they are typically the preferred go-to source for support and comfort in their forays into dating, sex, and relationships (Lefkowitz & Espinosa-Hernandez, 2007).

Sometimes, close peers protect adolescents and emerging adults by discouraging them from making unsafe decisions. For example, in one study, college students read a hypothetical scenario in which their friend “Jane” drank a lot at a party, became drunk, and was about to leave the party with a man she did not know (Menegatos et al., 2010). Some reported that they would allow Jane to leave with the man, whereas others would not and would use direct means (e.g., drive Jane home) or indirect means (e.g., trick Jane into going home) to keep Jane safe. In a study on non-hypothetical situations and friends, Patrick et al. (2011) found similar patterns of peer support. College students report multiple ways of protecting their friends during Spring Break, a time when some college students partake in risky behaviors such as binge drinking and unprotected sex. Some college students report carefully monitoring their friends from a close distance, keeping track of their friends’ alcohol intake, and/or physically staying close together to be safe. When adolescents and emerging adults do make decisions that have the potential to result in negative consequences, close friends continue to play a supportive role by providing comfort and validation. For example, interviews of college students and their friends illustrate that sharing regretful and negative experiences among friends helps to normalize those experiences (Morgan & Korobov, 2012). College students’ decisions and ways of helping their

friends reflect a consideration and a delicate balance of their relationship (e.g., closeness), individual autonomy, and the context.

### **How Does Gender of Peers Influence Sexual Socialization?**

Peers have been traditionally understudied within the sexual socialization literature, and when peers are the focus of inquiries, little attention is given to characteristics of the peers such as their gender. During childhood and early adolescence, young people's peer networks consist primarily of same-sex friends, but from adolescence onward, other-sex friendships become increasingly prevalent (Feiring, 1999). Both same- and other-sex friendships provide young people support, companionship, and affirmation (Hand & Furman, 2000; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1993). Both undergraduate men and women perceive intimacy across their same- and other-sex friends similarly and describe these friendships in terms of self-disclosure, emotional expressiveness, unconditional support, trust, and non-sexual contact (Monsour, 1992). Similarly, interviews with high school seniors reveal no differences between the amount of support and companionship they receive from same-sex and other-sex friends (Hand & Furman, 2000). At the same time, same-sex and other-sex friendships appear to have distinct functions, benefits, and disadvantages (Baumgarte & Nelson, 2009; Hand & Furman, 2009). For example, adolescents report that they learn more about the other sex, meet more members of the other sex, and are exposed to different perspectives more frequently through their other-sex friendships than their same-sex friendships (Hand & Furman, 2009). How might other-sex friends – whom young people report learning more from (especially about the other sex) – differ in their sexual communications than same-sex friends? How do same-sex friends – whom young people report are more supportive than other-sex friends – differ in the ways they provide support and

affirmation for sexual exploration or restraint than other-sex friends? I explore these questions here.

Because close friendships precede the emergence of romantic relationships, and because qualities of close friendships rival those of romantic relationships, friendship quality likely sets a precedent for romantic relationships (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Feiring, 1999). Indeed, various qualities of social support (e.g., intimacy, disclosure, instrumental support, reliability) in friendships predict the same qualities of social support in romantic relationships one year later (Connolly et al., 2000). Same-sex friends, in particular, may play a particularly influential role in shaping the quality of romantic relationships. Because same-sex friends typically outnumber other-sex friends within a young person's peer network, and because these friendships are frequently characterized by greater intimacy than other-sex friendships, young people's affiliative behaviors with their same-sex friends may transfer over to their romantic relationships. For example, having same-sex close friends – as measured by reciprocal nominations cross-sectionally and longitudinally, predicted involvement in romantic relationships by age 15 (Roisman et al., 2009). There are also a handful of studies that examined the quality of same-sex friends' and best friends' sexual communications to young people's sexual attitudes and experiences. Lefkowitz et al. (2004) found that undergraduate women report more sexual communication and higher levels of comfort and openness during such conversations with their same-sex best friends than do undergraduate men. The ease and frequency with which same-sex peers speak to one another likely reflects homosociality, the non-sexual close social bonds between members of the same sex (Bird, 1996).

For men, the sex of the peer or friend may play a particularly critical role in sexual socialization. Traditional masculinity is perpetuated and reinforced in homosocial networks of

men (Allen, 2005; Bird, 1996; Bowleg, 2004; Flood, 2007). For many young men, friendships with male peers take precedence over both their friendships with female peers and their romantic relationships with young women (Flood, 2007). Within the hierarchical structure of male peer networks, the status of young men is based, in part, on their actual and perceived adherence to the gendered sexual norms prescribed for men. For example, undergraduate men's masculine identity is questioned when they express a desire to spend time with their romantic partner (Bowleg, 2004). Some may refer to these men as "whipped," a popular term that signifies that these men are weak, a characteristic that is stereotypically "un-male" and hence feminine. To avoid this label, one strategy that undergraduate men employ to divert peer harassment is to communicate ambivalence about their romantic relationships (Allen, 2005). Other status-enhancing strategies include telling stories about one's sexual encounters and collaboratively pursuing women for sex (e.g., going to a party together to find women) (Flood, 2007). For adolescent boys and undergraduate men, male peers provide validation for being sexually active, initiating sexual activities, and pursuing casual sexual encounters, and less support for being involved in long-term, monogamous romantic relationships.

For adolescent girls and undergraduate women, same-sex peers appear to serve as a sounding board to hash out divergent sexual discourses. Indeed, undergraduate women report discussing with their same-sex best friend conservative sexual norms (i.e., abstinence), sexual risks (i.e., date rape), sexual health (e.g., fertility, sexually transmitted diseases), and sexual behaviors and feelings (i.e., casual sex, pleasure) more than undergraduate men (Lefkowitz, et al., 2004). At the same time, the ability and desire to be open and to disclose details about one's sexual experiences may be constrained by women's fears of being perceived as too promiscuous, too sexual, or unfeminine. For example, when investigating how and when adolescent girls feel

sexual desire, Tolman (2002) found that individual interviews with adolescent girls were much more effective than conducting focus groups. In fact, the focus groups elicited nothing but silence. In the interviews, these adolescent girls cited fear of negative social evaluation as reasons for their lack of participation. There is evidence that fear of developing a negative sexual reputation is warranted. Interviews with women who had developed reputations for being sluts revealed that the stigma and ridicule are long-lasting (Liston & Moore-Rahimi, 2005; Stewart, 1999). Whereas same-sex peers typically reinforce sexual expectations that are consistent with gender roles, especially for men, other-sex peers may provide greater leniency.

### **Associations among Gendered Sexual Scripts, Sexual Attitudes, and Behaviors**

Although the literature on adolescents' and emerging adults' sexual attitudes and choices is vast, it is not necessarily consistent in its findings concerning the contributions of sexual scripts to sexual attitudes and behaviors. According to the Heterosexual Script, men have an insatiable sex drive, actively pursue opportunities to have sex, and value sex over relationships, whereas women are devoid of sexual desire, convey their romantic interests indirectly, and value relationships over sex. If the Heterosexual Script influences young people's sexual socialization, then gender differences across sexual motivations, feelings, and behaviors should emerge. Research on sexual socialization yields findings that fall into one of three categories: findings that are consistent with the Heterosexual Script, null findings, and findings that contradict the Heterosexual Script.

First we have evidence that suggests that young people are following the dictates of the Heterosexual script in their sexual decision-making. Included in this group are findings of gender differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors, differences that align with the sexual double standard. Serving as evidence, here, are findings that undergraduate men, on average, endorse

permissive sexual attitudes and traditional gender roles more than undergraduate women (Ahrold & Meston, 2010; Holman & Sillars, 2012; Shearer, Hosterman, Gillman, & Lefkowitz, 2005; Townsend & Wasserman, 2011). For example, undergraduate men are more likely to endorse the acceptability of casual sex than undergraduate women (Ahrold & Meston, 2010; Carroll, Volk, & Hyde, 1985; Lindgren et al., 2009). Additionally, undergraduate men report more self-focused reasons to have sex (i.e., to feel good, to feel loved) than do women (Browning, Hatfield, Kessler, & Levine, 2000; Patrick & Lee, 2010; Patrick, Maggs, & Abar, 2007), and report greater intentions to initiate sex and greater frequency in actual initiation than undergraduate women (Simms & Byers, 2013). Undergraduate women report more partner-focused reasons to have sex (i.e., to show love) than do men (Browning et al., 2000; Patrick et al., 2007; & Patrick & Lee, 2010). In fact, college-aged women are more likely to concede to have consensual unwanted sex to avoid disappointing their partners (Impett & Peplau, 2003).

Gender differences in sexual affect also mirror the Heterosexual Script, whereby men express feeling more entitled to sexual pleasure than women. For example, undergraduate men feel more pride and pleasure after their sexual debut and hookups than do women (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Fisher et al., 2012). Undergraduate women report feeling greater sexual regret, shame, confusion, and sadness following hookup experiences than do men (Esbaugh & Gute, 2008; Lewis et al., 2012; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Owen & Fincham, 2011). These patterns of gender differences in sexual and gender attitudes, motivations, and behaviors are consistent with the Heterosexual Script in that men are expected to be sex-driven initiators and women are expected to be reactive and passive by responding to men's sexual lead and interests.

At the same time, not all studies of college students' sexual attitudes, behaviors, motives, and feelings yield gender differences. For example, some have found that undergraduate women

and men do *not* differ in their endorsement of traditional gender roles (e.g., Ahrold & Meston, 2010). There was also no gender difference in college students' motivation to stay abstinent to protect one's sexual health (Patrick et al., 2007), despite the expectation that women act responsibly and men recklessly. Undergraduate women and men are similarly motivated to hook up to have a fun and exciting time without expectations for future commitment; in fact, both undergraduate women and men generally report more positive feelings and fewer negative feelings about their hookup experiences (Lewis et al., 2012). In addition, consistent gender differences in sexual behaviors and ideals can disappear in experimental studies (Conley, Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, & Valentine, 2011). For example, no gender difference in the number of desired sexual partners emerged when women and men believed they were connected to a polygraph machine (Alexander & Fisher, 2003). When college students were led to believe that they were *not* connected to a polygraph machine, men reported wanting more sexual partners than women. Similarities across female and male college students' sexual attitudes, behaviors, motivations, and feelings provoke questions regarding the enduring strength of sexual scripts across time, as social norms change.

One possible explanation for findings in which gendered expectations are *not* met is that the sexual scripts available to young people, such as the Heterosexual Script, are restrictive. This means that the expectations, roles, and norms for women and men limit them in terms of what they can ask and how they behave. What happens when ideals cannot be met and/or are not endorsed? And what happens when there are conflicting ideals, such as those presented for women in the Heterosexual Script and hookup script? Instead of strict adherence to what is prescribed and proscribed, emerging adults may negotiate or reject such scripts. Indeed, conformity to the Heterosexual Script does not necessarily guarantee positive sexual experiences

and feelings. For example, undergraduate women who reported having sex to avoid conflicts with their partners and to maintain their partner's interest in them were more likely to report more negative emotions and more relationship conflicts (Impett, Peplau, & Gable, 2005). Alternatively, conforming to the hookup script does not guarantee sexual satisfaction. Young people who recreate or redefine sexual expectations, goals, and desires may do so, in part, to maximize positive sexual experiences and minimize negative sexual experiences. One example is when college students change their outlook on a hookup experience that they had hoped would lead to a romantic relationship (Bogle, 2008; Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, & Ward, 2009). When their hookup partners did not want a relationship, some college students minimize their disappointment by focusing on the fun they had during those hookups. Hence, young people's sexual decisions, attitudes, and experiences represent their interpretations and enactments of sexual scripts.

A third set of findings that create an understanding of gendered sexual decisions are findings that run contrary to sexually scripted expectations and illustrate that sexual scripts, although potentially influential, are not deterministic. Therefore, the influential strength of gendered sexual expectations and roles in sexual socialization remains in flux. Indeed, the intrapsychic level of sexual scripts theory represents the infinite possibilities for individuals' wants and needs, regardless of whether they align with broad societal sexual norms and expectations (i.e., cultural scripts) or more "local" expectations such as peer norms (i.e., interpersonal scripts). Contrary to the Heterosexual Script, whereby only women are described as being relationally oriented, multiple studies show that adolescent boys and undergraduate men also value and link emotional intimacy with physical intimacy (Epstein et al., 2009; Pinquart, 2010; Smiler, 2008; 2013). Among a sample of 10<sup>th</sup> grade adolescent men, over half reported

having sex due to their interest *and* connection to their sexual partner (Smiler, 2008). Only 9% of adolescent boys had sex to conform to their friends, which was also the least frequently endorsed reason to have sex. In addition, survey and experimental data collected among undergraduate women indicate that their interest in casual sex equals that of men, once factors such as partner sexual skill and partner celebrity status are equalized (Conley, 2011). Multiple studies using focus groups and interviews also highlight students' lack of endorsement of traditional gender roles (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009, Smiler, 2008). For example, upper-middle class undergraduate women discuss their desire to *avoid* serious romantic relationships during college because they see this as a time to prioritize their personal growth and development (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009). These findings have raised the possibility that endorsement of the sexual double standard and traditional gender roles may vary by demographic characteristics and/or decrease over time. Still, a review of the sexual double standard literature indicates that college students continue to endorse the standard to some extent, but this endorsement depends on contextual and situational factors (Crawford & Popp, 2003). Mixed findings regarding gender differences and links between sexual attitudes and behaviors highlight the complexity of sexuality.

### **Associations Between Peer Sexual Communication and Emerging Adults' Sexual Behaviors**

Is there any evidence that the amount or content of peer sexual communications predicts sexual behavior in the manners outlined by social learning and social comparison theories? The majority of studies examining peer influences on young people's sexual attitudes and behaviors focus on the contributions of peer perceptions or peer sexual norms (e.g., Lewis et al., 2007; Potard, Courtois, & Rusch, 2008; Wallace, Miller, & Forehand, 2008). Only a handful of studies have examined the contributions of specific peer sexual *communications* to emerging adults'

sexual behaviors. Busse and colleagues (2010) found that peer communications regarding sexual behaviors, HIV/AIDS/STIs, and birth control had a positive and *direct* effect on adolescents' sexual initiation one year later; adolescents were more likely to report having had sex one year later when they reported frequent exposure to peer sexual communications. In addition, peer communications had an *indirect* effect; more frequent peer sexual communication overall was associated with having more positive sexual attitudes and feeling more pressure to have sex, which in turn, predicted sexual initiation. In a cross-sectional study, undergraduate women who frequently discussed sexual feelings and behaviors with their same-sex best friends were more likely to be sexually active than undergraduate women who discussed these topics less frequently (Lefkowitz & Espinosa-Hernandez, 2007). Undergraduate women who reported higher levels of comfort and openness during discussions about sex with friends were also more likely to be sexually active than undergraduate women who reported lower levels of comfort and openness. How sex is discussed – if it is discussed – and what is discussed both shape sexual experiences.

Peer discussions of sexual values are rarely addressed in previous research. Yet sexual values regarding what is normative are salient for young people, who frequently engage in social comparisons with their peers. Because sex remains taboo for young people, numerous discourses regarding when sex is most appropriate are particularly pertinent in young people's sexual socialization. The most conservative discourse is abstinence until marriage. The taboo of premarital sex, however, has weakened (Harding & Jencks, 2003). A moderate discourse is that sex is acceptable within a relationship, and a more permissive discourse is that sex is acceptable outside of relationships. Regardless of sexual partner type (i.e., hookup partner, spouse), it is more acceptable for men to be sexually active than it is for women. Using archival data on college students, recent findings across three studies demonstrate that college students receive

few, if any, messages about abstinence from their peers (Fletcher et al., in press; Levin et al., 2012; Manago, Ward, & Aldana, in press; Trinh et al., 2014). Instead, sex-positive peer messages were more prevalent. In addition, receiving frequent peer messages regarding the acceptability of casual sex was associated with more dating experience and more casual sex encounters. Together, these findings indicate that young people's sexual behaviors align with the messages they receive from their peers.

### **Limitations in Previous Research on Peers**

Previous research has demonstrated that emerging adults are actively trying to piece together and make sense of the sexual messages they receive and that peers are an integral part of this process. There are four main limitations, however, that restrict our current understanding of peer sexual socialization. First, little attention has been given to the possibilities of how peer sexual communication is scripted. Previous literature on peer communication has focused primarily on communication of "textbook" topics, such as STIs (e.g., Lefkowitz, Boone & Shearer, 2004), narratives of young people's sexual experiences (e.g., Burns, Futch, & Tolman, 2011; Tolman, 2002), and perceptions of their peers' sexual experiences (e.g., Bamberg, 2004; Stewart, 1999). It is less well documented, however, whether communication of specific sexual scripts is more frequent than others. Although male and female college students endorse similar dating scripts whereby men ought to initiate romantic and sexual encounters (Laner & Ventrone, 2000), this does not necessarily mean that they receive the same types of peer sexual messages. Indeed, research on peer communications demonstrates that undergraduate women receive as many relational script messages as recreational (i.e., hookup) script messages (Fletcher et al., in press; Manago et al., in press; Trinh et al., 2014). It is possible that young people may tailor their communication to align with scripted gendered expectations or may communicate

egalitarian sexual messages to their same-sex and/or other-sex peers. These possibilities need to be examined.

Secondly, we know little about how patterns of peer sexual communication differ by gender. Previous research has either not specified the sex of the peers (e.g., Epstein & Ward, 2007; Trinh et al., in press) or has looked exclusively at same-sex friends (Lefkowitz et al., 2004; Lefkowitz & Espinosa-Hernandez, 2007). Research on other-sex peers' influences and sexual communications is missing. Do undergraduates receive similar messages about sex and relationships from their male and female friends? Furthermore, previous research on peer sexual communication and peer influences on young people's sexual socialization has not addressed the ways in which the gendered nature of sexual discourses and scripts likely influences the amount and type of sexual messages peers communicate to their same-sex *and* other-sex friends. For example, we do not know if peer communication, support, and reinforcement of the Heterosexual Script are stronger within the hierarchical structure of emerging adult men's peer network than within the communally structured peer networks of emerging adult women.

Third, popular assumptions and premises have narrowed the scope of peer sexual socialization research. Peer influences are widely construed to be negative. Indeed, peers are frequently studied as facilitators of sexual risk-taking behaviors, which reflect widespread implicit assumptions that peer norms are inherently permissive and risk-laden (Brown, 1997). Therefore, intervention and prevention programs aimed to protect adolescent health typically include some form of education and training to help young people reject negative peer pressure. This monolithic portrayal of peer influence is inaccurate and contradicts a substantive body of literature delineating the importance of social relations on well being across the lifespan (Hartup & Stevens, 1999).

Finally, previous research has focused on a limited range of sexual behaviors. Age of first sexual intercourse and number of sexual partners are common indices of sexual exploration and risk-taking (e.g., Lansford, Yu, Erath, Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 2010; Rostosky, Regnerus, & Wright, 2003; Sneed, 2009). Yet sexuality is complex and multifaceted, which necessitates looking at a broader set of sexual experiences. For example, sexual motives refer to the reasons why one chooses to participate or not participate in sexual activities. Analyzing sexual motives lends insight into individual perceptions regarding contextual, personal, and interpersonal conditions that contribute to the sexual decision-making process (Browning et al., 2000; Impett et al., 2005; Patrick et al., 2007).

Analyzing diverse sexual behaviors and cognitions lends greater insight into their associations with cultural scripts. For example, the Heterosexual Script documents how sexual assertiveness is conferred to men and not women. By virtue of prioritizing their partners' needs and desires and seeking to please them, women may face challenges with being sexually assertive. Indeed, endorsing and embodying this component of traditional femininity ideology is associated with diminished sexual health among adolescent girls and young women (e.g., Curtin, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2011; Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006). Simply being aware of the Heterosexual Script can alter women's behaviors. Conley et al. (2011) found that women who anticipated being stigmatized for accepting hypothetical offers of casual sex were more likely to reject such offers than women who believed they would not be judged harshly.

Because sexual expectations and roles for men appear more straightforward than those for women, the literature on the sexual socialization of adolescent boys and men is not as extensive as the literature on adolescent girls and women. Yet research has highlighted the ways in which young men also struggle to negotiate for what the Heterosexual script denies them,

namely intimacy and emotional connection with partners. Smiler (2013) documents substantial evidence undermining the notion that men are driven to have sex and that men find intimacy aversive. Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, and Ward (2009) found that some young men struggle to follow the hookup script of emotionally unattached casual sex. The expectations for young men to pursue and enjoy casual sexual encounters may inhibit their ability to develop and experience intimacy with their partners. Examining peer communication of sexual values and expectations may lend insight into one possible way that the Heterosexual Script may be learned and enforced.

In summary, peers warrant far more empirical attention than they have received. Widespread assumptions that peers are problematic influences on young people's sexual socialization contradict a substantial body of literature delineating the beneficial effects of close friendships across the lifespan. Friendships are not all the same; intimacy and disclosure levels are typically higher in same-sex friendships, particularly among women, than in other-sex friendships. Moreover, what society values in women differs from what is valued in men. Consequently, I focus on how gender shapes peer communications of sexual values by using mixed methods and highlight the diversity of messages communicated among peers and the concurrent and longitudinal associations between what peers say and what young people do.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **STUDY 1: ANALYSIS OF PEER SEXUAL COMMUNICATION PATTERNS BY GENDER**

#### **Introduction and Hypotheses**

In the popular imagination, discussions about sex and relationships among men differ from discussions about sex and relationships among women. Whereas the former conjures up images of groups of men trying to one-up each other in telling raunchy stories about their sexual conquests, the latter conjures up images of women, in pairs or in small groups, sharing advice about love and relationships. These gendered portrayals reflect the sexual double standard, whereby men are expected to be more sex-driven and women are expected to be more relationship-focused. In either case, peer communications about sex and relationships may carry significant weight for young people. Unlike the explicit yet impersonal and prolific communications of mass media and the restrictive and infrequent messages from parents, peer messages are simultaneously personal, protective, informative, and diverse, including both permissive and restrictive sexual messages (Epstein & Ward, 2007; Korobov & Thorne, 2007; Lefkowitz, Boone, & Shearer, 2004; Patrick, Morgan, Maggs, & Lefkowitz, 2011). Do sexual communications vary according to who is speaking to whom? Do these communications have measurable effects on sexual attitudes and experiences? The goal of the current study is to examine college students' reports of male and female peers' communications of sexual scripts and to investigate the contributions of these communications to their gender attitudes and sexual experiences. Based on previous research, I constructed the following hypotheses:

H1. Collapsing across reports of male peers' and female peers' messages, undergraduate women would report receiving more restrictive messages about sex (i.e., relational script, procreational script, hookup script) than undergraduate men.

H2. Taking into consideration the gender of one's peers, undergraduate women would receive more messages from their same-sex peers about the relational and procreational scripts than men, who would receive more messages from their same-sex friends about the hookup and heterosexual scripts than women. Other-sex friends would convey more hookup script messages to undergraduate women and more relational script messages to undergraduate men.

H3. Because same-sex peers are more likely to advise young people about sex and relationships than other-sex peers, college students' sexual attitudes and behaviors should be linked more closely to same-sex peer communications than to their other-sex peer communications.

### **Methods**

Participants were 566 college students ages 17 to 26 ( $M=19.37$ ,  $SD=1.61$ ). Ninety-six percent of participants identified as exclusively or predominantly heterosexual. Few participants identified as exclusively or predominantly homosexual (2%) or bisexual (1%), and few stated that they were unsure of how they identified (1%). Because the small sample of sexual minorities was not sufficient for comparative analyses and because it was unclear if sexual communications differed between groups, I focused exclusively on all emerging adults who identified as exclusively or predominantly heterosexual ( $n=530$ ). Young women made up 54.4% of the sample. Nearly one-third of women and men belonged to sororities and fraternities, respectively. Approximately 70% of participants identified as white/Caucasian/European American, and 19%

identified as Asian/Pacific Islander/Asian American. Fewer participants identified as black/African American (4%), Latino/Hispanic/Native American (3%), Middle Eastern (3%), or multi-racial (1%). Three participants did not respond. Parents' education was measured in number of years of schooling completed. Mothers, on average, graduated from college ( $M=16.39$  years of schooling,  $SD=2.34$ ), and fathers, on average received some form of graduate training ( $M=17.17$  years,  $SD=2.79$ ).

### Measures

**Sexual attitudes and experiences.** There were two measures of sexual attitudes. The first measure was the Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale (AMIRS), which is a 12-item measure that assesses the degree to which one endorses hegemonic masculinity in the context of social and romantic relationships (Chu, Porche, & Tolman, 2005). Participants used a 6-point scale anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) to indicate how much they agreed with statements such as "In a good dating relationship, the guy gets his way most of the time." Responses to five items needed to be reverse-scored, such as, "I think it's important for a guy to talk about his feelings, even if people might laugh at him." The second measure was an abbreviated form of the Attitudes Towards Sex and Dating Scale that measured endorsement of the Heterosexual Script (Ward, 2002; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999). Participants used a 6-point scale anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) to indicate their level of agreement (or disagreement) with 22 statements ( $\alpha=.89$ ). An example item is, "It is worse for a woman to sleep around than it is for a man." For each measure, responses across all items were averaged, such that higher scores indicated greater endorsement. I also include one measure of sexual experience. Participants rated the extent of their experience with their dating and sexual

relationships by using a 10-point scale that ranged from 0 (*just starting out*) to 10 (*have had several sexual relationships*).

**Peer Communications.** Peer sexual communications were assessed with 30 items, each relating a cultural message/script about sexuality and sexual relationships. Participants used a 4-point scale anchored from 0 (*none*) to 3 (*a lot*) to indicate how frequently they were exposed to each message. Participants completed this measure twice, once with regard to what their *female* peers told them and once with regard to what their *male* peers told them. Items tapped into DeLamater's (1989)'s three types of sexual scripts (i.e., relational, procreational, and recreational sexual scripts), and also the Heterosexual Script (Kim et al., 2007). A version of this measure has been used in previous research (Fletcher et al., in press; Trinh, Ward, Day, Thomas, & Levin, 2014).

Religiosity was measured with three items. Participants indicated how religious they were on a 5-point scale from (*not at all*) to 5 (*very*). Participants rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very regularly, usually once a week*) how often they attended religious services. Participants indicated how often they prayed on a 5-point scale from 1(*never*) to 5 (*very regularly; at least once a day*). Mean scores produced across these items indicate that participants, on average, were moderately religious ( $M=2.87$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ).

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent variables are reported in Table 2.1 for women and Table 2.2 for men. For women and men, the most frequent discourse discussed with female peers was the relational script, and the most frequent discourse discussed with male peers was the hookup script. For both women and men, the least frequent discourse

perceived from female and male peers' communications was the Procreational Script. Young women and men, on average, reported moderate endorsement of the Heterosexual Script. Young men reported slightly more agreement with the Heterosexual Script; their average fell between "disagree a little" and "agree a little," whereas, the average for women was closer to the level of "disagree a little." Women and men, on average, disagreed with hegemonic masculinity. Women's support of traditional masculinity, on average, was close to the "disagree" level, and men's support of traditional masculinity was between "disagree" and "disagree a little." Undergraduate women and men, on average, reported having 1-2 sexual relationships, but men's ( $M=4.93$ ,  $SD=2.65$ ) reported levels of sexual experience was significantly higher than women's ( $M=4.05$ ,  $SD=2.38$ ).

There were four sets of preliminary analyses. For each set, all analyses for women and men were conducted separately because of the focus on gender. First, I ran zero-order correlations between three dependent variables and the following demographic variables: age, U.S.-raised status, maternal and paternal education, raised in a single-parent home, Greek affiliation, and race (with 0/1 dummy codes representing membership in specific ethnic groups). Previous research has demonstrated that each of these demographic characteristics is frequently correlated with sexual attitudes and experiences (Ahrold & Meston, 2010; Zimmer-Gembeck & Helfand, 2008). Results for women and men are provided in Table 2.3.

For women, U.S.-raised status, paternal education, religiosity, Greek affiliation, self-identification as White, self-identification as Asian, self-identification as Black/African American, and being raised in a single-parent household emerged as significant correlates to sexual attitudes and level of sexual experience. Specifically, being raised in the U.S. was associated with less endorsement of masculine ideology, less endorsement of the Heterosexual

Script, and more sexual experience. Having a highly educated father and being religious was each correlated with more endorsement of the Heterosexual Script and less sexual experience. Being in a sorority was correlated with stronger endorsement of the Heterosexual Script and more sexual experience. Identifying as White was associated with less endorsement of the Heterosexual Script and more sexual experience. Identifying as Asian was associated with less sexual experience. Identifying as Black/African American and being raised in a single-parent household was each associated with greater endorsement of hegemonic/traditional masculinity. Maternal education, age, self-identification as Latina, and self-identification as multiracial were not associated with sexual behaviors and attitudes. The significant demographic correlates were controlled for in all analyses predicting women's sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Fewer demographic correlates emerged for men, and only for their sexual behavior and not their sexual attitudes. Results indicate that for men, being older, identifying as White or Black, and being in a fraternity was each associated with more sexual experience. Conversely, being religious and identifying as Asian was each associated with less sexual experience. Being raised in the U.S., maternal education, paternal education, identifying as Latino, identifying as multiracial, and being raised in a single-parent household were not associated with any sexual attitudes and behaviors. Only significant demographic correlates were controlled for in analyses predicting men's sexual attitudes and behaviors.

For the second set of preliminary analyses, I ran zero-order correlations between peer communications of discourses and the demographic variables, excluding the family-related variables. Refer to Table 2.4 for women's results. For women, being raised in the U.S. was associated with more frequent female peer communications about the hookup script and less frequent male and female peer communications about the procreational script. Higher levels of

religiosity for women were associated with reports of more frequent exposures to messages promoting the procreational script from male and female peers. Identifying as White was associated with reporting fewer procreational script messages from male and female peers, whereas the reverse was true for women who identified as Asian. Identifying as Latino, Black, or multiracial was not correlated to any communications. Being in a sorority was associated with each of the following: more hookup messages, more Heterosexual Script messages and fewer procreational script messages from both male and female peers.

For men, zero-order correlations between demographic variables and discourses are presented in Table 2.5. For men, being raised in the U.S. was associated with receiving more hookup script messages from male and female peers. Being religious was associated with receiving fewer messages promoting hookups from female peers and more messages promoting abstinence via the procreational script from male and female peers. Identifying as White was associated with more hookup messages, more Heterosexual Script messages, and fewer procreational script messages, all from male and female peers. Identifying as Asian was associated with the reverse: fewer hookup script messages, fewer Heterosexual Script messages, and more procreational messages, all from male and female peers. Identifying as Latino, Black, and multiracial were not associated with peer communications. Being in a fraternity was associated with reporting more hookup messages from male and female peers, more Heterosexual Script messages from male and female peers, and fewer messages about the procreational script from male peers.

For the third set of preliminary analyses, I ran analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to determine if there were differences across groups on demographic variables and dependent variables. Refer to [Table 2.6](#) for gender differences. Men, on average, were older than women.

There was no gender difference in religiosity. Men, on average, endorsed traditional masculinity more than women. Yet, undergraduate women and men did not differ on an assessment of their endorsement of the Heterosexual Script. Men did, however, report having more sexual experience than women. Race differences are reported in Table 2.7. Significance differences emerged for age, religiosity, and level of sexual experience. Here it appears that Black participants were more religious than other groups, and that Latino and Asian participants reported the lowest levels of sexual experience.

For the final set of preliminary analyses, I conducted inter-correlations between reports of peer communications across scripts to determine if multicollinearity exists. Refer to Tables 2.8 and 2.9 for results for women and men, respectively. For women and men, correlations between different discourses from male and female peers did not exceed .77. The majority of the inter-correlations for women (82%) and men (79%) were below 0.60. Reports of each discourse from female peers highly correlated with reports of the same discourse from male peers ( $r=.69-.77$ ). In general, greater exposure to any given discourse was associated with greater exposure to another discourse. There were a few exceptions. For example, men's reports of male peers' communications of the Heterosexual Script were not linked to their reports of female peers' communication of the procreational script. Women's reports of male peers' communications of the procreational script were not linked to female peers' and male peers' communications of the hookup script.

The first question focused on how frequently peers communicated various sexual scripts and whether the frequencies of these communications varied, depending on who was communicating to whom. I hypothesized that undergraduate women would receive more restrictive messages (i.e., relational script, procreational script, Heterosexual script) than

undergraduate men overall and specifically from same-sex peers. On the other hand, I anticipated that undergraduate men would receive more positive and permissive messages (i.e., hookup script, Heterosexual script) than undergraduate women, overall and specifically from same-sex peers. I hypothesized that the reverse would be true for other-sex peers; undergraduate women would receive more hookup script messages from their male peers than female peers, and undergraduate men would receive more relational script messages from their female peers than male peers. To test these hypotheses, I looked at gender differences on two levels, the participant and the peer, in three ways. First, I looked at differences *within* and *across* men and women's *overall* levels of peer communications. Secondly, I looked at differences between men's and women's levels of male and female peer communications. Finally, I looked at whether peer gender, participant gender, and/or both contribute to communication of each discourse.

**Participant gender differences in overall communications.** Communications from male and female peers were averaged to produce overall levels of communications for each script. A series of paired sample t-tests was conducted to identify significant gender differences within women's and men's reports of peer communications. Results are provided in Table 2.10. Women reported receiving significantly fewer hookup script messages than relational script messages, but they received more hookup script messages than procreational script messages. There was no significant difference between the frequency with which women received hookup script messages and Heterosexual script messages. Women received more relational script messages than hookup script messages, Heterosexual Script messages, and procreational script messages. Women received significantly fewer procreational script messages than messages regarding the remaining discourses. Men reported receiving significantly more hookup script messages than procreational, relational, and Heterosexual script messages. Men reported

receiving more relational script messages than procreational script messages, but they reported more exposure to hookup and Heterosexual Script messages than exposure to relational script messages. Men reported receiving more Heterosexual script messages than relational and procreational script messages, but exposure to Heterosexual Script messages paled in comparison to exposure to hookup script messages. Finally, procreational script messages were significantly fewer than all other scripts.

Next, I looked within women and men's reports of peer communications by peer gender. For example, is there a significant difference between the frequency with which men received messages about the hookup script and the Heterosexual Script from their male peers? Six paired sample t-tests looked at comparisons between male peers' communications, and six paired sample t-tests looked at comparisons between female peers' communications. There was a total of 12 paired sample t-tests for men and 12 paired sample t-tests for women. Because multiple comparisons were tested, a Bonferroni correction was used. The critical  $p$  value was set at  $.05/12 = .004$  to reduce the likelihood of Type I error. Results are provided in Table 2.11. Nearly identical patterns emerged for women and men regarding male and female peer communications; therefore, I discuss the findings for both women and men together. Male peers communicated significantly more about the hookup script than the relational script and more about the Heterosexual script than the procreational script. Male peers communicated less about the relational script than the Heterosexual script and less about the procreational script than the relational script. Male peers communicated more about the hookup script than the procreational script, but they communicated less about the Heterosexual script than the hookup script. Female peers conveyed more messages about the relational script than the hookup script and more messages about the Heterosexual Script than the procreational script. Female peers conveyed

more messages about the relational script than the Heterosexual Script, but this difference was only significant for women. Female peers conveyed more about the relational script than the procreational script, more about the hookup script than the procreational script, and more about the Heterosexual script than the hookup script.

**Differences within women and men's reports of peer communications.** Finally, I ran four linear mixed models to determine if there were significant effects of gender on the communication of each sexual script. Linear mixed models entail analyses on repeated measures while controlling for correlated errors in dependent data. Results are provided in Table 2.12. The main effects of participant gender and peer gender on reports of communications for all scripts were significant. Being a woman predicted lower levels of communications across all four scripts, relative to being a man. In terms of peer gender, reports of communication of the hookup script were greater when the peers were female. For the remaining scripts – the relational, Heterosexual, and procreational scripts – reports of communications were greater if the peers were male than when the peers were female.

These main effects were qualified with the significant interactions found between participant gender and peer gender across communications of all scripts. To interpret these interactions, I looked at the estimated marginal means, reported in Table 2.13. Women and men reported receiving more peer messages about the hookup script from their same-sex friends than their other-sex friends. Women and men reported receiving significantly more peer messages promoting the relational script from female peers than male peers. There was no difference between women's and men's reports of male peers' relational script messages. Women's and men's reports of Heterosexual Script messages from their female peers did not significantly differ, but men received significantly more messages from their male peers about the

Heterosexual Script than women did. Finally, women received significantly more messages about the procreational script from their female peers than did men, but there was no gender difference found in reports of male peers' messages about the procreational script.

**Contributions of peer communications to sexual attitudes and behaviors.** To test the contributions of peer sexual communications to college students' sexual attitudes and behaviors, I ran three hierarchical regressions each for women and men. Significant demographic correlates were entered in step 1, and peer communications of each sexual script from male and female peers were entered in step 2. Results for women are provided in Table 2.14. Nothing predicted women's endorsement of masculine ideology. However, significant discourse predictors emerged for the other two outcome variables. After controlling for U.S.-raised status, sorority status, and other demographic characteristics, female peers' communication of the Heterosexual Script and male peers' communications of the hookup script each predicted greater endorsement of the Heterosexual Script. Additionally, controlling for demographic factors, only male peers' communications of the hookup script predicted higher levels of sexual experience among women. Peer sexual communications accounted for an additional 1.6% to 16.4% of the variance in undergraduate women's sexual attitudes and level of sexual experience.

Results for men are provided in Table 2.15. Female peers' communications of the hookup script and the Heterosexual script predicted higher levels of men's endorsement of masculine ideology. Female peers' communications of the procreational script predicted lower endorsement of the Heterosexual script, and male peers' communications of the Heterosexual Script predicted higher endorsement of the Heterosexual Script. Female peers' communications of the hookup script and the heterosexual script each predicted more sexual experience. Peer sexual

communications accounted for an additional 7.1% to 29.9% of the variance in undergraduate men's sexual attitudes and level of sexual experience.

## **Discussion**

Within the past decade, the hookup culture on college campuses has received considerable empirical and theoretical attention. The imperative to enjoy and explore one's sexuality via hookups in college aligns with the hallmark characteristics of emerging adulthood (Halpern & Kaestle, 2013). Although sexual experimentation is normative for many college students during this period, these experiences are not universal. Variations across college students' sexual attitudes and experiences negate the idea of a single peer culture let alone a universal sexual script. Indeed, sexual norms and ideals vary, depending on the sexual script(s) endorsed. Communication patterns of sexual scripts also vary, such that women are far more likely to report receiving messages promoting relational and procreational scripts than men. The main implication of these gender differences is that women's sexuality remains taboo and their sexual experimentation remains restricted by social mores. What is unclear is who communicates these expectations to whom, and how do these communications contribute to sexual attitudes? The current study addressed these questions by looking at patterns of communications according to the gender of the source and recipient.

### **Peer Gender Differentiation Reveals Gendered Patterns of Sexual Communications**

My findings reveal that specifying the gender of peers adds greater nuance to our understanding of peer sexual socialization. Only one significant gender difference emerged across comparisons of participants' reports of *overall* peer communications; women reported more frequent peer communications of the relational script than men. Yet, when overall peer communications were disaggregated into reports of male and female peer communications,

significant interactions between participant gender and peer gender emerged for each sexual script. For example, female peers conveyed more messages about a relational script to women than men, but male peers conveyed messages about the relational script equally to women and men. The complexities of who communicates to whom and about what are glossed over when peer gender remains undifferentiated.

Communication patterns reveal that same-sex peers largely communicate messages about sexual scripts that are gender-specific. For example, young men are more likely to receive messages promoting hookups from their male friends than their female friends, and young women are more likely to receive messages promoting the procreational script from their female friends than from their male friends. These gender differences in the data are consistent with previous research, whereby women report receiving more conservative and restrictive messages about sex than men (Fletcher et al., 2014; Lefkowitz et al., 2004; Trinh et al., 2014). Further, the current study suggests that gender differences are driven by same-sex peers' targeted communications that uphold traditional sex roles. On the one hand, frequent communications of sexual scripts that align with gender expectations are not surprising. Conforming to or being perceived as conforming to sexual scripts appropriate for one's gender is heavily rewarded. For example, adolescent boys who report having more sexual partners experience more peer acceptance (i.e., more friendship nominations) (Kreager & Staff, 2009). Actual and perceived violations of sexual scripts appropriate for one's gender are punished. For example, young people ostracize undergraduate women who are perceived as promiscuous (Bogle, 2008). Ultimately, peer support and acceptance is greater for young people who conform to traditional gender norms (Carter & McCloskey, 1984; Horn, 2007; Lee & Troop-Gordon, 2011).

Same-sex peers, in particular, have the potential to play a strong role in reinforcing gender-specific sexual scripts for men. For instance, in these data, men received more messages from their male friends promoting the Heterosexual and hookup scripts than messages regarding the relational and procreational scripts. The prominence of the Heterosexual and hookup scripts in men's communications with their male peers is consistent with research on same-sex peers' influence on men's gender attitudes. Indeed, homosocial networks that consist mostly or entirely of men – friendship groups, fraternities, armed forces – are sites where hegemonic masculinity is performed and reinforced (Bird, 1996; Hunt & Gonsalkorale, 2014; Kalof & Cargill, 1991). For young men, sharing their hookup experiences with their peers is an effective way to gain status and affirm their heterosexual and masculine identity (Flood, 2007; Jonason, 2007).

For women, same-sex peers' messages are complex. Women receive more messages from their female peers about relationships than they do about hookup scripts, more hookup messages relative to procreational script messages, and more Heterosexual Script messages relative to hookup script messages. There are two possible explanations for the overall conservative nature of female peers' communications to women. First, there is some evidence to indicate that young women judge their same-sex peers more harshly for sexual permissiveness than do young men, especially if they have less sexual experience than them (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002; Vrangalova, Bukberg, & Rieger, 2013). Another possible explanation is that young women communicate more conservative messages to their female peers as a measure of protection against sexual dangers and stigma (Menegatos, Lederman, & Hess, 2010). It is worth noting, however, that female peers conveyed more hookup messages to women than did male peers. It may be easier for women to talk about hookups with their female peers than male peers because disclosure and intimacy is greater in friendships among girls and women than

friendships among boys and men (Bowman, 2009; Holmstrom, 2009). At the same time, ambivalence surrounding women's hookups likely makes it difficult for women to feel safe talking about hookups. Indeed, in one study, undergraduate women believed that women enforced the sexual double standard more than men, and that women endorsed the sexual double standard to a much greater extent than their own personal endorsement (Milhausen & Herold, 1999). As "insiders" who know the "rules," same-sex peers are simultaneously sympathetic and critical as educators and enforcers.

### **Other-sex Peers: Less Gendered Communication**

Communicating with other-sex peers may provide a reprieve from learning the rules. Indeed, the data indicate that messages from other-sex peers were more mixed, conveying some messages that reinforced traditional sexual expectations and other messages that did not. The less gendered communications of other-sex peers supports previous research wherein young people state that they learn more from their other-sex friends about the other sex than from their same-sex friends (Hand & Furman, 2008). The perspectives of other-sex peers are valued and featured regularly in popular magazines for women (e.g., *Cosmopolitan's* "Ask Him Anything" column) and men (e.g., *GQ's* "Ask a Real Live Lady" column). Young people may also learn how to resist or challenge dominant gendered sexual expectations with their other-sex friends. For example, one ethnography demonstrated that adolescent girls and adolescent boys challenge gendered sexual norms through playful interactions involving reverse gender roles (Eder, Colleen, & Parker, 1995). By chasing and wrestling with adolescent boys, adolescent girls mocked traditional gendered sexual norms that girls/women should be passive and coy. By being chased, adolescent boys mocked gendered sexual norms that boys/men should initiate and pursue girls/women. There may also be more comfort with other-sex peers. For men, communicating

with female friends provides a reprieve from the more hierarchical structure of male peer groups. Because women and men expect their female friends to be more nurturing and communicative (Holmstrom, 2009), men may feel more comfortable exploring and/or conveying opposition to masculine ideology. Because women, on average, report disclosing more information to their friends than do men, speaking to male peers may yield new insights and a “fresher” perspective from a more “objective” person(s).

The two most frequently discussed sexual scripts in male peer messages to women were the Heterosexual Script and the hookup script. Whereas the Heterosexual Script entails passivity and sexual inhibition for women, the hookup script promotes sexual experimentation. On the one hand, male peers’ communication of the Heterosexual Script is congruent with previous research documenting men’s stronger endorsement of the sexual double standard and traditional gender ideologies relative to women (Peterson & Hyde, 2010; Rudman, Fetterolf, & Sanchez, 2013). Indeed, in the current study, men, on average, endorsed masculine ideology and the Heterosexual Script more than women. Similarly, Rudman and colleagues (2012) found that undergraduate men discouraged their female friends from casual sex far more often than their male friends. Unsurprisingly, men penalize women who they perceive as promiscuous (Bogle, 2008; Stompler, 1994). On the other hand, undergraduate women’s reports of frequent male peers’ communication of the *hookup script* can be explained in several ways. First, the study’s sample was predominantly White, middle to upper-middle class, and not very religious, each of which predicts greater participation in the hookup culture (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Fielder, Walsh, Carey, & Carey, 2013). Secondly, hooking up is normative for undergraduate women and men (England & Thomas, 2006). Finally, hooking up has social and affective rewards for emerging adult women, many of whom are focused on their education and want to delay long-

term romantic relationships (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Kenney, Thadani, & Labrie, 2013). For women, male peers may play a unique role in their sexual socialization because although they do not convey wholly sex-positive messages, their mixed messages still contrast with the more restrictive messages that they receive from their same-sex peers and parents.

Women communicated more to men about a relational script than they did about hookup and procreational scripts, which is consistent with research documenting women's weak endorsement of the traditional gender ideologies and stronger endorsement of affiliation-based motives for sex (i.e., love). In fact, women in this study, on average, disagreed with hegemonic masculinity (i.e., average was below the mid-point). Similarly, Rudman et al. (2013) found that undergraduate women advised their male friends to not have casual sex. Because women's sexuality remains restricted and taboo, young women may feel that they are less able to talk about hookups to men. Hookups are outside the realm of sexual respectability (i.e., relationships). Therefore, speaking to their male peers about hookups may feel incriminating, especially given that women are judged not just for what they do but also for what others *think* they do (i.e., presumed promiscuity based on their way of dressing). Men, however, may feel more at ease conveying messages about the hookup script to women because such communications do not incriminate them. Unsurprisingly, the data here show that men report receiving few messages about hookups from women, but women report receiving many messages about hookups from men.

### **Contributions of Peer Sexual Communications to Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors**

What young people say to one another was linked to their sexual attitudes and behaviors, and these links varied depending on who spoke to whom. One surprising finding was that there were more associations between communications from other-sex peers and participants' sexual

attitudes and behaviors than there were links between communications from same-sex peers and participants' sexual attitudes and behaviors. For example, only female peers' communication of the Heterosexual Script and the hookup script predicted men's masculine ideology and level of sexual experience. One possible explanation is that young men may take less stock in what their male peers say about sex and relationships. They may attribute some of the messages promoting the Heterosexual Script and the hookup script as bravado. In fact, interviews with adolescent boys and emerging adult men reveal that many question the veracity of some of their male peers' stories about sex (Kimmel, 2008; Smiler, 2013). Another possible explanation of these null findings is that there was little variance in men's endorsement of hegemonic masculinity and in male peers' communications of the hookup script. Approximately 75% of men reported scores at or below the midpoint (i.e., a score of 3 translate to "disagree a little bit") for endorsement of hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, 58% of young men reported scores between "some" and "a lot" for the frequency of male peers' communications of the hookup script. These low levels of endorsement of hegemonic masculinity and higher levels of peer messages regarding hookups likely reflect pluralistic ignorance, whereby young people think others believe in norms that they themselves do not believe. In fact, Smiler (2013) found that only 5% of adolescent boys and young men embody the sexual stereotype of men (i.e., players). Yet, young men and their peers help regulate the reputations of their female counterparts via the stories they tell about them (Bogle, 2008; Stompler, 1994). These stories reinforce the Heterosexual Script, and unsurprisingly, exposure to male peers' messages of the Heterosexual Script predicted men's actual endorsement of the Heterosexual Script.

There were few associations between peer sexual communications and women's sexual attitudes and behaviors. For example, no peer communications were associated with women's

endorsement of masculine ideology. One possible explanation for the former is that undergraduate women typically reject or minimally endorse traditional gender roles (Petersen & Hyde, 2010). Male peers' communications of the hookup script predicted higher levels of endorsement of the Heterosexual Script and sexual experience among undergraduate women. Young women who feel comfortable and open to discussing sex with their male peers may have more heterosocial competence, "the ability to effectively negotiate social situations that involve the other sex including acquaintanceships, friendships, romantic, and sexual relationships" (Grover, Nangle, Serwik, & Zeff, 2010, p. 491). It is possible that a bidirectional association exists between heterosocial competence and friendships with other-sex peers; young people who have heterosocial competence develop friendships with other-sex friends, and young people who have other-sex friends are more likely to develop heterosocial competence. Indeed, other-sex friendships are a developmental precursor for dating and sexual relationships (Feiring, 1999), which may explain why there were more links between other-sex peer communications and young people's sexual attitudes and behaviors than there were of same-sex peer communications.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The current study's findings should be interpreted with some caution for there were several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, it is not known when college students received the messages that they reported receiving. If the messages were recent, then they may have contributed more to their sexual attitudes than if they were conveyed in early adolescence. Second, the sample was homogenous. The study demonstrated that sexual messages varied depending on the gender of the recipient and messenger, but sexual messages likely vary depending on race and class. Indeed, members of ethnic and racial groups may communicate

concerns to their peers about handling various sexual stereotypes. A third limitation is that only four discourses were assessed; other discourses, such as ones about risks, were not included.

Finally, directionality cannot be discerned given that the data are cross-sectional. A major concern of peer socialization research is selection versus socialization. Selection refers to the process of young people choosing friends that are already similar to them. Accordingly, it is possible that young people choose to discuss their sexual values with their friends who are similar to them and likely share the same values. Socialization refers to the process of social influence, whereby friends become similar over time by learning from each other. Accordingly, it is possible that young people become similar to their friends by interacting with them over time. Although the gender of the peers was specified, nothing else could be discerned about the peers in question. Young people are more likely to share their sexual values with close and trusted friends. This selective disclosure may especially be true for young people who may feel ostracized for their sexual attitudes. Interviews with adolescent girls who reported having a higher-than-average number of sexual partners revealed that friends can help buffer adolescent girls from experiencing stigma associated with violating the sexual double standard (Lyons, Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2011). For example, there were unspoken rules that stories that are shared in the friendship group are not to be repeated to peers outside their group.

Future directions should consider looking at peer sexual communications over time and across transitions. Whereas sex is considered normative in emerging adulthood, sex in early adolescence is considered more taboo. Therefore, young people's conversations likely change as young people age. For example, college students' acceptance of casual sex was found to increase over a one-year span while their belief in the value of sex occurring exclusively in relationships decreased over time (Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2012). At the same time, the influence of peers may

be stronger during adolescence than during emerging adulthood. Peer influences may also be stronger during transitions, including attending a new school and joining a Greek organization (e.g., fraternities, sororities). Transitions may represent times when young people are particularly attentive to new norms and expectations.

The current study demonstrates that peer sexual socialization is heavily gendered. By assessing reports of communications from male and female peers, it is evident that patterns of communication regarding sexual scripts vary considerably, depending on who is speaking to whom. Ultimately, both female and male peers contribute to emerging adults' gendered sexual scripts. These findings provide support for the need to take a more nuanced approach to assessing peer influences.

## CHAPTER 3

### STUDY 2: ANALYSIS OF YOUNG WOMEN'S REPORTS OF PEER SEXUAL COMMUNICATIONS

#### Introduction

Women receive numerous sexual messages and face many sexual expectations. From the passive, partner-pleasing ways of traditional femininity to the sassy, assertive sexuality of *Cosmopolitan* magazine (Kim & Ward, 2012), divergent discourses regarding female sexuality abound. Therefore, the current study focuses exclusively on emerging adult women. Emerging adulthood is a central time for young people to explore multiple cultural discourses outlining the norms of love, work, identity, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). For young women, explorations of love, in particular, may be facilitated by the hookup culture of college campuses that emphasizes casual sexual encounters and sexual experimentation. However, this exploration may be complicated by traditional gendered sexual norms that entail a double standard (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012). Whereas the sexual experiences of young men – especially heterosexual men – are typically celebrated within this standard, the sexual experiences of young women are closely scrutinized and policed. For women, sex within long-term, romantic, committed, and heterosexual relationships is most aligned with traditional femininity and considered ideal, yet it contradicts the hookup culture. Do young women in college receive potentially conflicting messages about sexual discourses? Because undergraduate women report relying on their peers for support and guidance regarding hookups and relationships, (Lefkowitz et al., 2004), the goal of the current study was to explore undergraduate women's retrospective reports of peer sexual communications.

Whereas previous research has repeatedly documented the fact that young women receive restrictive and moralistic messages about sex, they do, in fact, receive encouraging and positive messages about sex too, albeit with less frequency (Fletcher et al., in press; Lefkowitz et al., 2004; Levin et al., 2012; Trinh et al., 2014). In Study 1, the average reported level of exposure to female peers' and male peers' messages regarding the hookup script fell between "a little bit" and "some." Likewise, the average reported level of exposure to female peers' and male peers' messages about the Heterosexual Script also fell between the "a little bit" and "some," but this exposure to Heterosexual Script messages exceeded exposure levels to hookup script messages. The prevalence rates of both of these messages do not provide insight into how these messages *co-exist*. Are messages about sexual gatekeeping conveyed alongside messages about hookups and sexual pleasure? How do young people advise their peers to adhere to sexual scripts?

These questions remain unanswered for two reasons. First, previous research, including Study 1, measured sexual communication of topics and discourses discretely, and this approach of assessing sexual communications ignores the ways in which these messages can overlap. It is possible that an adolescent or emerging adult can receive messages regarding multiple scripts simultaneously. For example, the message that "it is safer and easier for girls to wait until marriage to have sex than it is for boys" reflects the Heterosexual, procreational, *and* relational scripts. Secondly, communications of sexual discourses and topics do not reveal how young people and their peers advise and support one another to meet sexual expectations and to fulfill sex roles. As previously mentioned, women, in particular, face numerous sexual expectations. The current study represents an initial effort to address these gaps in the literature and to expand on the findings in Study 1. By soliciting and analyzing emerging adult women's reports of peer

sexual communications through open-ended questions, I investigate how peers encourage and/or discourage women's sexual explorations.

The purpose of the study is to provide a descriptive analysis of peer sexual communications targeted to women. To do so, I focus on achieving three specific aims. First, I investigate the content of the messages young women received from their peers. What kinds of messages about sex and relationships do women report receiving? Here, I take a broader, open-ended approach to this question, allowing room for more than the four discourses examined in Study 1 to emerge. Second, I examine whether exposure to this broader set of messages differs between female and male peers. Are male peers more encouraging of sexual exploration and sexual experimentation than female peers? Which sex more rigidly polices sexual norms for women? Finally, I identify how peer messages are nuanced and may convey endorsement of more than one sexual value or expectation for young women.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were 451 undergraduate women enrolled in a large, public university in the Midwest. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 22. Participants were recruited from the Psychology Subject Pool (n=340) and from discussion sections of an Introduction to Developmental Psychology course (n=111). Women in the former group took part in a larger survey study of sexual socialization, whereas women in the latter group only completed the open-ended questions of the aforementioned survey. All women received course credit for participation, and their responses were anonymous and confidential. Because participants from the Introduction to Developmental Psychology course were only asked to provide their age and sex on their forms, only age differences could be discerned between the two groups. Participants

in the Psychology Subject Pool were, on average, younger than participants from the Introduction to Developmental Psychology course (19.15 v. 19.88 years old). This age difference was unsurprising, given that the Psychology Subject Pool consisted of students in Introduction to Psychology, a prerequisite for Introduction to Developmental Psychology.

### **Procedures**

Participants read the following prompt: “Frequently, we receive messages about romantic relationships and sex from the important people in our lives, such as our parents and friends. Sometimes, these messages conflict, and sometimes they agree. What kind of messages have you received?” Participants then answered four questions. Because of my interest in peer influences, I focused on two questions: What did your male friends tell you about sex and relationships? What did your female friends tell you about sex and relationships? Participants were instructed to write as many statements and messages as they could remember.

### **Analysis Strategies**

The first aim was to investigate the messages that young women recalled from their peers, and the second aim was to examine whether these messages differed between female and male peers. The third aim was to analyze nuances within reports of peer messages regarding varying levels of support for sexual values and expectations. To achieve the first and third aims, I used thematic analysis, “a method of systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insights into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). Thematic analysis is an ideal method because of its flexibility. For the second aim, I used chi-square analyses.

## **Code Development**

Sexual scripts evolve over time; what is deemed normative at this moment may later be considered deviant and vice versa. Therefore, code development was an inductive process to capture *current* sexual values, norms, and expectations among emerging adult women. I worked with three undergraduate research assistants to code and to analyze data. The first step of this bottom-up analytic approach was initial coding, the process of reading portions of the data to identify as many themes as possible. Unlike the first step, the second step involved collaboration, where my undergraduate research assistants and I discussed all themes. The commonalities found across themes were used to form and revise initial coding schemes. These first two steps were done repeatedly until saturation occurred, whereby no new additional themes were detected. For the third step, each person independently used these coding schemes to code a portion of the data. In the fourth step, coding discrepancies were discussed and codes were revised to enhance clarity and to capture greater breadth in the data. Steps 3 and 4 were done repeatedly until codes were no longer revised. The entire procedure that involved developing the codes and then coding the data took approximately 10 months.

## **Coding Procedures**

After the codes were established, focused coding began. Two pairs of coders coded all the data, independently of each other, so that all data were coded using the same coding schemes. Coding and analyses were done using Dedoose, a web-based mixed methods research program. A participant's response to each question represented a unit of analysis. Each unit of analysis could receive up to four codes. The limit was set to four because preliminary coding trials indicated that most units of analyses received fewer than five codes. The limit of four codes was

also set to help coders achieve reliability. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using percent agreement. Percent agreement varied across codes, from 82% to 98%.

### **Description of Specific Codes**

There were four themes that shaped the development of coding schemes: the hookup script, Good Girl/Pleasing Woman<sup>1</sup>, instrumental advice, and disclosure/support. Multiple codes were created to capture nuances within each theme. Refer to Table 3.1 for a description of the themes, constituent codes or subthemes, and examples of coded messages.

**Theme 1: Hookups.** Collectively, messages under the hookup theme revolved around the Together Woman discourse (Philips, 2000). This general discourse conveys the notions that sex is normative and that having sex outside of relationships is perfectly acceptable and pleasurable, and part of being a modern woman. There were five subthemes. Messages that conveyed support for women's pursuit of their sexual needs and desires were coded as *Sexual Agency*. Messages that conveyed that sex is enjoyable and fun were coded as *Sexual Pleasure*. Messages that conveyed that sex is not serious and is casual were coded as *Sex Is Okay*, and messages that conveyed that having sex and having sexual desire is normal were coded as *Sex is Common/Natural*. Messages that conveyed that relationships are difficult, not ideal during college, and/or not worthwhile were coded as *Stay Single*.

**Theme 2: Good Girl/Pleasing Woman<sup>1</sup>.** Although the Heterosexual Script consists of many components, I focused on conventional messages about female sexuality, as outlined by Philips' (2000) description of the Pleasing Woman discourse and Kim et al.'s (2007, p.148) *Good Girls* coding scheme. The general premise behind these two phrases – Pleasing Women and Good Girls – is that passivity and morality are central to traditional femininity. Specifically,

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<sup>1</sup> Because the criteria set forth in Kim et al.'s Good Girl Code (2007) aligns with Philips' (2002) Pleasing Woman discourse, I use them both in the code name, Good Girl/Pleasing Woman.

girls and women are expected to be *passively* pleasing (e.g., dressing to please him, waiting for him to make the first move) while being “*actively* selfless” (e.g., prioritizing his needs and desires over her own) (Philips, 2000, p. 39). For girls and women, sex is acceptable within a narrow context: romantic, long-term, committed relationships. There were seven subthemes. Three subthemes focused on the conditions that make sex acceptable. One subtheme was *Abstinence Until Marriage*. The second subtheme was *Right Timing* and referred to any messages that encouraged young women to wait until they were older and/or until they were “ready.” The third subtheme was *Wait for Love* and referred to any messages that instructed a woman to not have sex until she is in love and/or to wait until she has found the person she wants to marry. Two subthemes focused on how sex is most appropriate in relationships. Messages that explicitly prohibited hookups and encouraged involvement in romantic relationships were coded as *Meaningful Relationships*. The other subtheme was *Role of Sex in Relationships* and referred to any messages that conveyed that sex is best in a relationship and that sex strengthens a relationship. The sixth subtheme was *Negative Consequences of Sex*, and referred to messages pertaining to physical pain or discomfort regarding sexual intercourse, sexually transmitted infections, and risks of unplanned pregnancies. The last subtheme was *Keep it Classy* and refers to the reputational consequences of violating the Heterosexual Script.

**Theme 3: Instrumental advice.** Reports of peer messages often entailed advice about what to do and what not to do. Most advice pertained to sex and relationships. Advice about sex varied and resulted in two subthemes. One such subtheme was *Sex Advice*, and pertained to messages regarding sexual techniques to enhance pleasure. The other subtheme was *Sexual Health* and pertained to all messages regarding strategies to minimize sexual health risks. The third and final subtheme was *Relationship Advice*. Messages that conveyed any advice about

what one should do to initiate, maintain, or terminate a romantic relationship were coded as *Relationship Advice*.

**Theme 4: Disclosure and Support.** Some undergraduate women described the quality of their sexual discussions, and their descriptions emphasized disclosure and support. Reports of having open discussions with one's peers about sex and relationships were coded as *Disclosure*. *Support* was a broad subtheme. Reports of expressing and exchanging support for their own and their friends' relationships and sexual decisions were coded as *Support*. Reports of giving/receiving compliments to/from their friends, proclaiming that they and/or their friends "deserve the best," and expressing a desire to protect one another were each coded as *Support*.

## Results

Approximately 92% of women (n=415) reported that they received messages about sex and relationships from their peers. Only 37 women reported no communications from both female and male peers, and approximately 73% of these women (n=27) reported that they did not have friends or did not talk about sex and relationships with their friends. Some women reported receiving messages about sex and relationships only from their male peers (n=16) or only from their female peers (n=82). Overall, peer sexual communications appears to be a common occurrence for emerging adult women, particularly with their female friends. Young women received messages that promoted diverse sexual values and beliefs. Percentages for all messages from male and female peers are listed in Table 3.2.

### **Aim 1: Prevalence of Peer Communications of Discourses**

Across the four major themes/discourses, undergraduate women's reports of female peers' communications differed from their reports of male peers' communications. The most prevalent discourse in women's conversations with their female peers was *Good Girl/Pleasing*

*Woman*; approximately 43.5% of women's reports of female peers' communications consisted of *Good Girl/Pleasing Woman* messages (e.g., "Wait till you're in a relationship. Look for good guys. Play hard to get. Don't make the first move"). Nearly 37% of women's reports of female peers' messages conveyed *Instrumental Advice* (e.g., "We usually talk about cute boys and flirting. Generally my friends think indirect, subtle approaches are preferred"). Approximately 32% of women described their discussions about sex and relationships with their female friends as open and supportive (i.e., *Disclosure and Support* theme) (e.g., "My friends are not virgins. Sometimes they talk about hookups they've had or people they want to have sex with or relationship issues that are having"). The least prevalent discourse was *Hookup Script*, yet these messages were still common, as 28% of women reported receiving *Hookup Script* messages from their female friends (e.g., "They say sex is not a big deal. A few of them have had one night stands and see no problem with it").

Conversely, the most prevalent discourse in women's conversations with their male peers was the *Hookup Script* (e.g., "Definitely expressed concern and care. Still encouraged to go get it, do what I wanted, not necessarily what the guy wants"). Approximately 42% of women's reports of male peers' communications consisted of *Hookup Script* messages. The second most prevalent theme in male peer messages was *Instrumental Advice* (e.g., "My male friends advise me when or when not to text someone. Usually they advise me to be bold and go for it"). Almost 29% of women reported some form of advice from their male friends regarding sex, relationship, and/or sexual health. The least prevalent themes were *Disclosure and Support* and *Good Girl/Pleasing Woman*. Twenty-three percent of undergraduate women described their conversations with male peers about sex and relationships as open and supportive (e.g., "We talk about our relationship issues and complaints about the opposite sex. We tell each other if we are

virgins or not”). Twenty-three percent of undergraduate women also reported receiving *Good Girl/Pleasing Woman* discourse from their male peers (e.g., “They say not to give in easily because it will not be fun or worth it for the guy to continue”). Undergraduate women’s discussions about sex and relationships with their female peers appear to be less conservative than the discussions they have with their male peers.

Within each of the four themes, the most prevalent and least prevalent peer messages across subthemes were the same across female and male peers. Within the hookup script, the most common message was *Sex is Casual* (e.g., “They [male peers] tell me to hook up with a lot of guys because I will be happier if I do”), and the least common message was *Discouragement of Relationships* (e.g., “My female friends and I have discussed that the majority of men are pigs and that none of us are in serious relationships because we don’t like being tied down”). Across components of the *Good Girl/Pleasing Woman* script, the most common message was the *Role of Sex in Relationships* (e.g., “They [female friends] say that sex is for girlfriends and boyfriends. It can get girls pregnant, and sex will make a boy love you”), and the least common type of message was *Negative Consequences of Sex*. All messages that were coded as Negative Consequences of Sex came from female peers, and most described negative consequences surrounding the first sexual intercourse (e.g., “Some of my friends who have had sex mentioned that it hurts the first time. They say it is fun after you get used to it and more comfortable with it”). In terms of *Instrumental Advice*, *Relationship Advice* was the most common type of advice given, and advice on *Safe Sex* was the least common type. Relationship advice statements from male and female peers were similar in the values they conveyed (e.g., “They [male peers] say honesty is key and game playing is annoying”). Common pieces of relationship advice stemmed from peers’ endorsement of male sexual stereotypes and consequently their desire to forewarn

their friends (e.g., “If you are in a relationship and you don’t put out, a guy will leave you”). Finally, in terms of *Disclosure and Support*, more peer messages were coded as *Emotional Support* (e.g., “They say that my choices are my own and it is ok to wait if I am not ready. They are always there to talk”) than as *Sharing Personal Experiences* (e.g., “We tell each other who we have hooked up with, what we did, how good he was, and what the guy looked like”).

### **Aim 2: Gender Differences in Peer Communications**

Some reports of communications varied between male and female peers. Findings from chi-square analyses reported in Table 3.2 indicate that male and female peers communicated all components of the hookup script similarly except *Sex is Casual*. Women more frequently received *Sex Is Casual* messages from their male peers than their female peers. Unlike the hookup script, reports of communications of the Heterosexual Script varied considerably by source. Female peers were significantly more likely to communicate all components of the Good Girl/Pleasing Woman script than were male peers except for *Abstinence Until Marriage* and *Relationships Are Ideal*. For *Instrumental Advice*, there was only one gender difference; women reported receiving more *Safe Sex* messages from their female friends than from their male friends. There were no significant gender differences across reports of *Sex Advice* and *Relationship Advice*. For *Disclosure and Emotional Support*, female peer messages were more likely to be coded as *Sharing Personal Experiences* and *Emotional Support* than were male peer messages.

### **Aim 3: Exploring Overlapping Peer Messages**

It is important to note that the aforementioned prevalence rates do not take into account the fact that some messages targeted to emerging adult women were “mixed.” In other words, some women’s responses regarding peer messages received more than one of the following

codes: *Hookup Script*, *Good Girl/Pleasing Women*, *Instrumental Advice*, and *Disclosure and Support*. For example, one woman wrote, “My female friends have always said to enjoy yourself while in college but don’t go overboard with sexual partners.” The first half of the message – “My female friends have always said to enjoy yourself while in college...” – received two *Hookup Script* codes, sexual agency and sexual pleasure. The last half of the message – “...but don’t go overboard with sexual partners” – was coded as “keep it classy,” a constituent code of the *Good/Girl/Pleasing Woman* script. For clarity, I only focus on code co-occurrence across two themes at a time.

Table 3.3 presents percentages for code co-occurrence among women’s reports of *female* peers’ messages between the four major themes. Peer messages frequently blend advice, precautions, sanctions, and/or divergent norms simultaneously. For example, approximately 26% of *Good Girl/Pleasing Woman* statements from female peers also received codes for *Hookup* messages (e.g., “They say its ok to hook up with a guy you like. It’s alright to keep your standards high and not to settle. It’s okay to wait to have sex”). More statements from female peers coded as containing *Disclosure and Support* messages were also coded as containing *Good Girl/Pleasing Woman* messages (26%) than *Hookup* messages (19%) (e.g., “My female friends are all very empowered and adamant that sex and relationships are something that should be openly discussed without embarrassment”). Whereas few statements containing *Instrumental Advice* messages were also coded as including *Hookup* messages (16%) (e.g., “All of my close female friends are very open about their sex lives with me. We often share experiences that were good and exchange tips”), more *Instrumental Advice* messages were coded as including *Good Girl/Pleasing Woman* messages (31%) (e.g., “They say to only have sex when you are really comfortable with someone and they respect you. You must also completely trust them before you

have sex”) and *Disclosure and Support* messages (40%) (e.g., “We have talked and shared our past experiences with each other. I feel that I can go to them with any questions or concerns without feeling judged”). Overall, female peer messages stressed the need to consider interpersonal, situational, and individual factors when making sexual decisions.

Table 3.4 presents percentages of code co-occurrence among *male* peers’ messages. Forty percent of male peers’ *Good Girl/Pleasing Woman* messages were also coded as containing *Hookup* messages (e.g., “Male friends of mine are on both ends of the spectrum. One of my close guy friends is very protective and against me engaging in sexual activity, while another one kind of encourages it”). Few male peers’ *Disclosure and Support* messages were also coded as containing *Hookup* (17.33%) messages (e.g., “Sex is great. How good is your sex life? Is she/he a freak?”) or *Good Girl/Pleasing Woman* messages (12%) (e.g., “I have more male friends that I talk to about the pressures and are very supportive in my decisions rather than my partner. They look to keep me safe”). Similarly, there were few *Instrumental Advice* messages from male peers that overlapped with *Hookup* messages (13.7%) (e.g., “They give me sex tips and tell me not to settle”) or *Good Girl/Pleasing Woman* messages (18.9%) (e.g., “They encourage me to remain classy so they don’t encourage me to have sex”), but nearly 39% of *Instrumental Advice* messages from male peers were also coded as *Disclosure and Support* messages (e.g., “My male friends have talked more with me about relationships than sex. Their main message has been to be with one guy at a time and to think clearly about making decisions in a relationship”).

## **Discussion**

Contrary to common beliefs and portrayals of the hookup culture in news and mainstream media, college campuses are not sites of spontaneous, carefree, and fun-filled casual sexual encounters for all. For women, in particular, participation in the hookup culture requires

confrontation with and negotiation of the sexual double standard and its double bind for women. The consequences for hooking up or not hooking up renders any decision made less than ideal given the costs and rewards, and this is evident in the mixed messages found across women's reports of peer sexual messages. By focusing on reports of peer sexual communications rather than perceptions of peer sexual norms (i.e., estimation of prevalence rates), greater insight can be gained into the meanings young people derive from sexual scripts. The goals of the current study were to explore the content of women's reports of peer sexual communications and to discern whether there were any significant differences between male and female peers' messages.

Overall, the results illustrate that peer sexual communications are more conservative than permissive, but these messages heavily depended on the source. On the one hand, more undergraduate women reported receiving messages about how to be a Good Girl or a Pleasing Woman from their female peers than their male peers. On the other hand, more undergraduate women reported receiving messages about hookups, sexual pleasure, and sexual enjoyment from their male peers than female peers. These differences in content in peer communications reveal that female peers may be more instrumental in reinforcing ideals and expectations of femininity than male peers. For women, conveying conservative sexual messages to their female peers may serve as a way to protect them from dangers such as sexual assault and sexually transmitted diseases. Moreover, young women may be relaying the precautionary messages that they likely received as adolescents. Accordingly, young men may be conveying the permissive messages they frequently receive to their female peers. These gender differences suggest that women's approach to sex is more cautious than men. Overall, both scripts – Hookup and Good Girl/Pleasing Woman – were prevalently featured in undergraduate women's reports of peer

communications, illustrating the fact that the messages about women's sexuality are rarely straightforward.

Broadly, results of this study fall into two major themes. The first theme is the importance of context for women's sexual decisions; peer advice frequently addressed issues of timing, situational factors, and relationship or partner characteristics on sexual decisions. The second theme is women's need for discretion as a response to peers' ambivalence towards women's hookup experiences. Together, these themes illustrate how peer communications about sex reflect the multifaceted roles peers play in sexual socialization. From advice and affirmation to forewarnings and admonishments, peer messages are far from being one-note.

### **Theme 1: Context – not Desire – Shapes Sexual Rules**

The lack of consensus in reports of peer communications was the rule rather than the exception. Approximately 58% of peer messages contained words that qualified statements (i.e., "It's okay if..."), signaled contrast or disagreement (e.g., but), and suggested a plurality of opinions and norms (e.g., "some say..., but others say..."). The diversity and nuance in these messages partly stemmed from the fact that sexual desire was rarely attributed to women. In fact, only 7 participants reported peer messages that acknowledged women's sexual desires, and only one of those messages clearly and directly addressed it (i.e., "My girl friends tell me to do what I want, to not hold back, and to enjoy myself"). Because sexual desire was rarely acknowledged, it could not be used to explain women's reasons for having sex. Instead, other reasons for women's sexual decisions and experiences were emphasized, such as sexual pressure and desire for a romantic partner – reasons that reinforced stereotypical notions that women are passive. For example, many women reported receiving messages about the need to evaluate how they feel towards their relationship before deciding to have sex (e.g., "My friends say no sex until you are

in a really committed relationship and are pretty sure you will get married to that person”). Few women reported receiving messages about the need to evaluate how they themselves feel in the moment before deciding to have sex, and almost all of these messages focused on feelings of readiness than feelings of sexual desire and arousal (e.g., “My friends always say you should do it when you’re ready but don’t regret it and don’t do it to just do it”). Unsurprisingly, peer support of women’s sexual experimentation was limited and constrained.

Only 13% of mixed messages came from male peers. Male peers frequently promoted having fun and exercising caution simultaneously. One woman quoted her male peer’s advice, “Don’t be emotional. Be smart. Have fun, let loose. It’s okay to go out and not be in a relationship.” Interestingly, stereotypes of men as hypersexual and non-committal were used to justify both women’s sexual exploration and need to exercise caution. For example, one woman quoted her male peers, “They say it is ok to have fun at this age. Most guys are not in it for love, so be careful.” Although research is inconsistent, there is considerable support for the notion that undergraduate men, on average, endorse traditional sex roles and the sexual double standard more than undergraduate women (Allison & Risman, 2013; Fugère, Escoto, Cousins, Riggs, & Haerich, 2008). Therefore, men may be inclined to caution their female friends because they see women as passive targets of men’s sexual overtures.

Overall, female peers gave more messages. The average length of women’s reports of female peers’ messages was 11.46 words, and the average length of their reports of male peers’ messages was 8.53 words. Unsurprisingly, 87% of mixed messages came from female peers. One undergraduate woman’s response succinctly summarized the variations found in peer sexual communications, “Messages I have received include: wait until marriage for sex, wait until the right boyfriend for sex, and just have sex.” Indeed, many mixed messages entailed observations

of different types and levels of sexual experiences among one's female peers. Specifically, some women reported that their female peers described how sexual expectations differ across transitions. For example, the most common comment was that sex in high school is supposed to be serious, but sex in college is supposed to be casual. Casual sex was also more acceptable among women who were already sexually active. Indeed, many women received messages that their first sexual experience should be "special" (i.e., not casual). What makes a sexual encounter special is the sexual partner. Can the woman foresee having a future with him? Does the woman love him? Answering yes to these questions makes the sexual experience not only special but also acceptable according to conventional sexual expectations for women. The fact that messages about women's sexual experiences are typically couched in situation-specific details demonstrates that the meanings surrounding women's sexual experiences are diverse and context-driven.

## **Theme 2: Discretion is Advised**

Given the high levels of intimacy, support, and disclosure that characterize young women's friendships with their same-sex peers (De Goede, Branje, & Meeus, 2009; Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006) and the diverse sexual scripts that young women face, it is unsurprising that participants reported receiving a lot of sex and relationship advice. For young women, caution was needed to consider not only the meanings they ascribed to their sexual experiences but also the meanings that their peers would ascribe to them. Indeed, previous research illustrates that consequences of peers' harsh judgment of adolescent girls' and young women's sexual experiences are wide-ranging, from mild irritation to social exclusion (e.g., Kreager & Staff, 2009; Vrangalova, Bukberg, & Rieger, 2014). The fact that many young women in this study report receiving advice, particularly from their female peers, suggests that the complexities

regarding women's sexuality do not go unnoticed. Indeed, many undergraduate women's reports of female peers' messages addressed one or more of the following issues: sexual double standard, sexual health risks, emotional consequences (i.e., "feeling used" and "taken advantage of") and reputational costs from violating norms.

The most common advice or warnings given pertained to the sexual double standard, conveying that women need to exercise discretion to avoid stigma and shame. For example, one woman quoted her female peers, "They say having sex when you are not in a relationship is "skanky." They say sex is for love and makes you feel closer to your partner." It was clear that the taboo of casual sex primarily applied to women; one participant quoted her male peers, "Men can sleep around and it's a good thing, but when women sleep around, they're dirty." Ironically, support for women's sexual experiences outside of relationships reinforced the sexual double standard. For example, one undergraduate woman wrote, "They say it's okay to be a 'bad girl' as long as I don't get a bad reputation." This statement is typical of many statements that express ambivalence towards violations of expectations for female passivity. The reassurance that it is acceptable for a woman to engage in potentially reputation-damaging behaviors is undermined by the fact that this support is contingent upon a woman's being covert. Secondly, the phrase "bad girl" reinforces the idea that these behaviors are immoral and that a woman's sexuality is linked not only to her gender but also to her morality. Without outright rejections to the sexual double standard, discretion emerges as a primary response to diverse and sometimes divergent sexual expectations and norms. For example, one woman quoted her female peer, "You should enjoy being a female and not feel hindered by stereotypes and really enjoy your sexuality but do it in secret. Don't be outward with sexual promiscuity." Continuous conceptualization of women's enjoyment of their sexuality as promiscuity qualifies the support given for sexual

experimentation. Ultimately, many challenges to traditional gendered sexual expectations fell short of being actual challenges.

Many undergraduate women also reported being advised to be “safe,” “careful,” and/or “smart.” These messages more likely served as veiled references to navigating romantic relationships and hookups than minimizing risks of contracting sexually transmitted infections. Indeed, few women (n=57) reported messages about sexual health risks, and even fewer women (n=6) reported receiving peer messages that addressed forms of protection (i.e., birth control, condoms, regular STI testing). Expressing concern in very general terms, women were able to communicate support without judgment. Another possible explanation is that these broad statements reflect young people’s attempts to encourage one another to make safe and efficacious sexual decisions without “parenting” one another. Similarly, in their study of 141 college students, Menegatos et al. (2010) found that most college students would advise their friends to take minimal or moderate risks. College students were presented with a vignette about Jane, an undergraduate woman who was inebriated, and who was talking to an undergraduate man whom she is attracted to and interested in. Imagining that Jane was their friend, approximately 79% of college students wanted to persuade Jane to not go with the man or wanted to make sure Jane got home safely. Ultimately, peer messages promoting safety and caution highlight the protective and supportive role of friendships in young people’s lives.

Underlying much of the focus on dangers and safety are assumptions that adolescent girls and young women in their early 20s are not able to competently make sexual decisions and establish romantic relationships (Schalet, 2010). Denial of and resistance to young women’s sexual desires and sexual agency are evident in the sexual socialization literature (Tolman, 1994; 2002; 2012). For example, Fine (1988) notes the lack of acknowledgment of girls’ sexual desires

in sex education curricula. When adolescent girls and young women become sexually active, they face barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health care (e.g., restrictions on over-the-counter emergency contraceptives) (Fine & McClelland, 2007). Even when young women have access to and demonstrate safe sex knowledge (e.g., carry condoms) they are, at best, met with suspicion, at worst, shamed and stigmatized (Frankel & Curtis, 2008). Indeed, a woman's sexuality is linked to her morality, and any signs of being "improper" bring her character into question. This conflation of sexuality and morality begins early; college students are more likely to rate a fifth-grade girl in sexualized clothing lower than her peers in non-sexualized clothing in traits such as morality and self-respect (Graff, Murnen, & Smolak, 2012). Therefore, efforts to educate and empower adolescent girls and young women to be sexually assertive may be ineffective, given ongoing salience of sexual scripts that deny and demoralize women for sexual relationships and experiences that are not "vanilla" (Rubin, 1984).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

There are several limitations to analyzing reports of peer sexual communications. First, retrospective reports are prone to bias; what is recalled is unlikely to be exactly what was conveyed. At the same time, these recollections, regardless of their potential inaccuracies, may represent salient and potentially influential peer sexual messages. The actual influence of such messages remains unclear in the current study. How does the receipt of peer sexual messages influence how one feels about oneself and one's future sexual intentions?

Future research should also consider the contexts that underpin peer sexual communications. What sparks a conversation about sex among young women and their peers? In the current study, more women reported receiving sexual messages from their female peers than from their male peers. Communications among same-sex friends is likely, especially given taboo

topics, yet previous research finds that young people indicate that speaking with their other-sex friends exposes them to a new perspective (Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1993). It is likely that the content of these conversations is not only shaped by who is communicating to whom but is also influenced by friendship quality and homophily. It is possible that women may disclose more personal information to a friend whom she trusts, whom she has known for a long time, and whom she feels understands her. Therefore, what one says to one friend may not be the same as what the same person says to another. Peer sexual communications are likely a byproduct of peer dynamics.

Sexual socialization processes are gendered. What is taught and reinforced to young people about sex heavily differs by gender. Growing up, boys learn to be assertive, and girls learn to please others (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992; Fagot & Hagan, 1985; Leaper & Smith, 2004; Lee, & Troop-Gordon, 2011). Unsurprisingly, gender differences are well documented in the sexual socialization literature (Petersen & Hyde, 2010; 2011). Yet previous research largely ignores how those gender differences are created. Indeed, the literature on gender socialization is mainly confined to early and middle childhood, when youth are expected to acquire an understanding of their gender identity and the expectations and roles that accompany it. However, research on sexual communications in emerging adulthood demonstrates that gender socialization is continuous and not discrete; instead, it bleeds across domains, including academic achievement, leadership, and, of course, sexual socialization. The focus on gender differences in sexual socialization is a byproduct of the gendered sexual socialization process.

In differentiating peers by gender and examining young people's reports of their peers' messages about sex and relationships, the current study shows that this gendered process of sexual socialization is an *active* process. Young people are not passive receptacles of cultural

scripts; instead, they are synthesizing, and, to a lesser extent, questioning gendered sexual expectations. Young people not only receive such messages, but they inform and educate their peers. Therefore, young people and their peers not only construct and contest meanings and interpretations of cultural scripts, they also have the potential to redefine them. The nuances in peer messages and the absence of hard-and-fast rules suggest that young people may negotiate diverse messages by making numerous distinctions regarding when and under which conditions sex is acceptable. I believe that future efforts to broaden assessments of peer communications beyond textbook topics (e.g., sexual health risks) to include sexual scripts will yield a more comprehensive understanding of the gendered nature of the sexual socialization process.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **STUDY 3: ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S SEXUAL DECISION-MAKING WITHIN THE HOOKUP CONTEXT**

#### **Introduction and Hypotheses**

For undergraduate women, participation in the hookup culture on college campuses presents a double bind. Hooking up affords women opportunities to explore and enjoy sex outside of romantic relationships. At the same time, hooking up comes with risks. One such risk is the increased possibility of developing a poor sexual reputation due to the sexual double standard. Unlike men, women who are sexually assertive, experienced, and unabashedly enjoy sex are typically perceived as promiscuous, immoral, and troubled (Clayton & Trafimow, 2007; Kenney, Thadani, Ghaidarov, & LaBrie, 2013). Serving as judge, jury, and prosecutor in these sexual decisions are women's peer networks – both their close friends and their large cohort of peers – who all make judgments about women's sexual choices and respectability. It is this network of peers that women may be seeking to appease in their heads as they negotiate sexual decisions. Building on the findings of the first two studies, which highlighted peers' role as sexual teachers, advisers, and informants, the current study sought to assess contributions of peer gendered communications about sex to women's sexual motivations in the negotiation of a hookup scenario.

Ethnographies on hookup culture illustrate that the norms and expectations of the hookup culture – like any culture – are learned (Bogle, 2008; Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). Accordingly, the motivations behind women's sexual decision-making processes may change across time, as a reflection of what women have learned. Specifically, undergraduate women learn how to balance. For example, undergraduate women learn how to dress fashionably but not

in a manner that conveys that one “tries too hard;” they also learn how to party (i.e., make friends, have fun) at fraternities but not to the extent that they become “houserats” (i.e., low-status undergraduate women who overstay their welcome at fraternities) (Bogle, 2008). Similarly, hooking up without social ostracism requires a balanced negotiation between traditional gendered sexual expectations for women to be passive and pleasing, and the imperative of the hookup culture to experiment and enjoy sex, especially outside romantic relationships. Because of the double bind, the quest to achieve this balance is difficult, at best, and elusive, at worst. Accordingly, Tolman (2002, p. 8) coined the term “slut/prude tightrope” to describe the precarious nature of women’s double binds and the stigma that awaits women at any given misstep. Indeed, undergraduate women report that women in their freshmen year make the most “mistakes” (i.e., violations of rules), and as a result, are most at risk for peer ostracism (Bogle, 2008).

For women, the struggle to fulfill competing sexual expectations is intensified because their sexuality is tied to their morality. Unlike men, women face convoluted sexual expectations, where each and every decision seemingly carries high-stakes consequences. Therefore, the current study focuses exclusively on undergraduate women. What motivates their sexual decisions within the hookup context? If, according to the Heterosexual Script, sex is for men and relationships are for women, what motivates women to engage in sex outside of relationships? This question remains unanswered because assessments of sexual motivations are primarily global, whereby college students are asked to indicate the extent to which they have sex for a number of reasons, including: to show love, to obtain pleasure, to avoid conflict, or to prevent partner’s loss of interest (Browning, Hatfield, Kessler, & Levine, 2000; Impett, Peplau, & Gable,

2005). However, this approach glosses over situational and contextual factors that shape sexual decision-making processes.

One particular attribute of this decision-making process is the ability to make choices that advocate for one's own sexual needs and desires, also known as sexual agency. Having sexual agency is believed to be beneficial in a number of ways as it is associated with practicing safe sex more consistently, having more sexual knowledge, and experiencing higher levels of sexual and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Curtin et al., 2011; Harper & Welsh, 2007; Impett & Tolman, 2006). Developing sexual agency, however, runs counter to the passivity and self-sacrifice of traditional femininity. The literature on sexual agency is small but growing; overall, the findings regarding the extent to which adolescent girls and women develop sexual agency is mixed. According to several studies, undergraduate women, on average, report higher levels of condom use self-efficacy and less temptation to have unsafe sex than men do (French & Holland, 2013; Murphy, Parsons, Halkitis, Bimbi, & Borkowski, 2000). Other studies find that young women have low levels of sexual agency and that many women have had non-agentic sexual experiences (e.g., unwanted consensual sex) (Crown & Roberts, 2007; Lynn, 2000; Sanchez, Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Good, 2012). According to one study, approximately 56% of undergraduate women in their senior year reported at least one experience of non-agentic sexual experiences (Crown & Robert, 2007). The discrepancies across studies on sexual agency may arise from the fact that context is rarely addressed.

Being able to express and to pursue one's own sexual desires and needs plays a large role in being able to have satisfying and safe sexual experiences; this ability to be a sexual agent likely varies across contexts. Indeed, undergraduate women report having more satisfying sexual experiences with romantic partners than with hookup partners (Armstrong, Hamilton, &

England, 2010). In fact, the gender gap in sexual satisfaction narrows when men and women rate their sexual experiences with their romantic partner, and the gender gap widens when men and woman rate their sexual satisfaction with their hookup partner (Armstrong, England, & Fogarty, 2012). These studies suggest that being sexually agentic may be particularly difficult during hookups. Moreover, there are negative consequences associated with not exercising sexual agency. For example, having sex to primarily please one's partner or having sex because one feels pressured to do so was each associated with higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem over an academic year (Vrangalova, 2014). Accordingly, the questions remains: What motivates women's decisions to hook up during college?

From feeling aroused to feeling obligated, sexual motivations are wide-ranging. In terms of the motivations regarding hookups, two motivations are of particular interest: consideration of how sexual decisions may affect one's sexual reputation and consideration of sexual attraction and pleasure. Previous research indicates that women's concerns for their sexual reputation interfere with their feelings of sexual desire and arousal and factor heavily into their sexual decisions (Graham et al., 2004; Kenney et al., 2013). For example, interviews with young women illustrate that some women expressed concerns that their sexual partners would think they were promiscuous if they performed certain sexual acts or "performed too well." At the same time, some women feared that their peers would judge them harshly if they knew details about their sex lives. Unsurprisingly, previous research also demonstrates that women report feeling motivated by sexual desire and pleasure less often than men (Patrick et al., 2007; Patrick, Maggs, Cooper, & Lee, 2011; Richey, Knox, & Zusman, 2009). At the same time, some women *do* report that their previous hookup experiences stemmed from fulfilling their sexual needs and desires. For example, in a study of 221 undergraduate women, nearly 70% reported that women

hook up for sexual gratification (Kenney, Thadani, Ghaidarov, & LaBrie, 2013). Consideration of what motivates women's sexual experiences adds much-needed insight into the sexuality literatures.

Developmental timing also matters, for qualitative research suggests that undergraduate women may make different sexual decisions over time as they learn the "rules" of hooking up (Bogle, 2008). Specifically, undergraduate women may be more inclined to hook up during the first half of their college career than the second half. However, the developmental trends regarding sexual exploration and experimentation during emerging adulthood remain unclear; few studies have examined college students' sexual socialization over time (i.e., Fielder, Carey, & Carey, 2012; Fielder, Walsh, Carey & Carey, 2013; Kenney et al., 2013). Emerging evidence suggests that sexual attitudes, personality traits, and demographic characteristics each predict participation in hookups. For example, higher levels of impulsivity and sensation-seeking were associated with a greater number of hookup experiences in a prospective study of first-year undergraduate women's hookup experiences (Fielder, Walsh, Carey, & Carey, 2013). Most research, however, focuses on undergraduate women's post-hookup emotional reactions (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2010; Bachetal, 2013; Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008).

The current study represents an effort to explore undergraduate women's sexual motivations over a one-year span and to test whether or not sexual motivations are linked to their exposure to peer communications regarding the Heterosexual Script, a discourse that subsumes the sexual double standard. Based on longitudinal research on the hookup culture, the current study addresses the following three questions: Does exposure to peer communications about the Heterosexual Script predict concurrently and longitudinally more motivation to preserve one's sexual reputation and less motivation to seek sexual pleasure? Is there stability in sexual

motivations over a one-year span? Do reputation-based motivations predict less sexual assertiveness, whereas pleasure-based motivations predict more sexual assertiveness?

Based on previous literature that illustrates consistent links between young people's sexual behaviors and attitudes and those of their peers, I hypothesized (H1) that more frequent exposure to peer sexual communications regarding the Heterosexual Script would predict more motivation to protect one's reputation and less motivation to pursue sexual pleasure within the hookup context. I also hypothesized (H2) that motivations behind hookups would remain stable over time, such that women who were focused on protecting their sexual reputation at one time point would continue to do so one year later. Finally, I hypothesized (H3) that consideration of sexual desire would be linked to higher levels of sexual assertiveness, and that consideration of sexual reputation would be linked to lower levels of sexual assertiveness. The current study uses a scenario-based vignette that asks undergraduate women to consider what would shape their decisions to hookup. The current study builds upon Study 2, where analyses of undergraduate women's responses regarding the peer messages they received about sex and relationships yielded rich, interesting insights regarding the sexual double standard. At the same time, the diversity found in these women's responses to open-ended questions highlighted the importance of context in sexual values. Unlike Study 2, the current study narrows the focus on undergraduate women's sexual socialization by assessing how sexual decisions are made within a hookup context.

## **Methods**

### **Participants and Procedures**

Data for this study were based on analyses of an archival dataset collected for other purposes. Participants were 151 undergraduate women enrolled at a public university in the

Midwest. All were recruited from psychology courses and completed surveys at Time 1 – between November and December 2002 – and Time 2, January 2004. Participants completing surveys at Time 1 received extra credit in their courses, and participants continuing at Time 2 were compensated \$20. Participants who completed surveys at both time points did not differ from participants who completed surveys only at time 1 on religiosity, maternal and paternal education levels, race, U.S-raised status, and sexual orientation. This longitudinal sample, however, was younger than the cross-sectional sample of women who only participated at Time 1.

In the longitudinal sample, the young women ranged in age from 18 to 23, with an average age of 20 for Time 1 and 21 for Time 2. Mothers ( $M=15.96$ ,  $SD=2.38$ ) and fathers ( $M=17.0$ ,  $SD=2.75$ ), on average, had completed approximately 16 years of formal schooling, equivalent to bachelor degrees. Approximately 72% of participants identified as White/European American/Caucasian, and 13% identified as Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander. Fewer participants identified as Latina (7%), Black/African American (6%), and multiracial (2%). Approximately 97% of women identified as exclusively or predominantly heterosexual at time 1, and this increased slightly to 98% at time 2. Three women identified as exclusively homosexual at Time 1, and only one woman identified as exclusively homosexual at Time 2. One woman identified as bisexual at Time 1 and at Time 2.

## **Measures**

**Demographic variables.** Religiosity was measured as the average across three items. Participants rated how often they prayed and attended religious services on a 5-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very regularly, at least once a day*). Participants also rated how religious they were on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very*). Participants, on average, were moderately

religious at time 1 ( $M=3.25$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ) and at time 2 ( $M=3.13$ ,  $SD=1.11$ ). Parents' educational attainment was measured as the number of years in school; for example, a bachelor degree was equivalent to 16 years. Belonging to a Greek organization, being raised in the United States, and identifying as a sexual minority (i.e., homosexual, bisexual, unsure) were each measured with a dichotomous variable (0=no, 1=yes).

**Peer communications.** Peer communication of the Heterosexual Script was measured with 7 items (Trinh et al., 2014, Day et al, in press). For each item, participants indicated how often they received a given message from their peers, using a 4-point scale from 0 (*none*) to 3 (*a lot*). Example items included, "It is up to women to limit the sexual advances of men and to keep men from "going too far" and "It is worse for a woman to sleep around than it is for a man." Participants' scores across all items were averaged, such that higher scores indicated more frequent peer communication about the Heterosexual Script. Peer communications were only measured at Time 1; distinctions between female and male peers were not made in these archival data.

**Sexual decision-making factors.** Motivations behind college students' sexual decision-making process were measured with 29 items developed for this dataset. Sexual motivations were assessed at Time 1 and Time 2. Using a 5-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*), participants indicated how frequently they were influenced by a given factor. Because sexual motivations are likely influenced by contextual and situational factors, all participants read the following prompt:

You meet someone at a party or function on a Saturday night. After talking for a while, you got to her/his room for some privacy. If this is something you've never done, please skip to the next section. To what extent are your decisions about your subsequent sexual

behavior that night (which could include anything from kissing to sex, or the lack thereof) based on each of the following factors?

Sample motivations/items include “how well you physically connect with your partner” and “how you will be regarded by your friends afterwards.” A factor analysis of the 29 items was not conducted due to an inadequate sample size and data not missing at random. Approximately 48% of women completed the measure at Time 1, and 62% of women completed the measure at Time 2. Previous research demonstrates that young women are aware of and consider the social implications of their sexual decisions. Therefore, I created a subscale to assess the extent to which women factor into their sexual decisions how they think they will be perceived from their peers and their sexual partner(s). This subscale was called Consideration of Sexual Reputation (CSR) and consisted of 4 items. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) demonstrated that these items contributed to the same underlying latent variable. The data fit the model well:  $\chi^2(5)=2.77, p=.735; CFI=1.00; RMSEA=.000$ . See Figure 4.1 for the measurement model.

The second subscale was created to assess women’s consideration of physical attraction and sexual pleasure in their sexual decisions. This measure is the Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction (CSPA) measure and consists of a 4 items. A confirmatory factor analysis revealed that these items were part of the same underlying construct. The data fit the model reasonably well:  $\chi^2(2)=3.95, p=.139; CFI=0.97; RMSEA=.08$ . See Figure 4.2 for the measurement model.

Sexual assertiveness, a form of sexual agency, was measured with the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (Hurlbert, 1991). Participants used a 5-point scale from 1 (*none of the time*) to 5 (*all the time*) to indicate their degree of assertiveness according to 25 items. Example items include, “I approach my partner for sex when I desire it” and “I find myself doing sexual things

that I do not like.” After some items were reverse-scored, all responses were averaged to produce a score. Higher scores indicate greater sexual assertiveness.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics for the central variables are provided in Table 4.1. Women, on average, reported minimal peer communications regarding the Heterosexual Script; the mean falls closer to “some” than “a lot” Women reported moderate and similar levels of motivation to consider one’s reputation when making sexual decisions for Time 1 and Time 2. Women reported more consideration of pleasure and attraction in their sexual decision-making process, and this appeared to increase from Time 1 to Time 2. Women, on average, had moderate levels of sexual assertiveness across Time 1 ( $M=2.79$ ,  $SD=0.61$ ) and Time 2 ( $M=2.99$ ,  $SD=1.69$ ), with scores falling around “some of the time.” Only Consideration of Sexual Reputation varied across time, such that women reported higher levels of Consideration of Sexual Reputation at Time 2 than at Time 1. In general, this was a minimally experienced sample of undergraduate women. Approximately 48% of our sample reported not ever having vaginal intercourse at Time 1. The age of first vaginal intercourse ranged from 14 to 21, with an average age of 17.69 ( $SD=1.37$ ). For Time 1, nearly 70% of sexually active participants reported having one or two partners, and 20% of all sexually active participants reported having three or four sexual partners. Approximately 36% of participants reported not ever having vaginal intercourse at Time 2. Among those women who did report having had vaginal intercourse at Time 2, 42% reported having 1-2 sexual partners, 28% reported having 3-4 sexual partners, 16% reported having 5-10 partners, and 12% reported having 11-20 partners.

I ran zero-order correlations between demographic variables (Time 1), sexual decision-

making factors, peer communications of the Heterosexual Script, and sexual assertiveness. Results are reported in Table 4.2. Few demographic characteristics were associated with sexual decision-making factors. Higher levels of religiosity at Time 1 were associated with being Asian and with a decreased likelihood of belonging to a sorority at Time 1, and higher levels of religiosity at Time 2 were associated with being Asian, being raised in a single-parent household, belonging to a Greek organization, and reporting higher levels of sexual assertiveness at Time 2. Age at Time 1 was not a significant correlate, but age at Time 2 was negatively associated with identifying as Asian. Maternal education was positively associated with paternal education at Time 1 and at Time 2; in other words, having a highly educated mother was associated with having a highly educated father. Having a highly educated father was associated with being raised in the U.S. and belonging to a sorority. Asian participants were less likely to be in sororities at Time 1 and Time 2. Being raised in a single parent household was associated with less likelihood of being in a sorority at Time 1 and Time 2. Being in a sorority was associated with greater consideration of one's sexual reputation only at Time 2. Peer communications of the Heterosexual Script were associated with higher levels of Consideration of Sexual Reputation at Time 1. Consideration of Physical Attraction and Pleasure was not a significant correlate at Time 1 nor at Time 2. Identifying as Asian was associated with lower levels of sexual assertiveness at Time 1 but not Time 2.

I evaluated each model using AMOS 21. Missing data were estimated using the full maximum likelihood method. Goodness of fit indices included  $\chi^2$ , comparative fit index (CFI), and root-mean-square error of approximation. A model that fits will have a non-significant  $\chi^2$ , a CFI greater than .90, and a RMSEA less than or equal to .05. The theoretical model is shown in Figure 4.3. The hypothesized pathways are labeled A through I. Peer messages directly link to

Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction, and Consideration of Sexual Reputation, and Sexual Assertiveness, all at Time 1, as indicated by Paths A, B, and C. Consideration of Sexual Reputation, Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction, and Sexual Assertiveness are each hypothesized to be stable across Time 1 and Time, as in indicated by Paths D, E, and F, respectively. Cross-lags were modeled, such that Consideration of Sexual Reputation at Time 1 directly predicts Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction at Time 2 in Path G and Sexual Assertiveness at Time 2 in Path H. Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction at Time 1 directly predicts Consideration of Sexual Reputation at Time 2 in Path I and predicts Sexual Assertiveness at Time 2 at Path J. Sexual Assertiveness at Time 1 predicts Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction at Time 2 at Path K and predicts Consideration of Sexual Reputation at Time 2 at Path L. Two demographic variables, self-identification as Asian and religiosity, were allowed to predict all variables of interest, and dashed lines indicated these paths.

This initial model fit well:  $X^2(24)=25.79$ ,  $p=.364$ ; CFI=0.994; RMSEA=.022. The model was trimmed, where each insignificant pathway was eliminated one at a time. The model was re-estimated with each change. The final model had two fewer pathways than the theoretical model and is shown in Figure 4.4. The pathway between religiosity at Time 1 and peer communications and the pathway between Consideration of Physical Attraction/Pleasure at Time 1 and sexual assertiveness at Time 2 were eliminated. The final model fit the data well:  $X^2(15)=25.87$ ,  $p=.470$ .; CFI=.995; RMSEA=.001.

In the final model, several pathways among peer messages, Consideration of Sexual Pleasure, and Consideration of Sexual Reputation were significant. Receiving more frequent peer messages about gendered sexual roles predicted higher levels of Consideration of Sexual Reputation at Time 1, but peer messages did not predict Consideration of Sexual

Pleasure/Attraction at Time 1. There was stability in Consideration of Sexual Reputation, Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction, and sexual assertiveness across Time 1 and Time 2. The more one reports that she thinks about how her sexual decision may impact her reputation and may lead to a pleasurable experience, the more she thinks about those considerations one year later. Pathways between different sexual decision-making factors across time were not significant. Consideration of Sexual Reputation at Time 1 did not predict Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction at Time 2, and Consideration of Sexual Pleasure at Time 1 did not predict Consideration of Sexual Reputation at Time 2. Greater consideration of Sexual Reputation at Time 1 did predict more sexual assertiveness at Time 2.

### **Discussion**

The current study corroborates previous research on the salience of the sexual double standard in emerging adult women's sexual socialization by depicting the associations between peer messages about traditional gendered sexual roles and emerging adult women's concerns for their reputation. As hypothesized, women who report receiving frequent messages from their peers about the need for women to be sexually passive and pleasing and for men to be sex-driven and assertive (i.e., the Heterosexual Script) were more likely to make sexual decisions based on how they would be perceived. Young women's consideration of how their sexual decisions would affect their reputation persisted over a one-year span. Similarly, young women's sexual decisions based on the possibility or promise of sexual pleasure and attraction continued over time. Contrary to what was hypothesized, peer messages about gendered sexual roles did not predict less consideration of sexual attraction and pleasure when making sexual decisions. At the same time, I acknowledge that undergraduate women's focus and concern for their sexual reputation is neither new nor unique to this developmental period. Indeed, previous research

illustrates how late adolescent girls express concerns for their sexual reputation and how their sexual reputation influences their peer relationships (Kreager & Staff, 2009; Lindgren, Schacht, Pantalone, & Blayney, 2009; Lyons et al., 2011). Overall, the current study's findings point to the need to consider how the sexual double standard shapes the sexual decision-making process.

Peers teach and reinforce the sexual double standard (Eder, 1995). Unsurprisingly, undergraduate women who report receiving more peer messages promoting traditional gendered sex roles were more likely to think about the implications of their sexual decisions for their reputation. Women's concerns for their sexual reputation is a recurrent theme and finding in previous research (e.g., Currier, 2013; Lyons et al., 2011; Stewart, 1999). What was surprising was that women who reported receiving more messages promoting traditional gendered sexual roles were not necessarily less likely to be motivated by sexual pleasure/attraction. This null finding somewhat contradicts previous research that has documented links between endorsement and embodiment of feminine ideology and lower levels of sexual desire and arousal (Curtin, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2011; Sanchez, Kiefer, & Ybarra, 2006). The lack of association between women's exposure to the Heterosexual Script messages from their peers and their Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction in their sexual decision-making may stem from sexual conservatism. If undergraduate women who receive frequent peer messages about traditional gendered sexual roles hold more conservative sexual values (i.e., believing sex should be for procreation), then they may be less likely to consider other motivations to have sex, particularly within the context of a hookup.

Navigating the hookup culture on college campuses entails a steep learning curve for many undergraduate women. Interviews with undergraduate women reveal that they learn how to hookup during their freshmen year (Bogle, 2008; Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). This learning

process entails learning the “rules,” such as not hooking up with members of the same fraternity. These rules suggest that women’s sexual decisions and the reasons behind those decisions may change over time. According to Bogle (2008), many undergraduate women learn to hookup in their first year, hook up during college, and stop hooking up upon graduation. The current study, however, shows that the reasons behind undergraduate women’s sexual decisions remain stable over a one-year span. Stability in undergraduate women’s motives within the hookup context may reflect general orientations to making sexual decisions (e.g., cautious, calculated approach versus spontaneous, carefree approach). Another possible explanation for the stability in sexual decision-making factors is that majority of women who were surveyed began the study as sophomores and juniors. Ethnographies on undergraduate women suggest that the prevalence of hookups decreases drastically during senior year (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Bogle, 2008). Because participants in the current study were primarily sophomores and juniors at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively, they may have been immersed in the hookup scene. It is possible that instability would have emerged with a larger and more diverse sample of undergraduate women in terms of class standings.

The current study also showed that women’s Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction at Time 1 did not predict Consideration of Sexual Reputation at Time 2, and Consideration of Sexual Pleasure at Time 1 did not predict Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction at Time 2. There are several possible explanations for these null findings. It may be that women who are concerned for their sexual reputation may be less concerned or motivated by sexual pleasure and attraction and vice versa. Another possible explanation is that being concerned for one’s reputation is qualitatively different from being concerned and motivated for sexual pleasure.

A woman's sexual reputation does not rest solely on her sexual decisions. Adolescent girls and young women are judged according to many non-sexual aspects, such as what they wear and where they spend their time. For example, college students report that young women who wear revealing clothes and are seen frequenting parties are more likely to be perceived as promiscuous (Bogle, 2008). Therefore, concerns for sexual reputation may be ongoing and occurring across sexual and non-sexual contexts. Moreover, the fact the sexual reputation is so tenuous may explain why greater concerns for one's reputation predicts more sexual assertiveness. Women who feel that their sexual decisions are more closely linked to their reputation may feel a need to monitor what they do to ensure that they do not violate any norms.

Ultimately, concerns and motivations for sexual pleasure and attraction may be more situation-specific, which explains the lack of associations found between sexual motivations and assertiveness. For example, sexual pleasure and attraction may play a more influential role for a woman who is deciding whether or not she will want to continue seeing a man/woman she recently met than a woman who is hooking up with the same friend repeatedly (i.e. friends with benefits). Conley et al. (2011) surveyed women regarding hypothetical offers of casual sexual encounters and found that women were more willing to accept the offers for casual sex if the proposer was described as being very attractive and very sexually skilled. The ways in which concerns for sexual reputation and sexual pleasure may matter more or less across contexts and individuals may explain why there were no significant pathways between Consideration of Sexual Pleasure/Attraction and Consideration of Sexual Reputation.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The current study's findings are qualified by several limitations. One strength of the current study is the assessment of sexual motivations within a specific context, hookup culture.

Previous research typically assessed sexual motivations with little regard to context; consequently, it is unclear whether or not sexual motivations are situation-specific or represent general orientations to sexual decision-making process. In other words, it is unclear if individuals who report being motivated to have sex to gain status have sex to gain status all the time or for specific situations. Qualitative studies on undergraduate women's sexual experiences demonstrate that sexual experiences are typically not "one note." In other words, women's descriptions of their sexual experiences are not easily captured by a single word or sentiment.

Another limitation was that the measure of sexual assertiveness was a global measure. Future research should consider multiple dimensions that underlie sexual assertiveness. There may be women who feel more comfortable saying no than saying yes to sex, or vice versa. Beyond the ability to convey authentic and honest responses, women's ability to ask for what they want may vary. Indeed, the finding that women who are concerned with their sexual reputation are more sexually assertive runs counter to previous research wherein adherence to femininity is a risk factor for poor sexual health (Tolman, 1999). In other words, research that links femininity with poor sexual health suggests that feeling that one's reputation is at stake may lead women to silence what they want and need in favor for what they feel they should want and need. At the same time, the association between greater reputational concerns and more sexual assertiveness may stem from the fact that women who feel that their sexual decisions have high stakes consequences may be more invested in making sure that they do not enter potentially compromising situations. A more contextualized approach to studying sexual assertiveness is necessary to illustrate how and why women are assertive and/or not assertive.

Another strength is the longitudinal design. Across a one-year span, motivations behind undergraduate women's sexual decisions remained stable. This finding of stability adds nuance

to the qualitative literature on the hookup culture that finds relative instability in college students' participation in the hookup culture, with less stability in the beginning and end of college than the middle (Bogle, 2008). The sample and sample size, however, make it difficult to generalize these findings. There is increasing evidence that undergraduate women from working class backgrounds are less likely to report hooking up than their middle-class and affluent peers (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). In the current study, I was unable to test whether class was associated with considerations to make decisions based on one's sexual reputation and/or for sexual pleasure. Approximately 36% of undergraduate women in the current study had a mother with at least a master's degree, and 53% of undergraduate women had a father with at least a master's degree. There is also evidence that White college students are more likely to hookup than college students of color (Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Fincham, 2010). Future research should look at young people's participation in hookups (or lack thereof) from diverse backgrounds (e.g., working class, non-traditional college students, and/or non-White populations) and diverse contexts (e.g., community colleges).

## CHAPTER 5

### GRAND DISCUSSION

Sexual socialization takes center stage in peer networks, where adolescents and emerging adults work alongside their peers to learn and enact sexual scripts. This “production” repeatedly incites moral panics and is evident in ongoing cultural debates over multiple issues such as the accessibility of emergency contraceptives in college dormitory’ vending machines and middle schools’ ban on wearing “jelly” (i.e., rubber) bracelets purportedly used in a popular sex game (Culp-Ressler, 2013; Smith, 2013). The general ambivalence regarding the roles of peers in young people’s development adds fuel to these controversies. On the one hand, peer support and acceptance are linked to robust physical, emotional, and mental health, which raises concerns for isolated and rejected youth (e.g., Hartup & Stevens, 1999). On the other hand, exposure to negative peer pressure facilitates health-compromising behaviors (e.g., Allen, Porter, & McFarland, 2006). Peer influences on sexual experimentation and sexual health are widely acknowledged, but little is known about the actual process. What do adolescents and emerging adults learn from each other about sex? This dissertation aimed to contribute insight into this question by focusing on one form of peer influence – sexual communications.

The current work contributes to the literature in three ways: by focusing on peer communications of sexual values, by exploring how peer communication is shaped by gender, and by identifying links between peer communications and sexual attitudes, behaviors, and motivations. Further, these contributions complement the nascent literature of peer sexual socialization by using mixed methods. The findings from this dissertation emphasize the nuances, contradictions, and patterns in peer messages about sex, relationships, and gender.

Study 1 demonstrated that communication of sexual values varied according to who was speaking to whom. Same-sex peers typically conveyed sexual values that were aligned with the sexual double standard. For example, men received more positive messages about hookups from their male peers than their female peers, and women received more positive messages about relationships from their female peers than their male peers. Other-sex peers conveyed sexual values that opposed the sexual double standard; undergraduate women received positive messages about hookups more frequently from men than women, and undergraduate men received positive messages about relationships more frequently from women than men. Taken together, these findings suggest that same-sex peers teach the “rules” (i.e., expectations) that are ascribed to one’s gender, whereas other-sex peers may provide a “different” perspective. For women and men, this “different perspective” is more often associated with sexual attitudes and behaviors than the “same perspective” from same-sex peers. Findings from Study 1 suggest that it may be important to specify who the peers are in future studies of peer sexual socialization.

Study 2 built upon Study 1 in two ways. First, Study 2 verified that the four sexual scripts assessed in Study 1 – procreational, relational, hookup, and Heterosexual – were, indeed, discussed among emerging adults and their peers. Secondly, Study 2 illuminated the nuances of how sexual scripts were discussed by analyzing reports of peer sexual communications that were solicited via open-ended questions. By specifically focusing on the messages that undergraduate women received, the complexities and nuances of peer messages were highlighted; few undergraduate women recalled receiving messages that promoted one and only one sexual ideal or expectation, and many women described diverse sexual beliefs and experiences among their friends. Context emerged as a significant theme in the messages, whereby peers described when and under what conditions sex was appropriate and inappropriate. The factors that undergraduate

women were told to consider when making sexual decisions were numerous and most often pertained to various relationship characteristics, including duration and exclusivity. Study 2 illustrates that sexual expectations for women are numerous and not straightforward.

In Study 3, concurrent and longitudinal associations were established among peer communications of the Heterosexual Script and undergraduate women's sexual motivations within the context of hookups. More frequent communications of the Heterosexual Script were linked to making sexual decisions based on how it would affect (or not affect) one's sexual decisions, but it was not linked to making sexual decisions based on one's sexual feelings. Making decisions based on its effects on one's sexual reputation was stable over time, but was not linked to making decisions based on one's sexual feelings. The lack of associations between considerations for one's sexual feelings versus reputation suggests that undergraduate women may differ in their general orientation to sexual decision-making. Whereas, some undergraduate women may be more inclined to make sexual decisions based on temporal and situation-specific considerations (e.g., level of sexual arousal), others may base their decisions on more long-term considerations (e.g., reputation).

### **Central Role of Gender in Sexual Socialization**

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that gender socialization is a lifelong developmental process. Yet, almost all research on gender socialization focuses on early childhood. Unfortunately, the influence of gender on sexual socialization is overshadowed by the focus on gender differences. The extant literature on sexual socialization is replete with gender differences: parent sexual communications (i.e., women receive more restrictive messages than men), age of first sexual intercourse (i.e., men report earlier ages of sexual debut), sexual feelings (men report more positive feelings and fewer negative feelings than women), sexual

attitudes (i.e., women endorse the sexual double standard less than men), and sexual experiences (i.e., men report having more casual sexual encounters than women). These gender differences are not innate. The magnitude of gender differences across sexual attitudes and behaviors vary, yet many are typically small, if not negligible (Petersen & Hyde, 2010; 2011). Highlighting the tenuousness of these gender differences is the finding that such differences are diminished or magnified with experimental manipulation and across diverse assessments (Conley et al., 2011). For example, comparing means suggests that men report wanting many more sexual partners than women. This gender difference disappears if one looks at the medians. The tenuousness and variations in the robustness of gender differences (or lack thereof) illustrate the need to take a more gender-centered approach to identify how, when, and why gender shapes sexual socialization.

Many have eloquently described how various sexual socialization agents (e.g., parents, media, schools) help shape the aforementioned gender differences (e.g., Fine & McClelland, 2007; Kim et al., 2007; Philips, 2000; Tolman, 2002). This top-down approach of sexual socialization ignores the fact that young people are not passive recipients of sexual scripts and discourses. Looking at sexual socialization processes within peer networks represents an optimal opportunity to explore how young people receive and respond to messages regarding sexual expectations and roles. For example, young people's ways of helping their friends pursue or attract sexual partners illustrate how gender expectations and roles shape instrumental support. Instrumental help can vary and includes avoidance-based help (e.g., steering a disinterested friend away from an interested party) and access-based help (e.g., helping a friend approach a person he or she finds attractive) (Ackerman & Kenrick, 2009). Interestingly, undergraduate women are more likely to report receiving avoidance-based help from same- and other-sex peers,

whereas undergraduate men are more likely to report receiving access-based help (Ackerman & Kenrick, 2009).

### **Absence of Sexual Desire and Feelings in Women's Sexual Socialization**

Undergraduate women's lack of attention to sexual pleasure and their own sexual feelings was evident across all studies, but most particularly in Studies 2 and 3. Women's infrequent exposure to peer messages about hookups from Study 1 was corroborated by the perpetuation of the sexual double standard found in messages from male and female peers in Study 2. Undergraduate women in Study 2 were frequently advised to consider a host of factors unrelated to sexual feelings and desires; according to peers – particularly female peers – women ought to fully evaluate their romantic relationships before making sexual decisions. Is the relationship serious? Will the relationship lead to marriage? Self-evaluation prior to making sexual decisions was also important, but this self-evaluation largely focused on readiness. Were women ready to have sex? The insistence on readiness illustrates implicit assumptions that women are not entitled to sexual pleasure and do not want to have sex for its own sake. In Study 3, women's exposure to the Heterosexual Script messages from their peers was associated with more frequent consideration of how their sexual decisions within the context of a hookup would affect their sexual reputation. Collectively, these studies illustrate that sexual scripts that deny and denounce women's sexual desires and feelings are insidious because they not only shape the messages women receive but also inform how they make their decisions and what they communicate to their peers.

For girls and women, the struggle to develop sexual agency stems from a collective lack of rejection of the sexual double standard. Whereas sex is for men, traditional expectations dictate that sex for women is for procreation and relationship maintenance (e.g., having sex to

satisfy one's partner so he does not stray). Further, sex is tied to morality for women, but it defines masculinity for men. Given the stakes, it is unsurprising that the three dissertation studies illustrate that undergraduate women receive and are affected by restrictive peer messages about sex. Notably absent from reports of peer sexual messages is any mention of unqualified support and validation of one's sexual desires and feelings. This silence regarding sexual desire bolsters a growing body of literature regarding the lack of sexual agency among adolescent girls and young women (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006; Tolman, 2002; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). When suspicions of promiscuity can potentially arise from any "misstep" – carrying condoms or wearing a dress that is deemed "too short" – it is difficult for women to redirect their attention to their sexual desires and feelings.

### **Implications for Theory and Methods**

The three studies have implications for theory and methods. Currently, the sexual script theory is a useful *descriptive* framework for sexual socialization because it highlights distal and proximal influences on sexual socialization. Yet, the sexual scripts theory needs more elaboration to consider how *multiple* sexual scripts work in concert across the three levels. For instance, how does the relational script at the cultural level, gender-specific interpretations of the Heterosexual Script at the interpersonal level (e.g., women are passive partner-pleasers), and high levels of sexual agency (i.e., endorsement of the hookup script) at the intrapsychic level simultaneously shape sexual feelings across interpersonal contexts? Also missing from the sexual scripts theory is an acknowledgement that sexual scripts are learned over time and that sexual scripts evolve over time. In order for the sexual script theory to be adequately used in developmental research, these limitations need to be addressed.

Similarly, taking a developmental perspective on sexual socialization requires a closer consideration of the salient influential factors during different stages. Accordingly, I looked at the influence of peers rather than parents during emerging adulthood because college students spend considerably more time with their friends than with their parents. It is also important to consider continuities and discontinuities in development. For example, care for one's sexual health is a continuous process, yet the concerns regarding sexual risks changes from adolescence to emerging adulthood. Whereas, abstinence until marriage is frequently promoted in early adolescence, its relevance declines by emerging adulthood, as evidenced by the low rates of exposure to peer messages about abstinence in Study 1. Instead, sexual risks during emerging adulthood for women, in particular, is more holistic promoting emotional well being and, to a lesser extent, minimizing sexual risks.

All three studies entail analyzing retrospective accounts of peer sexual communications. From being rewarded for engaging in "gender-appropriate" play (e.g., playing house for girls and roughhousing for boys) to having "the talk" with parents, young people's sexual decisions are shaped by their lifelong exposure to implicit and explicit sexual messages. Because sexual socialization is ongoing and cumulative, retrospective reports afford a glimpse into this process. The usefulness of retrospective reports, however, varies. In one study, undergraduate women's daily reports of their sexual (i.e., vaginal intercourse without condoms) and nonsexual health behaviors (i.e., consumption of alcoholic drinks) over an eight-week period corresponded highly to their retrospective reports of that eight-week period one week later (Durant & Carey, 2002). The accuracy of retrospective reports also depended on how the questions about sexual behaviors were asked. Both adolescents and adults reported more instances of vaginal sex in retrospective reports than in daily reports, but there was no difference in daily and retrospective reports of

vaginal intercourse of categorical responses (i.e., response options include *never to everyday*). Although the reliability and accuracy of retrospective reports of peer sexual communications are currently unclear, what young people recall likely represent the perceptions and beliefs that shape and guide their sexual decisions. What is remembered may ultimately be more influential than what was actually conveyed because recollections represent the messages that were learned. The findings of the dissertation studies should be interpreted in light of the advantages and disadvantages that retrospective studies afford.

### **Real World Applications**

Learning how peers influence adolescent sexual development can help contribute to our understanding of a widely acknowledged yet understudied sexual socialization agent and can help continuous efforts to facilitate healthy and safe sexual development. Peer-led intervention and prevention programs can benefit from identifying and recruiting influential adolescents (i.e., well-respected, well-liked, members of many cliques and crowds) to correct common misperceptions regarding sex. For example, adolescents and emerging adults frequently overestimate the prevalence rates of unsafe sexual experience among their peers, and large discrepancies between their misperceptions and their actual sexual experiences are linked to greater sexual dissatisfaction (Agostinelli & Seal, 1999). Opportunities to temper adolescents' and emerging adults' expectations and perceptions about what their peers are doing (or not doing) may shift the focus on what is normative to underscore what is important to sexual health and sexual relationships, such as mutuality and consent among sexual partners. Further, identification of prominent peer norms can help improve the simplistic scripts that many intervention and prevention programs promote (i.e., "just say no") in order to discourage youth

from taking unhealthy risks. Listening to adolescents, emerging adults, and their peers can lend insight into the kinds of scripts that are actually guiding their behavior.

Findings from the dissertation studies illustrate the need to broaden sex education curricula and health services to include sexual scripts literacy. Similar to media literacy, sexual scripts literacy is the ability to critically think, question, and challenge sexual scripts. Developing sexual scripts literacy necessitates asking young people to question popular beliefs about sex and pervasive images of sex. Whose sexualized bodies are used to sell products such as hamburgers and cars? What are the common questions asked of sexual victims? Discussing responses to such questions helps individuals identify connections (and disconnections) between what they personally believe and what society espouses. Moreover, evaluating predominant sexual scripts has the potential to facilitate individual and collective efforts to revise sexual scripts to promote inclusivity and well-being. For example, the Heterosexual Script promotes the idea that heterosexuality is natural, normal, and appropriate; anything else is deviant. Furthermore, strict interpretation and adherence to the Heterosexual Script also means that men are entitled to enjoy sex but not desire and value emotional intimacy, and the reverse is expected for women. Understanding how the Heterosexual Script can be harmful can potentially help individuals gain insight into their own and others' sexual feelings and experiences.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Documenting what young people learn about sex and relationships is an initial step toward understanding the very complex and dynamic process of how young people derive meanings from these scripts and use them (or resist them) in their daily lives. Findings from the current studies suggest several directions for future research. Longitudinal studies are necessary to look at the developmental implications surrounding the transition from early adolescents'

same-sex peer groups to mixed-sex peer groups in mid- to late adolescence. This transition coincides with pubertal development, increases in peer sexual harassment, and the emergence of adolescents' first romantic relationships (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009; Petersen & Hyde, 2009). The majority of work on peer sexual communications, including the studies here, represents snapshots in time. Because young people report frequently talking to their peers about sex, it is unlikely that assessing young people's discussions about sex at one point in time captures the breadth of such discussions. Future research should consider the use of daily diaries to capture the range of messages that young people and their peers convey to one another and to identify the antecedents and consequences of such discussions. Future research should also consider longitudinal *network* analyses of sexual socialization that considers how the linked lives of peers shape developmental trajectories of sexual experimentation and sexual health. In doing so, complexities of peer sexual socialization can be addressed with respect to reciprocal but unequal influences, changes in peer group membership, and status.

**Table 2.1 Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent Variables for Women**

|                                        | Mean | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|----------------------------------------|------|----------------|---------|---------|
| <b>Female Peer Communications</b>      |      |                |         |         |
| Hookup                                 | 1.52 | .69            | 0       | 3       |
| Relational                             | 1.91 | .66            | 0       | 3       |
| Heterosexual                           | 1.73 | .73            | 0       | 3       |
| Procreational                          | 0.53 | .68            | 0       | 3       |
| <b>Male Peer Communications</b>        |      |                |         |         |
| Hookup                                 | 1.88 | .80            | 0       | 3       |
| Relational                             | 1.22 | .68            | 0       | 2.83    |
| Heterosexual                           | 1.66 | .77            | 0       | 3       |
| Procreational                          | 0.27 | .46            | 0       | 2.25    |
| <b>Sexual Attitudes and Experience</b> |      |                |         |         |
| AMIRS                                  | 1.86 | .55            | 1.00    | 3.92    |
| Heterosexual Script                    | 3.24 | .72            | 1.18    | 5.41    |
| Sexual experience                      | 4.10 | 2.36           | 0       | 10      |

**Table 2.2 Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent Variables for Men**

|                                        | Mean | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|----------------------------------------|------|----------------|---------|---------|
| <b>Female Peer Communications</b>      |      |                |         |         |
| Hookup                                 | 1.37 | .70            | 0       | 3       |
| Relational                             | 1.55 | .76            | 0       | 2.83    |
| Heterosexual                           | 1.51 | .77            | 0       | 3       |
| Procreational                          | 0.42 | .57            | 0       | 2.75    |
| <b>Male Peer Communications</b>        |      |                |         |         |
| Hookup                                 | 2.07 | .75            | 0       | 3       |
| Relational                             | 1.18 | .63            | 0       | 3       |
| Heterosexual                           | 1.76 | .74            | 0       | 3       |
| Procreational                          | 0.30 | .49            | 0       | 2.50    |
| <b>Sexual Attitudes and Experience</b> |      |                |         |         |
| AMIRS                                  | 2.63 | .66            | 1.00    | 5.00    |
| Heterosexual Script                    | 3.63 | .66            | 1.77    | 5.55    |
| Level of sexual experience             | 4.88 | 2.68           | 0       | 10      |

**Table 2.3 Zero-Order Correlations between Demographic Variables and Dependent Variables for Women and Men**

|                         | AMIRS  |      | Heterosexual Script |      | Sexual experience |        |
|-------------------------|--------|------|---------------------|------|-------------------|--------|
|                         | Women  | Men  | Women               | Men  | Women             | Men    |
| U.S.-raised             | -.21** | -.02 | -.16**              | <.01 | .14*              | .12    |
| Maternal education      | -.10   | -.09 | -.01                | <.01 | <.01              | .10    |
| Paternal education      | -.08   | -.03 | .15*                | .01  | -.13*             | .09    |
| Age                     | .08    | -.01 | -.02                | .09  | .09               | .17**  |
| Religiosity             | .11    | .12  | .15*                | .03  | -.13*             | -.16*  |
| Greek affiliation       | .03    | .03  | .23**               | .11  | .32**             | .27**  |
| White                   | -.12   | -.03 | -.12*               | .06  | .16**             | .22**  |
| Asian                   | .07    | .02  | .06                 | -.06 | -.20**            | -.25** |
| Latino                  | -.05   | .05  | -.03                | .01  | .06               | .09    |
| Black                   | .13*   | .09  | .09                 | -.01 | -.02              | .13*   |
| Multiracial             | -.01   | .08  | .06                 | .05  | -.03              | .10    |
| Single-parent household | .12*   | .02  | .04                 | -.06 | .01               | .03    |

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

Formative years (0= non-U.S raised, 1 = U.S.-raised)

Greek affiliation (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as White (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as Asian (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as Latino (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as Black (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as multiracial (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as sexual minority (0=no, 1 = yes)

Single-parent household (0=no, 1=yes)

**Table 2.4 Zero-Order Correlations between Demographic Variables and Discourse Variables for Women**

|                   | Hookup |        | Relational |        | Heterosexual Script |        | Procreational |        |
|-------------------|--------|--------|------------|--------|---------------------|--------|---------------|--------|
|                   | Male   | Female | Male       | Female | Male                | Female | Male          | Female |
| U.S.-raised       | .09    | .17**  | -.05       | -.03   | .03                 | -.01   | -.19**        | -.18** |
| Age               | -.02   | -.06   | .01        | .01    | -.01                | .07    | .04           | .02    |
| Religiosity       | -.02   | -.09   | .09        | .08    | .09                 | .11    | .25**         | .36**  |
| White             | .07    | .04    | .01        | .02    | .03                 | -.05   | -.19**        | -.23** |
| Asian             | -.09   | -.11   | -.01       | -.01   | -.05                | .02    | .17**         | .20**  |
| Latino            | -.03   | .02    | -.06       | -.10   | -.05                | -.02   | -.03          | -.05   |
| Black             | -.01   | .01    | -.01       | -.03   | -.03                | .02    | .06           | .04    |
| Multiracial       | .01    | -.01   | .05        | .05    | .02                 | .05    | .09           | .06    |
| Greek affiliation | .23**  | .24**  | -.05       | -.02   | .24**               | .18**  | -.23**        | -.23** |

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

Formative years (0= non-U.S raised, 1 = U.S.-raised)

Greek affiliation (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as White (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as Asian (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as Latino (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as Black (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as multiracial (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as being raised in a single-parent household (0=no, 1 yes)

**Table 2.5 Zero-Order Correlations between Demographic Variables and Predictor Variables for Men**

|                   | Hookup Script |        | Relational Script |        | Heterosexual Script |        | Procreational Script |        |
|-------------------|---------------|--------|-------------------|--------|---------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|
|                   | Male          | Female | Male              | Female | Male                | Female | Male                 | Female |
| U.S.-raised       | .13*          | .17**  | -.08              | -.01   | -.01                | .11    | -.08                 | -.07   |
| Age               | .08           | .05    | .02               | -.01   | .01                 | .01    | -.06                 | .05    |
| Religiosity       | -.12          | -.20** | .01               | -.03   | .03                 | .01    | .36**                | .32**  |
| White             | .41**         | .31**  | -.08              | .04    | .18**               | .13*   | -.29**               | -.24** |
| Asian             | -.37**        | -.31** | .08               | -.01   | -.18**              | -.13*  | .23**                | .20**  |
| Latino            | -.05          | -.02   | .04               | .01    | .06                 | .02    | .11                  | .14*   |
| Black             | .03           | .08    | .07               | .02    | .07                 | .08    | -.01                 | -.02   |
| Multiracial       | -.03          | .01    | -.07              | -.06   | -.01                | -.01   | -.01                 | -.02   |
| Greek affiliation | .24**         | .14*   | -.06              | .01    | .23**               | .15*   | -.18**               | -.11   |

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

Formative years (0= non-U.S raised, 1 = U.S.-raised)

Greek affiliation (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as White (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as Asian (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as Latino (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as Black (0=no, 1= yes)

Self-identified as multiracial (0=no, 1= yes)

**Table 2.6 Analysis of Variance Across Non-Communication Variables to Identify Gender Differences**

|                                        | Women |      | Men   |      | F        |
|----------------------------------------|-------|------|-------|------|----------|
|                                        | Mean  | SD   | Mean  | SD   |          |
| Age                                    | 19.15 | 0.83 | 19.46 | 0.91 | 17.52*** |
| Religiosity                            | 2.91  | 1.13 | 2.79  | 1.23 | 1.48     |
| AMIRS                                  | 1.96  | 0.57 | 2.74  | 0.61 | 38.86*** |
| Endorsement of the Heterosexual Script | 3.53  | 0.64 | 3.79  | 0.60 | 3.69     |
| Sexual experience                      | 4.05  | 2.38 | 4.91  | 2.66 | 15.66*** |

\*\*\* p<.001

**Table 2.7 Analysis of Variance for Race Differences Across Variables**

|                                 | White        | Asian        | Latino       | Black        | Middle Eastern | Multi-racial | <i>F</i> |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------|
| Age                             | 19.28 (0.84) | 19.49 (1.06) | 19.34 (0.88) | 18.94 (0.63) | 18.94 (0.66)   | 18.93 (0.66) | 2.69*    |
| Religiosity                     | 2.81 (1.13)  | 2.85 (1.28)  | 3.28 (1.26)  | 3.63 (0.98)  | 2.71 (1.51)    | 2.28 (0.57)  | 3.13**   |
| AMIRS                           | 2.15 (0.67)  | 2.39 (0.60)  | 2.63 (1.36)  | 2.37 (0.94)  | 2.58 (1.53)    | 1.96 (0.06)  | 0.68     |
| Heterosexual Script Endorsement | 3.39 (0.73)  | 3.44 (0.65)  | 3.44 (0.92)  | 3.51 (0.71)  | 3.39 (0.94)    | 3.33 (0.95)  | 0.19     |
| Sexual experience               | 4.76 (2.51)  | 3.35 (2.28)  | 5.69 (2.87)  | 4.60 (2.47)  | 2.87 (2.23)    | 3.83 (2.93)  | 7.47***  |

Note. Means are reported

**Table 2.8 Inter-correlations between Women's Reports of Female and Male Peer Communications of Discourses**

|   | Female Peer Communications |               |                 |                  | Male Peer Communications |               |                 |                  |
|---|----------------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
|   | Hookup(1)                  | Relational(2) | Heterosexual(3) | Procreational(4) | Hookup(5)                | Relational(6) | Heterosexual(7) | Procreational(8) |
| 1 | 1                          |               |                 |                  |                          |               |                 |                  |
| 2 | .18**                      | 1             |                 |                  |                          |               |                 |                  |
| 3 | .45**                      | .44**         | 1               |                  |                          |               |                 |                  |
| 4 | -.25**                     | .32**         | .23**           | 1                |                          |               |                 |                  |
| 5 | .73**                      | .37**         | .60**           | -.08             | 1                        |               |                 |                  |
| 6 | .26**                      | .69**         | .31**           | .20**            | .36**                    | 1             |                 |                  |
| 7 | .50**                      | .38**         | .77*            | .09              | .72**                    | .32**         | 1               |                  |
| 8 | -.06                       | .31**         | .29**           | .70**            | -.01                     | .43**         | .20**           | 1                |

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

**Table 2.9 Inter-correlations between Men’s Reports of Female and Male Peer Communications of Discourses**

|   | Female Peer Communications |               |                 |                  | Male Peer Communications |               |                 |                  |
|---|----------------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
|   | Hookup(1)                  | Relational(2) | Heterosexual(3) | Procreational(4) | Hookup(5)                | Relational(6) | Heterosexual(7) | Procreational(8) |
| 1 | 1                          |               |                 |                  |                          |               |                 |                  |
| 2 | .41**                      | 1             |                 |                  |                          |               |                 |                  |
| 3 | .57**                      | .69**         | 1               |                  |                          |               |                 |                  |
| 4 | -.12                       | .36**         | .20**           | 1                |                          |               |                 |                  |
| 5 | .72**                      | .40**         | .58**           | -.07             | 1                        |               |                 |                  |
| 6 | .33**                      | .76**         | .48**           | .37**            | .35*                     | 1             |                 |                  |
| 7 | .51**                      | .43**         | .69**           | .13*             | .73**                    | .27**         | 1               |                  |
| 8 | -.20*                      | .13*          | .04             | .76**            | -.24**                   | .35**         | -.01            | 1                |

\*\* p<.01    \*p<.05

**Table 2.10 Participant Gender Differences across Overall Levels of Peer Communications of Sexual Scripts**

| Script               | Women             |           | Men               |           | <i>F</i> |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|----------|
|                      | <i>M</i>          | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>          | <i>SD</i> |          |
| Hookup Script        | 1.45 <sup>a</sup> | 0.70      | 1.97 <sup>a</sup> | 0.79      | 124.16   |
| Relational Script    | 1.73 <sup>b</sup> | 0.74      | 1.20 <sup>b</sup> | 0.67      | 156.23   |
| Heterosexual Script  | 1.61 <sup>a</sup> | 0.76      | 1.70 <sup>c</sup> | 0.76      | 3.19     |
| Procreational Script | 0.48 <sup>d</sup> | 0.64      | 0.29 <sup>d</sup> | .48       | 30.40    |

Note. Reports of communications from male and female peers were averaged to produce means for overall communication of each script. Ratings were made on 4-point scales (0=*nothing*, 3= *a lot*). Means in the same column that do not share a superscript differ at  $p < .001$

**Table 2.11 Differences within Undergraduates' Reports of Peer Communications of Sexual Scripts By Gender**

| Participant Gender | Script                       | Male Peers             |          | Female Peers           |                    |
|--------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|----------|------------------------|--------------------|
|                    |                              | Paired Difference Mean | <i>t</i> | Paired Difference Mean | <i>t</i>           |
| Men                |                              |                        |          |                        |                    |
|                    | Hookup - Relational          | 0.89                   | 15.71    | -0.17                  | -3.36              |
|                    | Heterosexual - Procreational | 1.47                   | 25.47    | 1.09                   | 19.42              |
|                    | Relational - Heterosexual    | -0.58                  | -10.70   | 0.04                   | 1.04 <sup>ns</sup> |
|                    | Procreational - Relational   | -0.89                  | -20.94   | -1.13                  | -22.58             |
|                    | Hookup - Procreational       | 1.78                   | 27.52    | 0.96                   | 15.43              |
|                    | Heterosexual - Hookup        | -0.31                  | -8.87    | 0.13                   | 3.00               |
| Women              |                              |                        |          |                        |                    |
|                    | Hookup - Relational          | 0.66                   | 13.27    | -0.39                  | -7.59              |
|                    | Heterosexual - Procreational | 1.38                   | 28.67    | 1.20                   | 23.08              |
|                    | Relational - Heterosexual    | -0.44                  | -8.72    | 0.18                   | 4.21               |
|                    | Procreational - Relational   | -0.95                  | -25.41   | -1.38                  | -29.99             |
|                    | Hookup - Procreational       | 1.60                   | 29.21    | 0.99                   | 15.37              |
|                    | Heterosexual - Hookup        | -0.22                  | -6.37    | 0.21                   | 4.71               |

Note. All comparisons except one noted are significant with a Bonferroni correction of .0042.

**Table 2.12 Linear Mixed Model Predicting the Effects of Sex on Communications**

| Variable                         | Coefficient | SE   | <i>t</i> ratio | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|----------------------------------|-------------|------|----------------|-----------|----------|
| <b>Hookup Script</b>             |             |      |                |           |          |
| Intercept                        | 1.51        | 0.04 | 34.37          | 688.05    | <.001    |
| Participant gender               | -0.13       | 0.07 | -1.98          | 688.05    | .048     |
| Peer gender                      | 0.36        | 0.03 | 10.93          | 523.00    | <.001    |
| Participant gender X peer gender | 0.33        | 0.49 | 6.87           | 523.00    | <.001    |
| <b>Relational Script</b>         |             |      |                |           |          |
| Intercept                        | 1.90        | 0.04 | 46.13          | 690.15    | <.001    |
| Participant gender               | -0.35       | 0.06 | -5.73          | 690.15    | <.001    |
| Peer gender                      | -0.70       | 0.03 | -22.69         | 523.00    | <.001    |
| Participant gender X peer gender | 0.35        | 0.05 | 7.65           | 523.00    | <.001    |
| <b>Heterosexual Script</b>       |             |      |                |           |          |
| Intercept                        | 1.72        | 0.05 | 38.24          | 677.74    | <.001    |
| Participant gender               | -0.22       | 0.07 | -3.37          | 677.74    | .001     |
| Peer gender                      | -0.07       | 0.03 | -2.13          | 523.00    | .033     |
| Participant gender X peer gender | 0.33        | 0.05 | 6.92           | 523.00    | <.001    |
| <b>Procreational Script</b>      |             |      |                |           |          |
| Intercept                        | 0.54        | 0.03 | 16.07          | 697.55    | <.001    |
| Participant gender               | -0.12       | 0.05 | -2.50          | 697.55    | .013     |
| Peer gender                      | -0.26       | 0.03 | -10.13         | 522.00    | <.001    |
| Participant gender X peer gender | 0.15        | 0.04 | 3.91           | 522.00    | <.001    |

*Note.* Participant gender and peer gender were dichotomized variables (0=male, 1=female).

**Table 2.13 Estimated Marginal Means for Peer Communications**

| Participant Gender          | Peer Gender | Estimated Marginal Means | Standard Error | Significance |
|-----------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| <b>Hookup Script</b>        |             |                          |                |              |
| Female                      | Female      | 1.513                    | .044           | .048         |
| Male                        |             | 1.385                    | .048           |              |
| Female                      | Male        | 1.873                    | .044           | .002         |
| Male                        |             | 2.078                    | .048           |              |
| <b>Relational Script</b>    |             |                          |                |              |
| Female                      | Female      | 1.905                    | .041           | <.001        |
| Male                        |             | 1.555                    | .045           |              |
| Female                      | Male        | 1.201                    | .041           | .992         |
| Male                        |             | 1.202                    | .045           |              |
| <b>Heterosexual Script</b>  |             |                          |                |              |
| Female                      | Female      | 1.718                    | .045           | .001         |
| Male                        |             | 1.496                    | .049           |              |
| Female                      | Male        | 1.649                    | .045           | .097         |
| Male                        |             | 1.759                    | .049           |              |
| <b>Procreational Script</b> |             |                          |                |              |
| Female                      | Female      | 0.540                    | .034           | .013         |
| Male                        |             | 0.416                    | .036           |              |
| Female                      | Male        | 0.279                    | .034           | .614         |
| Male                        |             | 0.304                    | .036           |              |

**Table 2.14 Regression Analyses Testing Which Discourses Best Predict Gender Beliefs among Undergraduate Women**

|                                         | Masculine Ideology | Heterosexual Script | Sexual Experience |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Step 1. Demographics                    |                    |                     |                   |
| U.S.-raised                             | -.17*              | -.17*               | -.12*             |
| Paternal education                      | -.05               | .07                 | -.11              |
| Religiosity                             | .09                | .15                 | -.08              |
| Greek affiliation                       | .10                | .29***              | .26***            |
| White                                   | -.02               | -.16                | .17**             |
| Asian                                   | .01                | -.06                | -.23**            |
| Black/African American                  | .09                | .04                 | .06               |
| Single-Parent Household                 | .08                | -.04                | .01               |
| <i>Step 1 adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>    | .067               | .112                | .129              |
| Step 2. Peer Communications             |                    |                     |                   |
| Source: Female Peers                    |                    |                     |                   |
| Hookup                                  | .06                | .04                 | -.05              |
| Relational                              | -.06               | -.06                | -.03              |
| Heterosexual                            | .18                | .19*                | .05               |
| Procreational                           | .02                | .01                 | -.05              |
| Source: Male Peers                      |                    |                     |                   |
| Hookup                                  | .11                | .21*                | .26**             |
| Relational                              | -.03               | -.05                | -.06              |
| Heterosexual                            | .04                | .12                 | -.02              |
| Procreational                           | -.03               | .12                 | -.07              |
| <i>Step 2 adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>    | .083               | .276                | .191              |
| <i>Change in adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i> | +.016              | +.164               | +.062             |
| <i>Final equation F</i>                 | 2.484**            | 7.278***            | 4.841***          |

**Table 2.15 Regression Analyses Testing Which Discourses Best Predict Gender Beliefs among Undergraduate Men**

|                                         | Masculine Ideology<br>(AMIRS) | Heterosexual Script | Sexual Experience |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Step 1. Demographics</b>             |                               |                     |                   |
| White                                   | .08                           | .01                 | -.04              |
| Asian                                   | .09                           | .01                 | -.23*             |
| Black                                   | .11                           | .01                 | .01               |
| Greek affiliation                       | .04                           | .15*                | .26***            |
| Religiosity                             | .09                           | .02                 | -.09              |
| Age                                     | .03                           | .15*                | .18**             |
| <i>Step 1 adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>    | -.007                         | .011                | .011              |
| <b>Step 2. Peer Communications</b>      |                               |                     |                   |
| Source: Female Peers                    |                               |                     |                   |
| Hookup                                  | .22*                          | .09                 | .29**             |
| Relational                              | -.15                          | -.18                | .09               |
| Heterosexual                            | .24*                          | .10                 | .23**             |
| Procreational                           | .10                           | -.19*               | -.05              |
| Source: Male Peers                      |                               |                     |                   |
| Hookup                                  | .01                           | .17                 | .04               |
| Relational                              | -.05                          | .04                 | -.10              |
| Heterosexual                            | .06                           | .45***              | .01               |
| Procreational                           | -.09                          | .09                 | -.09              |
| <i>Step 2 adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>    | .064                          | .310                | .256              |
| <i>Change in adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i> | +.071                         | +.287***            | +.299             |
| <i>Final equation F</i>                 | 2.065*                        | 8.160***            | 7.882***          |

**Table 3.1 Code Development of Common Peer Messages Regarding Sex and Relationships**

|                                              | Code Name                                | Examples                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hookup Script                                | Sexual Agency/Together Woman             | My girl friends tell me to do what I want, to not hold back, and to enjoy myself.                                                         |
|                                              | Sexual pleasure/fun                      | They say it's fun and feels good.                                                                                                         |
|                                              | Sex is okay/not a big deal/casual        | They always advocate having sex casually. They say that it is fun and not a big deal. They try to do it as much as possible to seem cool. |
|                                              | Sex is common/natural                    | They say it is natural and nothing to be ashamed of.                                                                                      |
|                                              | Don't rush/stay single/don't get serious | They say to have less serious things and enjoy being single.                                                                              |
|                                              | Discouragement of relationships          | They say that relationships are complicated and messy and that people's feelings get hurt; their solution is to not get attached.         |
| Heterosexual Script/Good Girl/Pleasing Woman | Abstinence until marriage                | My roommate told me to not have sex and that it is not worth it.                                                                          |
|                                              | Right timing (Older/Later/Ready)         | My close male friends have told me to not have sex until I am ready, even if the guy is pressuring me.                                    |
|                                              | Wait for "The One"/Love/Commitment       | They say to wait for the right guy.                                                                                                       |
|                                              | Serious and Meaningful Relationships     | They discourage me from sex and hookups. They want me to have more meaningful relationships.                                              |
|                                              | Role of sex in relationships             | They say it is important to do it with the right person and that relationships are more than just sex.                                    |
|                                              | Negative Consequences of Sex             | I learned that sex can hurt a lot from my female friends.                                                                                 |
|                                              | Keep It Classy/Slut-Shaming              | My guy friends encourage me to remain classy so they don't encourage me to have sex.                                                      |
| Instrumental Advice                          | Sex Advice                               | One message was a boy in my hall was telling a group of girls the best way to give a blow job.                                            |
|                                              | Relationship Advice                      | They say don't seem over interested, play it cool, and don't ask "where is this going?"                                                   |
|                                              | Safe Sex                                 | My guy friends say I should use protection and that it is okay to say no if I don't want to.                                              |
| Disclosure and Support                       | Sharing Personal Experiences             | My friends are pretty open about sex and always wanting to gossip about their latest lovers.                                              |
|                                              | Emotional Support                        | My male friends are protective over me and advise me to be careful and to not trust any guy.                                              |

**Table 3.2 Comparison of Peer Sexual Communications from Men and Women**

| Theme                     | Subtheme Codes                     | Sex of Peers (%) |                  | Pearson Chi-Square Test |       |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------|
|                           |                                    | Women (n=398)    | Men (n=331)      | X <sup>2</sup>          | p     |
| Hookup Script             | Sexual pleasure/fun                | 47(11.8)         | 52(15.7)         | 2.34                    | 0.13  |
|                           | Sex is okay/casual                 | 59(14.8)         | 72(21.8)         | 5.88*                   | 0.02  |
|                           | Sex is common/natural              | 8(2.0)           | 10(3.0)          | 0.77                    | 0.38  |
|                           | Discouragement of Relationships    | 4(1.0)           | 9(2.7)           | 3.03                    | 0.82  |
|                           | Total                              | <b>110(27.6)</b> | <b>140(42.3)</b> | -                       | -     |
| Good Girl/Pleasing Woman* | Abstinence until marriage          | 15(3.8)          | 6(1.8)           | 2.47                    | 0.12  |
|                           | Right Timing (Older/Later/Ready)   | 20(5.0)          | 6(1.8)           | 5.42*                   | 0.02  |
|                           | Wait for Mr. Right/Love/Commitment | 24(6.0)          | 4(1.2)           | 11.38*                  | 0.01  |
|                           | Relationships are Ideal            | 29(7.3)          | 18(5.4)          | 1.02                    | 0.31  |
|                           | Role of Sex in Relationships       | 48(12.1)         | 23(6.9)          | 5.37*                   | 0.02  |
|                           | Negative Consequences of Sex       | 9(2.3)           | 0(0)             | 7.58**                  | 0.006 |
|                           | Keep It Classy                     | 41(10.3)         | 19(5.7)          | 4.98*                   | 0.03  |
|                           | Total                              | <b>173(43.5)</b> | <b>75(22.7)</b>  | -                       | -     |
| Instrumental Advice       | Sex Advice                         | 46(11.6)         | 31(9.4)          | 0.92                    | 0.34  |
|                           | Relationship Advice                | 87(21.9)         | 61(18.4)         | 1.31                    | 0.25  |
|                           | Safe Sex                           | 41(10.3)         | 16(4.8)          | 7.50**                  | 0.006 |
|                           | Total                              | <b>147(36.9)</b> | <b>95(28.7)</b>  | -                       | -     |
| Disclosure and Support    | Sharing Personal Experiences       | 59(14.8)         | 33(10.0)         | 3.86*                   | 0.05  |
|                           | Emotional Support                  | 94(23.6)         | 50(15.1)         | 8.26**                  | 0.004 |
|                           | Total                              | <b>129(32.4)</b> | <b>75(22.7)</b>  | -                       | -     |

*Note.* All analyses were conducted on a subsample of women (n=415) who reported receiving messages from their peers. The totals for each theme represent the number of women who received messages from any number of subthemes. These totals are adjusted for double-counting; therefore, the totals are not sums across prevalence rates of subtheme codes because a woman can report receiving any number of subtheme codes.

**Table 3.3 Percentage of Code Co-Occurrence in Reports of Female Peers' Communications**

|                          | Hookup | Good Girl/Pleasing Woman | Disclosure and Support | Instrumental Advice |
|--------------------------|--------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Hookup                   | -      |                          |                        |                     |
| Good Girl/Pleasing Woman | 26.40  | -                        |                        |                     |
| Disclosure and Support   | 18.60  | 25.58                    | -                      |                     |
| Instrumental Advice      | 16.32  | 30.61                    | 39.46                  | -                   |

**Table 3.4 Percentage of Code Co-Occurrence in Reports of Male Peers' Communications**

|                          | Hookup | Good Girl/Pleasing Woman | Disclosure and Support | Instrumental Advice |
|--------------------------|--------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Hookup                   | -      |                          |                        |                     |
| Good Girl/Pleasing Woman | 40.00  | -                        |                        |                     |
| Disclosure and Support   | 17.33  | 12.00                    | -                      |                     |
| Instrumental Advice      | 13.68  | 18.94                    | 38.94                  | -                   |

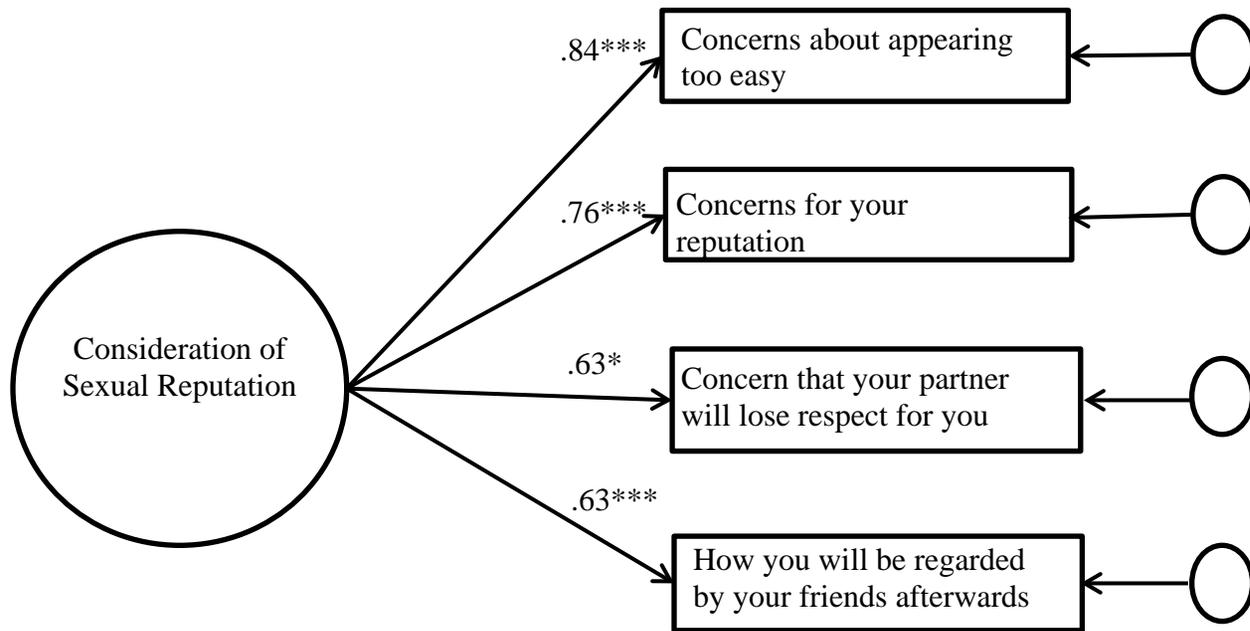
**Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent Variables**

|                                               | Time 1 |      | Time 2 |      | <i>t</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------|------|--------|------|----------|
|                                               | M      | SD   | M      | SD   |          |
| <b>Independent variables</b>                  |        |      |        |      |          |
| Religiosity                                   | 3.25   | 1.13 | 3.13   | 1.11 | 2.92**   |
| Maternal education                            | 15.96  | 2.25 | -      | -    | -        |
| Paternal education                            | 17.04  | 2.75 | -      | -    | -        |
| Age                                           | 20.03  | 0.78 | 21.35  | 0.81 | -        |
| <b>Dependent variables</b>                    |        |      |        |      |          |
| Peer communication of the Heterosexual Script | 2.57   | 1.36 | -      | -    | -        |
| Consideration of Pleasure and Attraction      | 3.00   | 0.70 | 3.07   | 0.64 | -1.04    |
| Consideration of Sexual Reputation            | 2.11   | 0.87 | 2.20   | 0.80 | 26.94*** |
| Sexual assertiveness                          | 2.79   | 0.61 | 2.99   | 1.69 | -.88     |

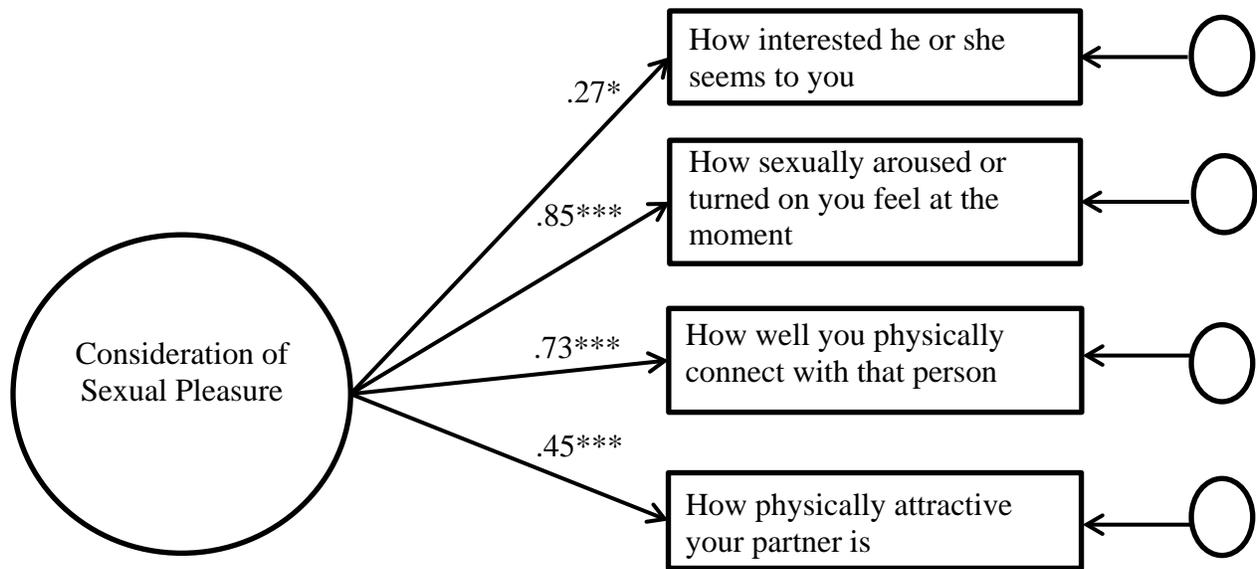
\*\* p<.01    \*p<.05

**Table 4.2 Inter-correlations Between All Variables**

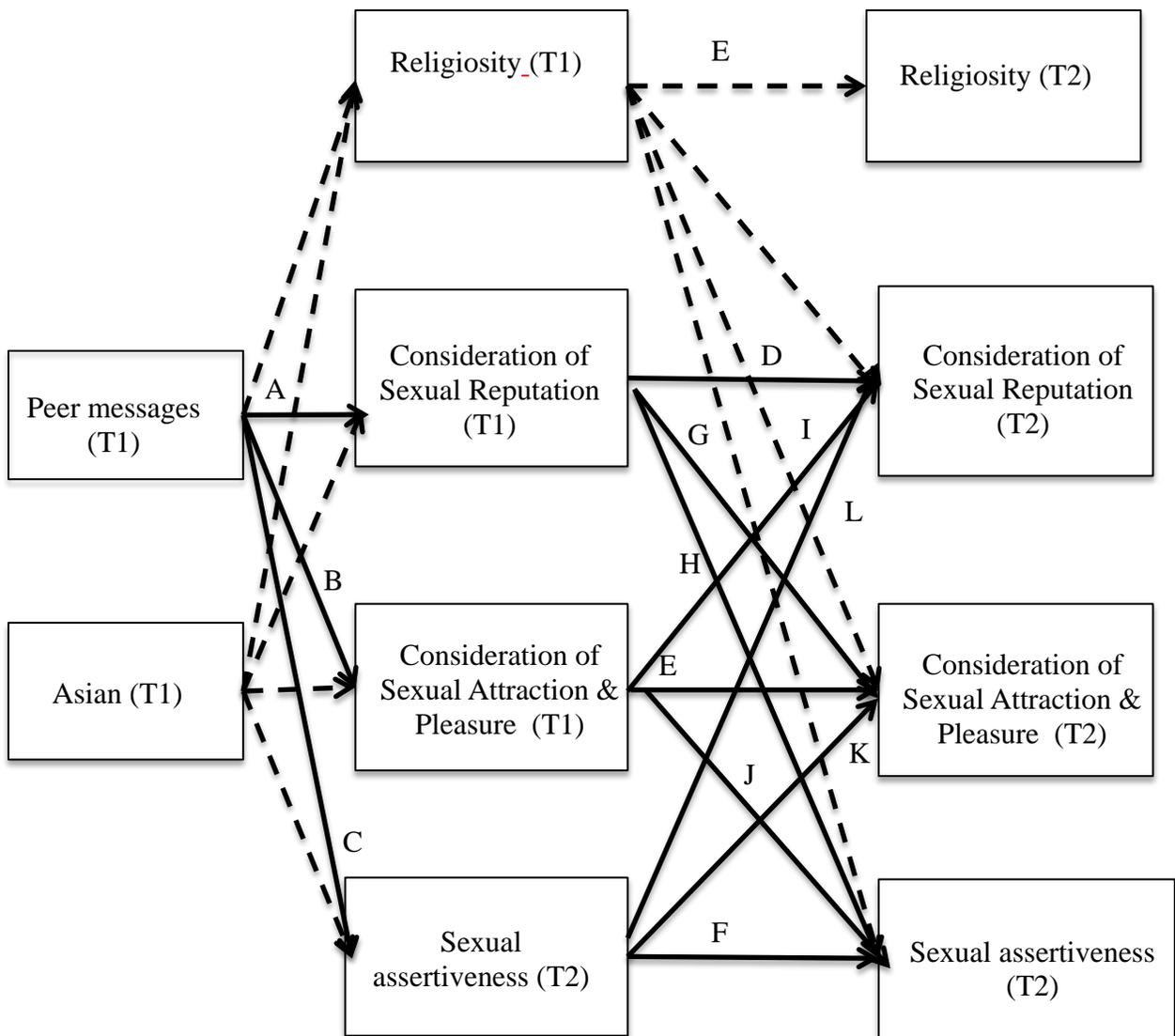
|                                             | Time 1 |       |       |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
|---------------------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|------|----|
| Time 1                                      | 1      | 2     | 3     | 4    | 5     | 6    | 7     | 8    | 9     | 10   | 11   | 12 |
| 1 Religiosity                               | -      |       |       |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 2 Age                                       | -.13   | -     |       |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 3 Maternal Education                        | -.04   | -.14  | -     |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 4 Paternal Education                        | -.05   | -.01  | .45** | -    |       |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 5 Asian                                     | .20*   | -.14  | -.11  | .10  | -     |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 6 Single-parent household                   | .11    | -.06  | -.12  | -.03 | .03   | -    |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 7 U.S.-raised                               | -.05   | -.04  | .19*  | .20* | -.07  | -.09 | -     |      |       |      |      |    |
| 8.Greek affiliation                         | -.24** | -.04  | .07   | .16* | -.17* | -.14 | .14   | -    |       |      |      |    |
| 9 Peer communications                       | -.05   | .09   | -.01  | -.02 | -.15  | -.07 | -.19* | .11  | -     |      |      |    |
| 10 Consideration of pleasure and attraction | .12    | -.08  | .05   | .04  | .05   | -.12 | .04   | .07  | .12   | -    |      |    |
| 11 Consideration of sexual reputation       | .19    | -.10  | .03   | .10  | .04   | -.02 | -.10  | .18  | .30** | .20  | -    |    |
| 12 Sexual assertiveness                     | -.10   | .05   | -.03  | -.12 | -.25* | -.20 | -.16  | -.12 | -.20  | -.09 | -.23 | -  |
|                                             | Time 2 |       |       |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| Time 2                                      | 1      | 2     | 3     | 4    | 5     | 6    | 7     | 8    | 9     | 10   | 11   | 12 |
| 1 Religiosity                               | -      |       |       |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 2 Age                                       | -.12   | -     |       |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 3 Maternal Education                        | -.06   | -.13  | -     |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 4 Paternal Education                        | -.05   | .01   | .45** | -    |       |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 5 Asian                                     | .23*   | -.17* | -.11  | .10  | -     |      |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 6 single-parent household                   | .18*   | .11   | -.12  | -.03 | .02   | -    |       |      |       |      |      |    |
| 7 U.S.-raised                               | -.06   | -.01  | .19*  | .20* | -.07  | -.09 | -     |      |       |      |      |    |
| 8 Greek affiliation                         | -.22*  | .01   | .07   | .16* | -.17* | -.14 | .14   | -    |       |      |      |    |
| 9 Peer communications                       | -      | -     | -     | -    | -     | -    | -     | -    | -     | -    | -    | -  |
| 10 Consideration of pleasure and attraction | .04    | .06   | -.15  | .07  | -.10  | -.17 | -.13  | .11  | -     | -    |      |    |
| 11 Consideration of sexual reputation       | .11    | .01   | -.04  | .17  | .10   | -.03 | .15   | .26* | -     | .16  | -    |    |
| 12 Sexual assertiveness                     | .28**  | -.17  | .08   | -.14 | -.17  | -.06 | -.20  | .01  | -     | .16  | .17  | -  |



*Figure 4.1.* Measurement Model for Consideration of Sexual Reputation



**Figure 4.2.** Measurement Model for Consideration of Sexual Pleasure and Attraction



*Figure 4.3.* Theoretical Model

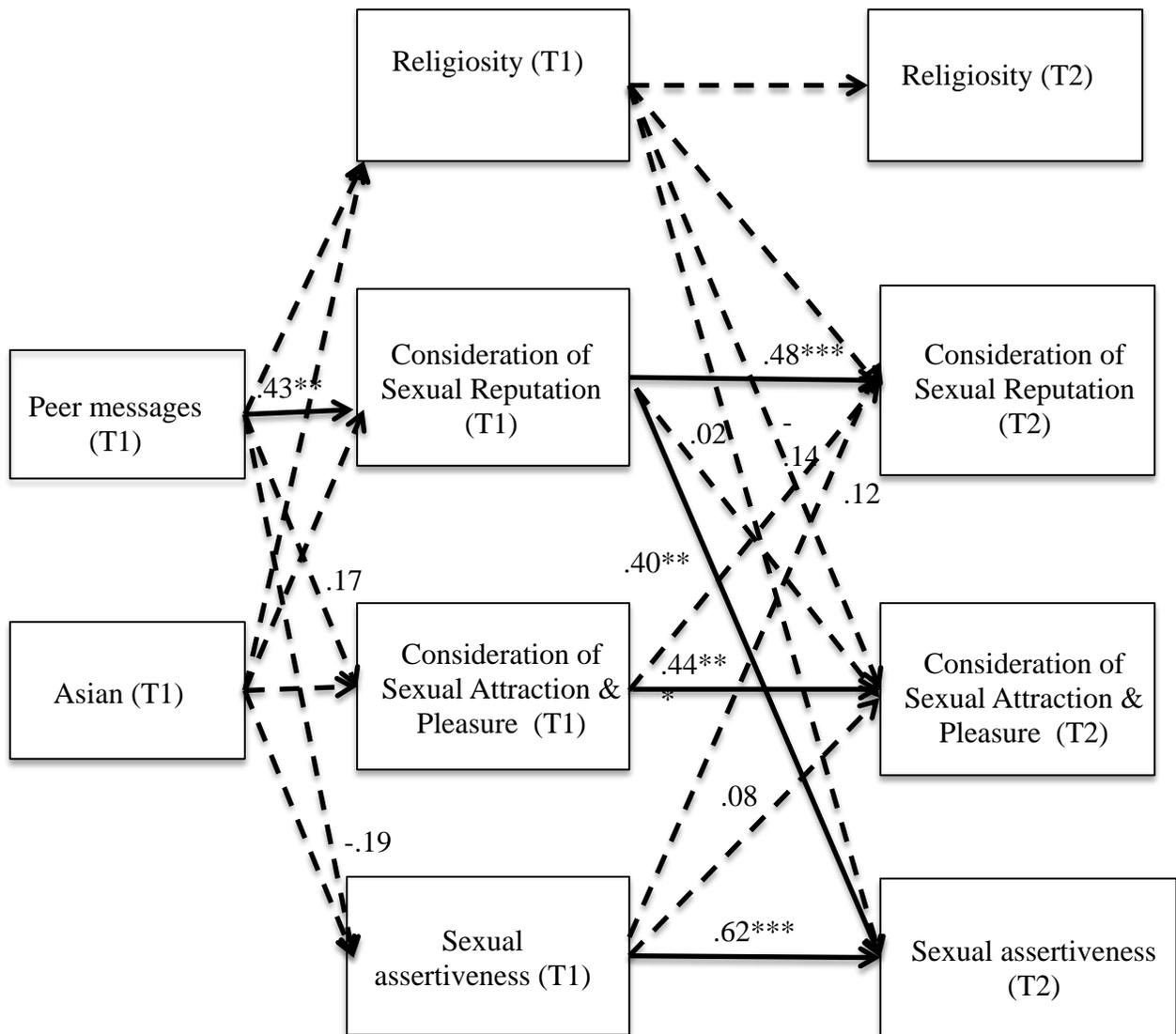


Figure 4.4. Full Model

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