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Relationships between Parent-Child Interactions and Sexual Attitudes, Behaviors and Online

Activity in Young Adulthood

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Abstract

The current study examined correlations between parent-child relationships and its relationship with the sexual attitudes and behaviors of young adults. Participants were asked to report on their perception of communication and quality relations with their parents. The findings indicate there was a relationship between the perception of high-quality parent-child relationships, likelihood of having extensive sexual experience, tendency to hold specific sexual attitudes and the frequency of online sexual behaviors. Explanations regarding the discrepancy between previous findings and the current study were discussed, including the sexual fluency of those with conservative attitudes. The consideration of gaps in literature incorporating online sexual behaviors were included. Implications regarding the conduction of this study during a global pandemic and low reliability of the positive communication scale were also discussed. Pathways of risky sexual experiences and correlations regarding sexual orientation were introduced as a further topic of study.

Keywords: Sexual attitudes, sexual behaviors, young adults, parent-child, online

Parent-Child Relationships on Sexual Attitudes, Behaviors and Online Activity in Young Adulthood

Sexuality is an integral part of the human experience, so it is no surprise that the development of sexual attitudes and behaviors has become a growing topic of curiosity. The majority of research has examined how adolescents acquire their sexual values through parent and peer interactions (Martino et al., 2008; Taris, 2000; Miller et al., 1987). Further investigation is needed to assess whether the specific parenting factors continue to play a part in the forming of values into adulthood. Additionally, as society is constantly changing, our mode of fulfilling sexual needs evolves, specifically with the increasing role of technology in filling those needs. Sexual activity occurring online is typically more accessible and the consideration of whether the behavior could be deemed inappropriate or not within an individual's value system is unclear. In other words, if an individual does engage in sexual activities online, does that go against what they believe? Online sexual behaviors have only been scarcely researched in relation to parenting but the focus was on gender differences (e.g., Brar et al., 2018) so this component will be one of the aspects studied in this research as these behaviors can often lead to hidden consequences.

The literature review will discuss the concepts associated with sexuality, including sexual attitudes and behaviors, and the development of those values through sex socialization. Additionally, it will address some of the theoretical interpretations regarding the role of the family on individual development, with a focus on Ecodevelopmental Theory. Then it will review previous research on how parent-child interactions, specifically communication, quality, and longevity, have contributed to the development of sexual attitudes in adolescents and emerging adults. Lastly, it will address how gender, religion and culture serve as a strong predictor of sexual value outcomes.

Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

The sexual attitudes of individuals are defined as the values and beliefs held regarding sex and sexuality. Sexual attitudes typically range between liberal, or permissive, and conservative, or restrictive (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987). Those with liberal or permissive attitudes are typically more accepting of sexuality and sexual practices, including the purpose, frequency, responsibilities and uses of sex. For example, an individual with liberal attitudes is more accepting of multiple sexual partners, using sex for pleasure or viewing contraception as a responsibility. Conservative or restrictive attitudes are typically more in line of traditional norms, such as waiting until marriage to engage in intercourse or considering sex as a means mainly for reproduction.

These attitudes often predict sexual behavior, which includes any behaviors related to sex, such as contraception usage, partner selection, or age of sexual debut (Wetherill, et al., 2009). Sexual behaviors are expanding to include sexual behaviors that occur online through cell phones, computers, or other technological internet-based devices. Previous research has suggested that the use of online sexual resources are used to obtain either an online or offline sexual partner (Cooper et al., 2003). However, this assumption may neglect to address the educational, or other non-arousal, components of online sexual exploration. According to Döring (2009), internet sexuality can be explained in six general categories that are more comprehensive, including pornography, sex shops, sex work, sexual education, sex contracts, and sexual subcultures. These general categories used to describe internet sexuality are often assessed through non-arousal use (i.e., educational purposes or learning sexual subcultures), solitary-arousal use (i.e., masturbation using pornography or sex worker) or partnered arousal use (i.e., engaging in online relationships or mutual engagement in pornography/sex work).

Negative consequences, such as the impact on the family or embarrassment, are frequently ignored during educational approaches to sexuality, where instead, abstinence is promoted (Walsh, 2019). Embarrassment could occur after participation from an array of online sexual behaviors, such as the exposure of a private fetish or nude photos being shared without consent. Sexual risk taking is a commonly used term to describe sexual behaviors in which the mental and physical state of the individual is being neglected that could lead to negative outcomes, such as unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections. Other factors must be considered in understanding sexual risk taking. Some individuals prioritize pleasure over the potential of psychological or physiological harm, while situational circumstances can influence why others choose to engage in these risky behaviors, such as the availability of contraception (Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996).

Sex Socialization

Socialization is the process by which a person integrates the necessary skills and knowledge to become a functioning member of their social group (Grusec, 2002). Sex socialization, more specifically, is a natural process during which knowledge, attitudes and values are formed to become a functioning sexual member of their social group (Ward, 2002). Sex socialization is acquired primarily through interactions with family members and peers (Fortenberry, 2013; Holman & Kellas, 2015). Although peer groups often have a “culture of encouragement” regarding sexual attitudes and behaviors, it is important to recognize that parents have a facilitative role in the forming of peer relationships (Goldstein, et al., 2005). Specifically, if children do not receive personal autonomy from their parents at home, they search for it in their peer groups instead. This idea supports the notion that parents are the foundation of sex socialization for adolescence (Holman & Kellas, 2015; Fingerson, 2005).

There are distinct gender differences regarding the sexual attitudes and behaviors of young adults. One explanation could be described by Role Theory (Osmond & Thorne, 1993), which suggests that individuals act in accordance with what has been predetermined by society. Social determinism describes how individuals are influenced by their role, suggesting that the superficial social norms placed on males and females in our society impacts the way they view the world, including sexuality. Gender schema theory suggests that children form their beliefs by identifying their own gender and assimilating to the behaviors of others in that gender group (Drury & Bukowski, 2013; Bem, 1981). Social learning theory suggests we learn from the people around us and chose what behaviors to endorse, using conditioning from others to either reinforce or eliminate those behaviors over time (Bandura, 1986).

There are often preconceived notions regarding the differences between men and women, such as women being more social, suggestible or naïve, have lower self-esteem, excel at simple tasks or lack achievement motivation. These differences were negated by research conducted by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974). There are only four areas in which gender differences are actually well established, including verbal ability, visual-spatial ability, mathematical ability and aggression. This would not include sex differences regardless of societal constructs that suggest women should defer their sexual debut, referring to their first sexual experience, to preserve their innocence. Whereas, males are often praised on a societal level for experiencing the same sexual behaviors females are punished for, getting masculine validation such as “he became a man”. According to Caplow et al. (2001), the disparity between gender differences is decreasing. Sexual Strategies Theory suggests that men typically have less investment in the lives of their children, thus engage in more short-term dating strategies, such as more sexual partners, paying for sexual acts or having a more positive attitude toward casual sex (Buss & Schmitt, 2011).

Gender Similarities Theory suggests that men and women are actually alike on most psychological variables, with a few outliers regarding sexuality. In particular, views on masturbation and casual relationships (Hyde, 2005).

Parental Influence on Children's Attitudes and Behaviors

Parental influences in a family often have the most direct impact on the development of values for individuals. Bronfenbrenner (1977) described human development through an ecosystem, called Ecodevelopmental Theory. Families make up a portion of an individual's microsystem, which also includes the people associated with their educational and work institutions. Reciprocity within a family is a major property of the microsystem suggesting family members engage in a systematic give and take relationship. This exemplifies that the family is a complex system of relationships that are being influenced by the mere presence of others. However, there are indirect influences contributing to the microsystems functioning, such as the physical environmental settings, which can impact social processing and development. Ecodevelopmental theory also suggests that adolescents rely on the reactions from their microsystem interactions as a basis for forming their value systems, including sexual attitudes and behaviors.

The Family Systems Theory provides another view into the family environment by viewing the family holistically, rather than separate parts. Families can be a part of a larger system, called a suprasystem, such as affiliation with their neighborhood, or subsystems, such as sibling relationships, which are located within the family itself. This theory suggests that the family's subsystems have a reciprocal influence on one another, where the behavior of one affects them all (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Based on this theory, one could postulate

that values and attitudes could also be shared within a family environment due to the mutual influences that are present.

As described, the family system extends beyond the members themselves. Religious affiliations, for example, are a part of a family's mesosystem (Ecodevelopmental Theory) or suprasystem (Family Systems Theory) but influence personal values and beliefs. Relationships in the family, specifically between that of parent and child, can be perceived in several ways, including closeness between members, quality of the relationships, feelings of trust and warmth, or levels of communication. The current study will focus on the perception level of quality parent-child relationships and communication.

Previous research has been conducted on how parents influence their children's attitudes and behaviors through different factors that are associated with the parent-child relationship, including communication and overall quality of the relationships between parents and children (Martino et al., 2008; Cox, 2015; Wetherill, et al., 2010). Communication is an integral component of the family environment contributing to both personal and interpersonal relations. Specific factors of communication to be addressed include frequency, depth of topics, openness, support and overall effectiveness of the message. The quality of relations between members is viewed in both general and specific means. For example, family members can report whether or not they feel like their interactions are of higher quality. Conversely, quality can be measured by more specific factors, such as perceived warmth, truth, care, connectedness or monitoring in order to define the quality of relationships. Similar to that of political and religious affiliation, parents must instill a sense of trust in order for the desired message to be effectively transferred to their child, strengthening the durability of their influence into adulthood.

These parenting factors will be discussed below, along with their influences in sexual attitudes and behaviors, according to the literature.

Parent-Child Communication

Literature shows that communication between the parent and child is essential to developing healthy and safe sexual attitudes and knowledge. The “sex talk” is often considered a single occurrence during adolescence approaching their sexual debut in which parents provide knowledge on sex or related topics, which could include discussions on the act of sex itself, reproduction, male or female anatomy, contraception, or sexually transmitted infections, among various other related matters. However, repetition is suggested to be more effective in increasing knowledge and comprehension of the specific messages parents attempt to spread (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984). Parents often avoid discussing topics that make them uncomfortable, such as masturbation or experiencing an orgasm (Nolin & Petersen, 1992). These conversations tend to be a one-sided lecture versus a place for open communication where questions and concerns could be addressed (Leftkowitz et al., 1996). Parents with a greater range of sexual knowledge, as perceived by their children, are typically deemed more trustworthy, and thus, having a greater influence on their children’s sexual socialization (Whitaker et al., 1999). Martino et al. (2008) found that adolescents reported having a more positive, open and close relationship with parents who had repeated conversations about sexual related topics. So, Martino’s study suggests that increasing the amount and range of sex-related communication occurring within the family would result in the parents making a larger impact on their children’s sexual value system.

Previous studies have emphasized the predictive power of parent-teen communication regarding the sexual behaviors of teens. Adolescents with supportive and open parents tend to participate in less risky sexual behaviors; for example, they are more likely to use contraception

or delay initial sexual activity. Jaccard et al. (2000) studied the effects of sex communication in exclusively African American parent-adolescent pairs as previous research conducted by Fox and Inazu (1980) found that black families discuss fewer sex-related topics than white or religious families. They found that maternal disapproval had a larger impact on the sexual behaviors of the adolescent with repeated communication. However, they also found that the mother's perception of the amount of communication occurring was significantly less than what the adolescent perceived (Jaccard et al., 2000). Jaccard's research suggests that there is a critical disconnect in parent communication, where parents believe they are adequately discussing sex-related topics when they are not, which could lead to risky sexual behaviors.

Holman and Kellas (2015) expanded on previous research by studying how different communication factors, including frequency, effectiveness and competence, impact the sexual health of Midwestern high school students. They found that frequent parent communication had only a slight negative association with the likelihood of sexual risk taking and early sexual debut, while peer communication increased those factors, meaning that increased communication between both parents and peers typically leads to sexual risk taking, with parental communication serving as a moderator. However, frequent communication in either parent or peer relationships did not have an impact on sexual attitudes. Additionally, parent-child closeness, as perceived by the adolescent, had no effect on either sexual risk taking or attitudes. Their findings on both communication frequency and closeness contradicted previous research (Jaccard et al., 2000; Martino et al., 2008), which could be explained by a variety of limitations, such as generational or individual sample differences.

Hong et al. (2016) reviewed the limited sexual attitudes literature from a 25-year period including only studies based on South Korea due to a high concern of sexual health issues

occurring in adolescents from that country. Through the lens of the Ecodevelopmental theory, Hong et al (2016) found that family interactions in the microsystem are a primary source for shaping sexual knowledge and attitudes. Increased communication between parents and adolescents lead to more sexual knowledge, thus safer sexual practices (Lee, 2010). Weinman et al. (2008) reported comparable findings among U.S. adolescents. Positive parent-child communication acted as a predictor of safer sexual behaviors.

Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

Effects of the quality of the relationship between parents and children have long been a topic of discussion. Weinstein and Thornton (1989) researched how high- or low-quality interactions between mother and child, as perceived by the pairs, would affect the transmission of values and beliefs regarding sexuality by studying almost exclusively urban white families in a Midwestern state. They found that in families where both mother and child reported high quality relationships, the mother's attitudes were more likely to be shared by the child. Levels of quality were determined by perceptions of warmth, closeness, respect and understanding. They suggested that a high-quality relationship between the mother and child acts to support the values passed on to their children, with mothers' attitudes being the more pertinent factor to determining the children's actual sexual attitude outcomes. In other words, if a mother has more liberal or conservative sexual attitudes, the child is more likely to share in those attitudes, where their relationship simply facilitates those transmissions, in white families (Weinstein & Thornton, 1989). Conflicting evidence was found while researching the impact of quality mother-adolescent relationships on sexual values in England. Rather, Taris (2000) found that mother-child pairs with low quality relationships tend to influence their children's values more than that

of higher quality relationships. However, regardless of quality, mother and adolescent views did not become more similar over time.

Parents' characteristics, including warmth, trust, connectedness and monitoring, are associated with supportive quality parent-child relationships, which is suggested by research findings to aid in the delaying of sexual activity for adolescents (Markham et al., 2012). Cox (2015) researched the effects of perceived parental support, sibling and peer influence and media usage on the sexual attitudes of middle schoolers in the Southern United States. Sexual attitudes of adolescents tended to be more conservative when they experienced high monitoring, open communication, and a warm caring environment in their parental relationships. These results were stronger with males, who typically held more conservative views when they described their relationship with their parents as supportive. However, for adolescents with more liberal attitudes, strong parental support did not strengthen or weaken those attitudes. These results suggest that liberal sexual attitudes are formed through peer interactions and social norms learned from their environment while conservative views are formed in supportive families.

Transitioning from living at home to beginning college is a crucial developmental period for emerging adults. Wetherill et al. (2009) researched how a quality relationship, specifically measures of perceived awareness and caring, impacted sexual values during this transitional period for 17-19-years old. There was a negative correlation between parent and peer influences and the sexual behaviors of the participants. However, those who perceived high levels of caring and awareness from their parents engaged in less sexual risk taking, suggesting that quality parent-child relationships continue to impact the values of emerging adults through this transitional period. Liberal sexual attitudes are typically unwavering in cases where high levels of perceived awareness and caring is experienced. So, although liberal attitudes and sexual risk

taking are typically positively correlated (Knox et al., 2001), sexual risk taking seems to be an outcome of lower quality family interactions (Goldstein et al., 2005).

Longevity of Parental Influence

Parental influences are known to extend into adulthood for adolescents, exemplified through shared political and religious affiliations (Glass et al., 1986). Certain messages are sent to children, either intentionally or inadvertently, that shape the values and beliefs of young adults. Through extensive research across the United States, Spain, Peru and Costa Rica, young adults in the United States consider their parents to have a more influential role than those in Spain (Negy et al., 2016). Similarly, female university students rated their parents as having more influence on their sexual attitudes than their male peers (Sanders & Mullis, 1988). Gravel et al. (2016) found that consistent values found between parent and emerging adults exemplified the lasting effects of parental influence. These findings suggest that parents in the United States, as perceived by young adults, do impact the sexual value systems of their children into adulthood. However, the span of parental influence may be of importance as young adults typically have more liberal sexual attitudes than those of their parents, meaning the influence may be short lived (Negy et al., 2016). Some research suggest that personal attitudes formed early in life, such as negative attitudes towards condom use, are a stronger predictor of sexual attitudes maintained later in life (e.g., Wetherill, et al., 2009; Roberts & Kennedy, 2006; Fromme et al., 1997).

Religion and Culture

Religiosity is typically a strong predictor of sexuality (Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000) that is often shared in a family environment. Leftkowitz and associates (2004) examined the relationship between religiosity and sexuality in Eastern United States college students. They

found that participants where religion was more prominent in their daily lives held more conservative attitudes and behaviors regarding sex (Weinstein & Thorton, 1989; Sohn, 2011; McMillen et al., 2011). Negy et al. (2016) suggested that religion is a stronger predictor than parent-child communication. Church attendance was negatively associated with sexual behaviors, where the more one attended church the fewer sexual partners and less activity were present. Sexual knowledge was also inhibited by religious affiliation, where the benefits of condom use, for example, were limited (Negy et al., 2016).

In some cultures, conversations about sex are considered taboo, or even inappropriate, resulting in a more uneducated adult population. However, knowledge regarding sexual health is essential to having both safe and pleasurable experiences. A recent survey of Indian university students exemplified the true deficit in sexual knowledge within this culture. They found that a majority of participants believed in several sexual misconceptions, such as sexual urge before the age of 18 to be harmful (69%) or that sex during menstruation is harmful to the man (64%). Participants were more likely to have engaged in sexual activity when they considered their family environment to be uncomfortable, however, these participants also had higher levels of sexual knowledge and liberal sexual attitudes (Thangadurai et al., 2019). These findings may validate the cultural beliefs that sexual knowledge leads to an increase in sexual activity which explains the suppression of sexual communication.

Gender Differences

Gender differences are common regarding sexual attitudes and behaviors, even within the same family. For example, males typically hold more liberal sexual attitudes (Wetherill et al., 2009), however there are not any differences between males and females in reported sexual behaviors (Brar et al., 2018). Interestingly, males who reported more conservative views felt

closer with their mother and while those with more liberal views were closer with their father; females, on the other hand, reported more conservative views when they felt close to either parent (Brar et al., 2018). While these findings were from a study in India, it is supported by previous research that describes close parent relationships for males leads to more conservative sexual values for U.S. adolescents (Cox et al., 2015). These results suggest that parents, specifically fathers, are sending messages to their children, whether directly or indirectly, on the basis of gender norms, regardless of the parents' personal sexual attitudes, which typically have no significant differences (Gravel et al., 2016).

The Current Study

Aim of Study

The aim of the current study is to research the relationship between quality and communication in parent-child relationships and the sexual attitudes and behaviors, both online and physical, of young adults through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecodevelopmental Theory. This theory focuses on how an individual's environment influences the development of how they perceive the world and their experiences. Specifically, development often includes the advancement of values, knowledge, beliefs, identity, or culture. Parents are within the microsystem of an individual and are theorized to have the most direct impact on development, as they interact with an individual face-to-face on a consistent basis. Others in the microsystem could include siblings, peers, teachers, or neighbors. The mesosystem is considered an indirect influence and include the interactions between an individual's microsystem, such as how one's peer and parents interact (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

Thus, this study aimed to support the direct influence of the microsystem, more specifically the perception of parental relationships, regarding the development of sexual

attitudes and behaviors of children as they transition into young adulthood. Ecodevelopmental Theory outlines how complex interpersonal relations “invite, permit, or inhibit” behaviors in one’s environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). Quality and communication are used to examine how the perception of those complex interpersonal relationships relate with the development of sexual attitudes and behaviors. Online sexual behaviors are included in the current study for consideration as a form of development as its use would describe how one cultivates their views on how to engage with varying online resources.

Hypothesis

The present study proposes four groups of hypotheses. The first group focuses on the relationship of parent influences, including parent-child communication and quality of their relationship, and young adult’s sexual attitudes and behaviors. This group includes the following four hypotheses:

H1a: Young adults with high-quality relationships with their parents will be negatively related to liberal sexual attitudes.

H1b: Young adults with high-quality relationships with their parents will be negatively related to increased sexual behaviors.

H1c: Young adults with positive communication with their parents will be negatively related to liberal sexual attitudes.

H1d: Young adults with positive communication with their parents will be negatively related to increased sexual behaviors.

These hypotheses were based on research documenting how increased parental support, care, affection and communication delays sexual debut, limits risky sexual behavior and

promotes more conservative sexual values (Martino et al., 2008; Cox, 2015; Wetherill, et al., 2010)

The second group focuses on the relationship between autonomy support provided by parents and young adults' sexual attitudes and behaviors, consisting in two hypotheses:

H2a: Young adults with more autonomy support by their parents will be positively related to liberal sexual attitudes.

H2b: Young adults with more autonomy support by their parents will be positively related to increased sexual behaviors.

These hypotheses were based on research that found adolescents with less autonomy at home tend to seek that autonomy elsewhere, such as peer groups, which leads to more problem behaviors, such as sexual risk taking (Goldstein et al., 2005).

The third group focus on the relationship between sexual attitudes and behaviors and has one hypothesis:

H3: Liberal sexual attitudes will be positively correlated to sexual behaviors.

This hypothesis was based on research that found that adolescents with liberal sexual attitudes typically engaged in more frequency sexual behaviors (Knox et al., 2001).

The fourth group analyses specifically the relationship of gender and young adults' sexual attitudes and behaviors, and two hypotheses were elaborated:

H4a: Males will have more liberal sexual attitudes than females, regardless of parental relationship factors.

H4b: There will be no gender differences regarding sexual behaviors.

These hypotheses were based on research that found males to be more permissive in their sexual attitudes than females while there were no gender differences in sexual behaviors (Wetherill et al., 2009; Brar, 2018)

Finally, there is an exploratory hypothesis, which lack in supportive literature, regarding the relationship between quality communication and parent-child relations and young adults' online sexual behaviors.

Exploratory: Does the perception of quality relationships and positive communication between parent and child impact the frequency of online sexual behaviors for young adults?

Extensive research has yet to examine how parenting impacts online sexual behaviors of young adults which posits this exploratory question.

Method

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students at Eastern Illinois University recruited through online software at Eastern Illinois University; receive credit in their respective courses.

Participants were only eligible to be included in analysis if they were between 18-25 years of age, which is a common conception of young adults. They were eligible to participate with no probable biases. Using GPower, the sample size yielding the acceptable power (80%) at an alpha of .05 should include at least 159 participants. No other exclusions were made regarding the participants in the sample.

The survey originally included 221 participants with 25 participants being excluded from analysis for failing to complete the survey ($n = 22$), being over 25 years old ($n = 2$), and declining the informed consent ($n = 1$). The analyzed sample consisted of 196 participants (135

women, 57 men, and 4 non-binary) between the ages of 18 and 25 ($M = 19.32$, $SD = 1.57$), as determined to describe young adults, with 85.7% of participants being between the ages of 18 and 20. The majority of the sample included those who identified as Caucasian or White (71.9%), followed by African American or Black (16.8%), Hispanic or LatinX (6.1%), Asian (2.6%) and Other (2.6%). Religious identity included Christian (Catholic, Protestant, Adventist, or any other denomination; $n = 121$), not religious ($n = 51$), Atheist ($n = 11$), other ($n = 9$), Buddhist ($n = 2$), Jewish ($n = 1$), and Islam ($n = 1$).

Research Design

The current study used a correlational design by surveying a sample of a Midwestern University.

Measures

Demographics. Participants were asked to complete a demographics questionnaire consisting of questions related to age, gender, race, religion and income (See Appendix A).

Sexual Attitudes. The Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (BSAS; Appendix B) is a 23-item Likert format self-report questionnaire that is designed to measure sexual attitudes while considering gender and cultural differences (Hendrick et al., 2006). The BSAS includes four subscales (Cronbach alphas of original study, permissive = .95, birth control = .87, communion = .79 and instrumentality = .80) that were combined for use into a single scale. Permissiveness can be defined as how people think about sex and the practices they may engage in based on those views. The birth control subscale describes the perception of responsibility in terms of using birth control. The communion subscale represents the idealistic view of sexuality. Lastly, instrumentality involves the biological and utilitarian aspect of sex. In the current study, the

overall reliability of the scale was measured at .83 with the following representing each subscale: permissive = .91, birth control = .81, communion = .74 and instrumentality = .77).

Sexual Behaviors. Sexual behaviors were measured by a modified version of the Sexual Experiences Inventory (Brady & Levitt, 1965a; Appendix C). The original scale was developed for use on exclusively males but has since been used on both mixed (Isvtan, 1983) and female only populations (Giles, 1997). The modified inventory contains 10-items with a 5-point Likert response format, ranging from “Never (1)” to “Very Often (5).” The original study found the coefficient of reproducibility to be .97 (Brady & Levitt, 1965b). The Cronbach alpha of the scale in the current study was .95.

Online Sexual Behaviors. The Online Sexual Experience Questionnaire is a 9-item format that uses a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from never (0) to once a day or more (6), to report sexual online experiences within the past month (See Appendix D). The questionnaire includes three subscales assessing non-arousal, solitary-arousal and partnered-arousal behaviors. The Cronbach alpha of the original study developing this questionnaire is .77 (Shaughnessy et al., 2011). In the current study, it measured as .78. The subscales resulted in the following Cronbach alphas: Non-Arousal = .25, Solitary Arousal = .75, and Partnered Arousal = .88). Shaughnessy et al., (2011) defines non-arousal as seeking sexual information, solitary as viewing sexually explicit materials and partnered arousal as maintaining a partner online.

Parent-Child Communication. The Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS; Barnes & Olson, 1985; Appendix E) was used to measure quality communication from the perspective of the participant. PACS is a 20-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), with higher scores indicating positive communication. There are two subscales integrated into a single scale, including *openness* and *problems* in family

communication, and Cronbach alphas of the original study were .87 and .78, for the subscales respectively. The PACS has been used in several communication studies (Bandura et al., 2011; Prado et al., 2012; Forehand et al., 1997). The Cronbach alpha of the current study was much lower at .48 for the single scale.

Quality of Parent-Child Relationship. The Perceptions of Parents Scale – College Student version (Robbins, 1994; Appendix F) was used to measure the perceived quality of parent-child relationship by using the following subscales: involvement, warmth and autonomy support. Involvement describes the degree to which parents perceived their parents are involved in their lives (i.e., *My mother finds time to talk with me.*) The Warmth subscale is defined as parents incorporating empathy and motivation, versus shame (i.e., *My mother accepts me and likes me as I am.*) The autonomy support subscale measures participants perceptions of independence and encourage of individual problem-solving and decision making (i.e., *My mother, whenever possible, allows me to choose what to do.*) The scale includes a 7-point Likert Scale, ranging from ‘not at all true’ (1) to very true (7). The original scale has 21-items for each the mother and the father. Instructions for single or same-sex parent households were provided in the current study. The overall scale reliability from the original validation study was high, with a Cronbach alpha of .94 (Wintre & Yaffe, 1991). This scale also had high reliability in the current study, with the mother scale having a .96 (Involvement = .88, Warmth = .90, and Autonomy Support = .92) and the father having .95 (Involvement = .92, Warmth = .91, and Autonomy Support = .85).

Procedure

The current study was approved by Eastern Illinois University’s Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. Participants (N= 196) completed each measure through an online

survey that was available on Eastern Illinois University's Qualtrics server. The data was then exported into Microsoft Excel and analyzed using SPSS. Participants first received the informed consent in which they designated that they understood the nature of the study and agreed to proceed.

Results

Table 1.

Summary of Bivariate Correlation Analysis Among Quality Parent-Child Relationships, Communication, Sexual Attitudes, Sexual Behaviors, Online Sexual Behaviors.

	Sexual Attitudes ¹	Sexual Behaviors	Online Sexual Behaviors	Parent-Child Communication ²	Quality of Mother-Child Relationship	Quality of Father-Child Relationship	Quality of Parent-Child Relationship (Total)
Sexual Attitudes ¹	-	-.24*	-.35*	.04	.16*	.11	.14
Sexual Behaviors	-	-	.26*	-.008	-.18*	-.12	-.18
Online Sexual Behaviors	-	-	-	-.06	-.18*	-.13	-.17*
Parent-Child Communication ²	-	-	-	-	.43*	.27*	.41*
Quality of Mother-Child Relationship	-	-	-	-	-	.52*	.86*
Quality of Father-Child Relationship	-	-	-	-	-	-	.89*

*Significant at .05 (one-tailed)

¹. Higher values represent more liberal sexual attitudes while lower values represent more conservative sexual attitudes.

². Higher values mean more positive parent-child communication, while lower values mean more negative parent-child communication from the perspective of the child.

Correlation of Parent-Child Relationships

Hypothesis 1a, which predicted that the perception of high-quality relationships with parents would be related to more conservative sexual attitudes, was not supported. There was a significant and modest positive correlation between perception of quality and sexual attitudes, $r(194) = .14, p = .025$. As quality of parent-child interactions increased so did the liberal sexual attitudes of participants. High-quality maternal relations were more significant in indicating more liberal attitudes, $r(194) = .16, p = .013$. There was no relationship between paternal relationships on either sexual attitudes ($p = .07$). (See Table 1)

Hypothesis 1b, which predicted that the perception of high-quality relationships with parents would be related to decreased sexual behaviors, was supported. Bivariate correlations indicated, at an alpha level of .05, there was a modest negative correlation between quality relationships and sexual behaviors, $r(194) = -.18, p = .006$ (one-tailed). Specifically, young adults who experienced high-quality relationships with both their parents were significantly less likely to have participated in increased sexual experiences. Results also indicate that the relationship between the participant and their mother, in particular, were significantly related to less sexual behaviors, $r(194) = .18, p = .008$ (one tailed). There was a slight relationship between high quality paternal relationships and less sexual experiences ($p = .049$). (See Table 1)

Hypothesis 1c, which predicted that the perception of positive communication with parents would be related to more conservative sexual attitudes, and Hypothesis 1d, which predicted that the perception of positive communication with parents would be related to a decrease in sexual behaviors, were not supported. Correlations indicate that there was no significant relationship between positive communication of parent and child and sexual attitudes ($r = .042$) or sexual behaviors ($r = -.008$). (See Table 1)

Scores on the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale for all 196 participants ranged from 23 to 98 ($M = 65.28$), with a median of 65. For a portion of the analysis, two groups were formed: conservative attitudes at the median or lower ($n = 100$) and liberal attitudes higher than the median ($n = 96$). An independent samples t-test was ran to examine the relationship between positive communication and high-quality relations and liberal or conservative attitudes. At an alpha level of .05, results indicate that perception of parents scale describing overall maternal relationships (involvement, warmth and autonomy support) of the liberal sexual attitude participants ($M = 16.95$, $SD = 3.47$) was significantly higher than those of conservative participants ($M = 15.95$, $SD = 4.00$), $t(190) = -1.85$, $p = .034$ (one-tailed). No other significant relationships were found using the liberal and conservative group.

Relationship of Autonomy Support

Hypothesis 2a predicted that there would be a positive relationship between increased autonomy support and more liberal sexual attitudes. This hypothesis was supported. Bivariate correlations indicate that an alpha level of .05, there was a modest positive correlation between parental autonomy support and sexual attitudes, $r(194) = .16$, $p = .012$. As autonomy support increased so did that of sexual attitudes, indicating more liberal attitudes. Perception of autonomy support by the participant's mother was again significantly related to more liberal attitudes, $r = .16$.

Hypothesis 2b predicted that there would be a positive relationship between increased autonomy support and increased sexual behaviors, which was not supported. There was a negative correlation between autonomy support and sexual behaviors, $r(194) = -.18$, $p = .006$. This would suggest that as autonomy support increased, sexual behaviors decreased.

Relationship between Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

Hypothesis 3, which predicted that a positive relationship would exist between sexual attitudes and behaviors, was not supported. Rather, the results indicated an opposite relationship to exist. Bivariate correlations were used to compare the total and subscales of sexual attitudes with sexual behaviors. At an alpha of .05, results suggest that participants tend to have less sexual behaviors as their liberal attitudes increased, $r(194) = -.24, p < .001$. In particular, increased sexual behaviors was related to more conservative views on permissiveness, $r(194) = -.24, p < .001$, and communion, $r(194) = -.19, p < .001$, (one-tailed). There were no significant differences in the relationship between sexual experiences and attitudes regarding birth control ($r = -.07$) or instrumentality ($r = .03$).

The Sexual Experience Inventory for all participants had scores ranging from 10 to 48 ($M = 24.36$), with higher scores indicating more sexual behaviors. A t-test for independent means was used to examine the differences between liberal and conservative groups and sexual experiences. At an alpha of .05, results indicate that the sexual experiences by the liberal attitudes group ($M = 22.16, SD = 10.43$) were significantly less than those by the conservative attitudes group ($M = 26.47, SD = 11.27$), $t(194) = 2.78, p < .001$ (one-tailed).

Relationships with Gender Identity

Hypothesis 4a predicted that males would hold more liberal sexual attitudes than females, was not supported. There were not enough non-binary participants to obtain meaningful results, thus analysis was conducted to compare male and female participants. A T-test for independent means was ran to compare male and female participants and sexual attitudes. At an alpha of .05, results indicate there is no significant differences in sexual attitudes between the men ($M = 63.75, SD = 14.36$) and women ($M = 66.22, SD = 12.13$), $t(190) = -1.22, p = .23$. (See Table 2)

Hypothesis 4b was supported which predicted that there would be no gender differences in terms of sexual behaviors. Likewise, only male and female participants were included in analysis. A T-test for independent indicated that at an alpha of .05, there was no significant differences in sexual behaviors between males ($M = 24.46$, $SD = 11.67$) and females ($M = 24.59$, $SD = 10.76$), $t(190) = -.08$, $p = .94$.

Table 2.

Results of t-test and Descriptive Statistics for Sexual Attitudes by Sex

	Sex						95% CI for		
	Male			Female			Mean Difference	t	df
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n			
Sexual Attitudes	63.75	14.36	57	66.22	12.13	135	-2.47	-1.22	190
Sexual Behaviors	24.46	11.67	57	24.59	10.76	135	-.136	-.08	190
Quality of Parent-Child Relationship	16.34	3.53	57	15.53	3.50	135	.81	1.46	190
Parent-Child Communication	65.44	6.25	57	65.64	8.15	135	-.21	-.17	190

Gender differences were also analyzed to compare the perception of parental relationships and positive communication. A T-test for independent means compared gender and the overall perception of parent relationships. At an alpha of .05, there were no significant findings between males ($M = 16.34$, $SD = 3.53$) and females ($M = 15.53$, $SD = 3.50$), $t(190) = 1.46$, $p = .15$. Likewise, there were no significant differences in communication as reported by males ($M = 65.44$, $SD = 6.25$) and females ($M = 65.64$, $SD = 8.15$), $t(190) = -.17$, $p = .87$. (See Table 2)

Exploration of Parent-Child Relationship on Online Sexual Behaviors

Hypothesis 5 set to explore the relationship between online sexual behaviors and the perceived quality of parental relationship and positive communication. Bivariate correlations were used to compare the frequency online sexual experiences and its three subscales: non-arousal, solitary arousal or partnered arousal. At an alpha of .05, results indicate that the overall perception of parental relationships are significantly and negatively correlated with the frequency of online sexual behaviors, $r(194) = -.17, p = .019$. Participants with more positive perception of the relationship are less likely to partake in online sexual exploration. Additionally, perception of relationship with mothers had a greater impact on the occurrence of online experiences than the average of total parental presence, $r(194) = -.18, p = .012$, while the perception of fathers had no significant relationship between overall online sexual behaviors. Specifically, the use of online resources for solitary arousal was negatively correlated with high-quality parental relationships, $r(194) = -.22, p = .002$. Perception of relationship with father also had significant negative correlations with solitary arousal ($r = -.18, p = .02$), and participants' perception of maternal relationships had a greater impact ($r = -.22, p = .002$). There were no other significant relationships regarding partnered arousal and non-arousal use of online resources in terms of parent-child relationships. (See Table 4)

The Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale was also used to examine the relationship with online sexual experiences and associated subscales. The only significant finding included a negative correlation between positive communication and decreased frequency of online resources for specifically solitary arousal usage, $r(194) = -.18, p = .014$. Positive communication was not related to overall online sexual behaviors, $r = -.06$. (See Table 4)

Table 4.

Summary of Bivariate Correlation Analysis on the frequency of Online Sexual Experiences and Perception of Parental Relationships and Positive Communication

	Quality of Parent-Child Relationship (Total)	Quality of Mother-Child Relationship	Quality of Father-Child Relationship	Parent-Child Communication
Online Sexual Behaviors	-.17*	-.18	-.13	-.06
Non-Arousal Use	-.09	-.07	-.09	.08
Solitary Arousal Use	-.22*	-.22*	-.18*	-.18*
Partnered Arousal Use	-.05	-.10	-.02	-.005

*Significant at .05 (two-tailed)

Further analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between sexual attitudes and the frequency of online sexual behaviors. A t-test for independent means compared liberal and conservative group differences and the frequency of online resources. Among the sample, the scores for the Online Sexual Experiences Questionnaire ranging from 1 to 4.83, with mean of 1.63. At an alpha of .05, results indicate that online sexual exploration in the liberal attitudes group ($M = 1.46$, $SD = .69$) was significantly less than those in the conservative attitudes groups ($M = 1.80$, $SD = .71$), $t(194) = 3.45$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed). Likewise, there was a negative correlation between liberal leaning sexual attitudes and the increased frequency of online sexual experiences, $r(194) = -.35$, $p < .001$. There was also a significant positive correlation between physical and online sexual experiences, $r(194) = .26$, $p < .001$, describing that as sexual experiences increase, so does that of online sexual experiences. A significant correlation was

present analyzing the frequency of online partnered arousal and physical sexual experiences, $r = .32, p < .001$.

Religion and Ethnicity

Analysis was conducted to examine relationships discussed in the literature regarding the impact of religiosity on sexual attitudes and behaviors. Religious identity was grouped into Religious (Jewish, Christian, Islam, Hindu, Buddhist and Other) and Non-Religious (Atheist and Non-religious) for analysis, as some groups were too small to have meaningful results. A T-test for independent means was conducted. At an alpha of .05, there was a significant difference in sexual attitudes between religious ($M = 67.58, SD = 12.30$) and non-religious groups ($M = 60.29, SD = 12.81$), $t(194) = 3.81, p < .001$. These results indicate that participants with a religious identity held more liberal sexual attitudes than those who did not identify as religious. However, there were no significant differences in sexual behaviors between religious ($M = 23.92, SD = 11.11$) and non-religious groups ($M = 25.31, SD = 10.94$), $p = .42$.

Ethnicity demographics collected were used to examine the relationship between sexual attitudes, sexual behaviors and frequency of online sexual behaviors. No significant findings were uncovered indicating differences between ethnicities. In order to potentially obtain more meaningful results, ethnicity was grouped into White/Caucasian and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color). A T-test for independent means was ran to compare the two groups and sexual attitudes. At an alpha of .05, there was no significant difference between White ($M = 66.00, SD = 13.12$) and BIPOC ($M = 63.42, SD = 12.20$) participants, $p = .208$. Likewise, there was no difference between the two groups regarding online sexual experiences, $p = .91$ (Whites, $M = 1.64, SD = .72$; BIPOC, $M = 1.63, SD = .70$). However, white participants had significantly more sexual behaviors ($M = 25.49, SD = 11.27$) than BIPOC participants ($M = 21.45, SD =$

10.00), $t(194) = -2.32$, $p = .021$. There were no significant results comparing means between White and BIPOC participants regarding perceptions of parents, both mother or father, and communication between parent and participant.

Discussion

This study examined how young adults' perception of their relationship with their parents would impact the development of sexual attitudes and behaviors, including online sexual behaviors. The findings highlight the importance of parents in the sexual socialization process of their children, given that the perception of high-quality relationships with parents lead to less sexual experiences and more liberal attitudes. Participants, thus, engaged in less early, and assumingly less risky, sexual experiences, considering the average age being around 19 years, but still felt flexibility and support in holding more liberal attitudes when it comes to sex. The previous literature suggested that if children were raised in positive households, they would have more conservative attitudes, thus engage in less risky behaviors and extensive sexual behaviors (Martino et al., 2008; Cox, 2015; Wetherill, et al., 2010). Current finding suggests the opposite, where conservative participants were actually more likely to engage in sexual experiences, when considering both online and in person activities and less likely to experience autonomy, warmth and involvement from their parents. There was actually a negative relationship between liberal sexual attitudes and extensive sexual behaviors, suggesting that participants with conservative attitudes are more sexual experienced, which contradicted the general consensus of previous research (i.e., Knox et al., 2001).

Conservative values are typically considered the norm in the rural Midwest, but it is evident that when it comes to sexual knowledge there is a great disparity, so the potential of not considering risk factors associated with sexual behaviors may provide an explanation to the

contradictory findings (McMann & Trout, 2020). In particular, the current study found that those with conservative values engage in more frequent online sexual behaviors. This aspect may indicate the need to hide the exploration of their sexuality by using online resources, as those with conservative values may be burdened with guilt, shame or disgust for violating beliefs held within their ecosystem. Freitas (2008) describes how those within religious cultures, often synonymous with conservative values, typically feel like they are violating their own morality by engaging in sex related topics. This may lead to hypersexualized individuals, who instead of having open and direct conversations about sex, they feel the need to explore in private, potentially exposing themselves to more risky encounters. Conversely, those with liberal attitudes are more open to having explicit conversations about sex and may not feel as drawn to experiment covertly to uncover sexual knowledge.

The results indicate that mothers tend to have more impact on the sexual outcomes of their children than fathers do. This could be due to the idea that mothers are typically the primary caregiver, responsible for the bulk of child-rearing, and thus have more opportunities to share their values. According to Buss and Schmitt (2011), men typically have less participation and investment in the upbringing of their children, consistent with other findings that focus on the mother's impact, in particular, regarding the transmission of values (Weinstein & Thornton, 1989). A recent study analyzed the "power of mom[s]" regarding contraceptive attitudes and behaviors (Bell et al., 2020). They found that nuances regarding the quality of the relationships between mothers and daughters greatly impacted contraceptive usage, where daughters use the same or similar contraception types as their mothers. Considering the current findings, this may support that when mothers have a positive relationship with their children, regardless of gender, they may share more liberal attitudes about sex.

Buss and Schmidt (2011) also outlined that men typically engaged in more short-term dating behaviors, such as having one-night stands, which would typically be considered more liberal, in attitudes. Women typically try to uphold expectations described by Role Theory, which would suggest more conservative values as women are expected to save their sexuality for marriage. This highlights the importance of the current findings, where those roles may be shifting to include more open-mindedness and flexibility in the transmission of liberal values while encouraging less problematic or early sexual experiences. It is important to consider, that autonomy support provided by mothers, in particular, have an impact on the formation of more liberal attitudes and less sexual behaviors, as previous research suggested that when adolescents are not experiencing autonomy at home, they rely on it within their peer group (Goldstein et al., 2005). This would suggest that if mothers allot their children with a sense of independence, they will not necessarily engage in more risky or extensive sexual behaviors.

It is important to consider that there were no significant correlations between positive parent-child communication and sexual attitudes or behaviors, contrary to the literature which suggest positive communication to be a strong predictor regarding the transmission of knowledge and values (Sung Hong et al., 2016; Holman & Kellas, 2015; Marino et al., 2008; Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000). One explanation for the violation of the hypothesis could be the low reliability in the current study on the Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale, thus the results may be uninterpretable, neither supporting nor contradicting the research. Likewise, the scale was originally used to get the perceptions of both parent and adolescent, so while the focus of this study was the participant's perception, it may have interfered with the reliability.

Gender differences are typically quite common when comparing sexuality. However, the current findings support the gradual decline of gender differences, as there were no significant

differences in sexual attitudes or behaviors when it came to gender identity (Caplow, et al., 2001). Simon et al. (2020) researched the “feelings of difference” in emerging adults, which is a term coined to describe the awareness of distinct differences in perceptions shared between one’s own identity, whether that be sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. It was found that gender identity, in particular, increased the likelihood of experiencing feelings of difference, however, there was no group differences in sexual experiences when it came to gender identity. A meta-analysis conducted by Petersen and Hyde (2019) on gender differences regarding sexuality examined a period of fourteen years, finding that gender differences regarding attitudes and behaviors were small, with exceptions regarding specific sexual experiences (i.e., masturbation, casual sex, etc.). The current findings would closely replicate the meta-analysis. Gender Similarities Theory also supports that men and women are very much alike, other than specific outliers regarding sexuality (i.e., masturbation and casual relationships) and aggression.

Further, previous research has suggested that the influence regarding the gender of the child may differ dependent upon closeness to either their maternal or paternal figures (Cox et al., 2015). The current research did not replicate these findings and found that there were no relationships between gender identity and the perceptions of high-quality relationships with each parent. There was a significant difference between non-binary participants and their perception of positive communication. This variance would want to be interpreted with caution, as there were very few non-binary participants and no other significant correlations related to positive communication.

The current study introduced new evidence regarding how the use of online resources is related to sexual attitudes, behaviors and parent-child relationships. It was found that those with the perception of high-quality relationships with parents, specifically mothers, typically results in

less frequent internet use to explore or engage sexually. While not consistently problematic or coercive, the use of online resources could result in risky or dangerous behavior if used irresponsibly. Problematic internet use is becoming a more common issue around the world. Hassan et al. (2020) found that 28.6% of young adults, ranging from 18-24 years old, has an internet addiction. Further, a recent study found a significant relationship between the likelihood of internet addiction and engaging in risky online behaviors, exacerbated by that of the use of online erotica or pornography usage (Drouin & Miller, 2016). The current results found a significant use of solitary arousal, which would include that of online erotica, was negatively related to the perception of high-quality relationships with parents. This may suggest that the age of the current sample, being 18-25 years old, and the significant use of online erotica may result in more risky online sexual behaviors. Thus, these findings could highlight the importance of maintaining a healthy and high-quality relationship between parent and child where it could decrease not only the frequency but the potential of risky or dangerous online sexual behaviors.

The current study found that those with a religious identity had significantly higher results regarding sexual attitudes, suggesting more liberal attitudes when compared to those who did not identify as religious. However, there were no significant differences in sexual behaviors between the two groups. Previous research has supported that overall religious engagement would suggest more conservative values, of both attitudes and behaviors regarding sex (Leftkowitz et al., 2004; Weinstein & Thorton, 1989; Sohn, 2011; McMillen et al., 2011). This could mean that although participants reported identification with a religion, it does not necessarily mean that they consider religious values as prominent in their daily lives. Religion is often shared within a person's microsystem, specifically within their family, such as attending religious ceremonies together or having relevant discussions. The current sample included

college students who may be experiencing their first taste of freedom and thus not practicing the same habits as they did with their family, which may result in having less impact on their sexual attitudes and behaviors (Smith and Snell, 2009). There would also be a lack of assumption that they have fully transitioned through other developmental milestones, such as marriage, employment or education, meaning they may not have had the opportunity to potentially reconnect with their previous held spirituality. Several studies have found that the transition from youth to young adulthood causes a shift in religiosity, with numerous different factors being considered, such as the role of parents, peers, the media, siblings or romantic partners or engagement in risky behaviors, such as substance use or sexual activities (Arnett, 2000; Barry et al., 2010; Barry and Nelson, 2005; Davignon, 2013, Longest & Smith, 2011; Smith & Snell, 2009).

Indeed, religion should be viewed not only as just personal religious belief, commitment and a sense of belonging, but as multidimensional, as suggested by Jung and Park (2020). This would suggest that simply asking participants their religious orientation would not provide enough context to suggest how the role of religious identification has shifted for them into young adulthood, therefore how religion is actually impacting sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Study Limitations and Future Direction

This study was conducted during a global pandemic (COVID-19) which may have altered the results considering that a primary focus was regarding how participants used online resources to participate in sexual experiences. The internet was already the most widely used method of communication, which has only escalated in a time of social distancing, work-from-home mandates and suggested quarantines. Thus, it would accurate to assume that individuals had to resort to online resources to satisfy sexual needs. The self-report of online sexual experiences

may have been elevated. The generalizability of the results is limited by the essentially forced use of the internet to most fulfill responsibilities, including sexual needs.

The reliability of gender differences is also limited by the lack of diversity within the sample. Only four participants identified as non-binary, thus limiting the interpretations of significant results and providing evidence for more gender fluid options in relation to sexual attitudes and behaviors moving forward. The lack of reliability for the positive communication measure in the current study would also suggest that the obtained results cannot actually confirm that communication between parents and children does not impact that of sexual attitudes or behaviors. In the future, a different measure should be used in order to accurately conclude the relationship between these variables.

The research was intended to examine the relationship of sexual attitudes and behaviors of young adults, ranging from 18-25 years old. However, the sample would not be considered diverse, as it was conducted in the rural Midwest of the United States. The majority of the sample was 19 and 20 years old, where this may not provide a generalized view of young adulthood. Likewise, the sample consisted of only university students enrolled in psychology courses, which does not describe that of all young adults, so the generalizability is limited as there are potential cultural constraints that are likely to arise. While not explicitly researched, sexual attitudes and behaviors may differ by education. The majority of the sample's ethnicity was Caucasian. This could have decreased the likelihood of finding significant ethnic differences between groups.

This area of research has been scarcely studied resulting in several different potential directions for future extension. It is suggested that men and women have different habits when it comes to dating behaviors, where men typically have a preference for short-term mates and a

greater variety of partners when compared with women (Hughes et al., 2020). Previous research has suggested that sons who are closer with their father have more liberal attitudes, as their values are more effectively transmitted (Brar, 2018). Although the current study did not replicate those findings, the specific perception of “closeness” to one parent was not explicitly examined. This may suggest that if fathers engage in specific dating habits, those values would then be transferred to their sons dependent upon the relationship. Further research could expand on the impact of parent-child relationships and the dating behaviors of young adults. The exceptions in sexual behaviors found by Petersen and Hyde (2010) highlight the differences in habits related to dating, such as the likelihood to engage and hold positive views regarding casual sex.

Future research regarding sexual orientation would provide a deeper perspective when understanding gender differences, as variances may relate more to sexual partner preferences than that of simply gender identity. Additionally, those who identify as LGBTQ+ may experience different or varying parent-child relationships or, more importantly, have different perspectives on the impact of their parental relations. It would be additionally beneficial to include an assessment of risky sexual behaviors as well, especially considering sexuality, for several reasons. There is still not general acceptability of LGBTQ+ individuals where they may not feel comfortable participating in open and safe relationships and rely on more dangerous behaviors to explore their sexuality (Witeck, 2014). In fact, Witeck (2014) found that only 60% of Americans approved of equality in marriage, which is an accelerating pace from the past. He also found that those in the LGTBQ+ community were also motivated to engage in online surveys due to the safe and anonymous environment it provided. There is also a growing misconception regarding the sexual habits of these different groups that would be critical to differentiate. This area of research would provide more insight into how parent-child

relationships impact those of all sexual identity, highlighting potential deficits that would need to be addressed. Lastly, it would be helpful to develop a scale with more stable reliability to measure the communication between parents and young adults.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Demographics Questionnaire

Age:

18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26+

Gender:

Male

Female

Nonbinary

Other

Prefer not to answer

Ethnicity:

Black or African American

Asian

Caucasian/White

Hispanic/Latino(a)

American Indian or Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other: Specify

Religious Affiliation

Jewish

Christian (Catholic, Protestant, Adventist, or any other denomination)

Islam

Hindu

Buddhism

Atheist

Other, I am not religious

Income:

Less than 25k

25-50k

50-100k

100-200k

More than 200k

Prefer not to answer

Appendix B: Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (Hendrick et al., 2006)

For each statement:

A = Strongly agree with statement

B = Moderately agree with the statement

C = Neutral - neither agree nor disagree

D = Moderately disagree with the statement

E = Strongly disagree with the statement

1. I do not need to be committed to a person to have sex with him/her/them.
2. Casual sex is acceptable.
3. I would like to have sex with many partners.
4. One-night stands are sometimes very enjoyable.
5. It is okay to have ongoing sexual relationships with more than one person at a time.
6. Sex as a simple exchange of favors is okay if both people agree to it.
7. The best sex is with no strings attached.
8. Life would have fewer problems if people could have sex more freely.
9. It is possible to enjoy sex with a person and not like that person very much.
10. It is okay for sex to be just good physical release.
11. Birth control is part of responsible sexuality.
12. A woman should share responsibility for birth control.
13. A man should share responsibility for birth control.
14. Sex is the closest form of communication between two people.
15. A sexual encounter between two people deeply in love is the ultimate human interaction.
16. At its best, sex seems to be the merging of two souls.

17. Sex is a very important part of life.
18. Sex is usually an intensive, almost overwhelming experience.
19. Sex is best when you let yourself go and focus on your own pleasure.
20. Sex is primarily the taking of pleasure from another person.
21. The main purpose of sex is to enjoy oneself.
22. Sex is primarily physical.
23. Sex is primarily a bodily function, like eating.

Appendix C: Sexual Experience Inventory (Modified)**(Brady & Levitt, 1965a)**

For each statement:

1 = Never

2 = Rarely

3 = Sometimes

4 = Often

5 = Very Often

1. Kissing with tongue contact with another person.
2. Manual manipulation of clothed breast/chest of another person.
3. Manual manipulation of nude breast/chest of another person.
4. Manual manipulation of another person's genitalia.
5. Oral contact with another person's breast/chest.
6. Manual manipulation of your genitalia by another person.
7. Vaginal intercourse (with penis or sexual aide)
8. Oral contact with your genitalia by another person.
9. Oral contact with another person's genitalia.
10. Anal intercourse (with penis or sexual aide)

Appendix D: Online Sexual Experience Questionnaire (Shaughnessy et al., 2011)

For each statement:

0 = Never

1 = Once

2 = 2-3 times

3 = Once a week

4 = 2-3 times a week

5 = 4-6 times a week

6 = Once or more a day

How many times in the past month have you:

1. Visited an educational web site on sexuality
2. Chatted with someone on a dating website
3. Watched sexually explicit videos/photos online alone
4. Masturbated while watching sexually explicit videos online
5. Masturbated while viewing a stranger via webcam
6. Read erotic material online
7. Engaged in a conversation with some via computer/cell phone typing or microphone
in which you share sexual fantasies
8. Repeatedly engaged in private discussion online about sexual fantasies with the same
person
9. Maintained a sexual relationship with someone online

Appendix E: The Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (Barnes & Olsen, 1985)

For each statement:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Strong Agree

1. I can discuss my beliefs with my parent(s) without feeling restrained or embarrassed.
2. Sometimes I have trouble believing everything my parent(s) tells me.
3. My parent(s) is/are always a good listener.
4. I am sometimes afraid to ask my parent(s) for what I want.
5. My parent(s) has a tendency to say things to me which would be better left unsaid.
6. My parent(s) can tell how I'm feeling without asking.
7. I am very satisfied with how my parent(s) and I talk together.
8. If I were in trouble, I could tell my parent(s).
9. I openly show affection to my parent(s).
10. When we are having a problem, I often give my parent(s) the silent treatment.
11. I am careful about what I say to my parent(s).
12. When talking to my parent(s), I have a tendency to say things that would be better left unsaid.
13. When I asked questions, I get honest answers from my parent(s).
14. My parent(s) tries to understand my point of view.
15. There are topics I avoid discussing with my parent(s).

16. I find it easy to discuss problems with my parent(s).
17. It is very easy for me to express all my true feelings to my parent(s).
18. My parent(s) nags/bothers me.
19. My parent(s) sometimes insults me when she/he/they is/are angry with me.
20. I don't think I can tell my parent(s) how I really feel about some things.

Appendix F: Perceptions of Parents Scales – College Student Version (Wintre & Yaffe, 1991)

Answer each question using the following scale:

1 - Not true at all

2

3

4 – Somewhat true

5

6

7 – Very true

Questions about Parent 1 – Indicate: Male Female Non-Binary Other

Questions about Parent 2 – Indicate Male Female Non-Binary Other None (Single Parent)

Mother Questions

1. My mother seems to know how I feel about things.
2. My mother tries to tell me how to run my life.
- 3 My mother finds time to talk with me.
4. My mother accepts me and likes me as I am.
5. My mother, whenever possible, allows me to choose what to do.
6. My mother doesn't seem to think of me often.
7. My mother clearly conveys her love for me.
8. My mother listens to my opinion or perspective when I've got a problem.
9. My mother spends a lot of time with me.
10. My mother makes me feel very special.

11. My mother allows me to decide things for myself.
12. My mother often seems too busy to attend to me.
13. My mother is often disapproving and unaccepting of me.
14. My mother insists upon my doing things her way.
15. My mother is not very involved with my concerns.
16. My mother is typically happy to see me.
17. My mother is usually willing to consider things from my point of view.
18. My mother puts time and energy into helping me.
19. My mother helps me to choose my own direction.
20. My mother seems to be disappointed in me a lot.
21. My mother isn't very sensitive to many of my needs.

Father Questions

1. My father seems to know how I feel about things.
2. My father tries to tell me how to run my life.
3. My father finds time to talk with me.
4. My father accepts me and likes me as I am.
5. My father, whenever possible, allows me to choose what to do.
6. My father doesn't seem to think of me often.
7. My father clearly conveys his love for me.
8. My father listens to my opinion or perspective when I've got a problem.
9. My father spends a lot of time with me.
10. My father makes me feel very special.
11. My father allows me to decide things for myself.

12. My father often seems too busy to attend to me.
13. My father is often disapproving and unaccepting of me.
14. My father insists upon my doing things his way.
15. My father is not very involved with my concerns.
16. My father is typically happy to see me.
17. My father is usually willing to consider things from my point of view.
18. My father puts time and energy into helping me.
19. My father helps me to choose my own direction.
20. My father seems to be disappointed in me a lot.
21. My father isn't very sensitive to many of my needs.

Non-Binary or 'Other' Parent Questions

1. My parent seems to know how I feel about things.
2. My parent tries to tell me how to run my life.
3. My parent finds time to talk with me.
4. My parent accepts me and likes me as I am.
5. My parent, whenever possible, allows me to choose what to do.
6. My parent doesn't seem to think of me often.
7. My parent clearly conveys his love for me.
8. My parent listens to my opinion or perspective when I've got a problem.
9. My parent spends a lot of time with me.
10. My parent makes me feel very special.
11. My parent allows me to decide things for myself.
12. My parent often seems too busy to attend to me.

13. My parent is often disapproving and unaccepting of me.
14. My parent insists upon my doing things his way.
15. My parent is not very involved with my concerns.
16. My parent is typically happy to see me.
17. My parent is usually willing to consider things from my point of view.
18. My parent puts time and energy into helping me.
19. My parent helps me to choose my own direction.
20. My parent seems to be disappointed in me a lot.
21. My parent isn't very sensitive to many of my needs.