

Sexual Attitudes and Double Standards: A Literature Review Focusing on Participant Gender and Ethnic Background

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Abstract We conducted a review of literature regarding sexual attitudes and double standards, focusing on participant gender and ethnic background. We found that men had more permissive sexual attitudes than women, and that African Americans had the most permissive sexual attitudes, followed by White Americans, then by Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans. The literature regarding sexual double standards was mixed; some studies showed evidence of continued sexual double standards and some studies showed the absence of sexual double standards. In some studies, men were more likely to endorse the sexual double standard than women. We found only one article addressing sexual double standards using ethnic background as a quasi-independent variable; this research revealed that non-North American (Russian and Japanese) samples were more likely to endorse the traditional double standard, that sex is more acceptable for men than for women.

Keywords Sexual attitudes · Double standard · Ethnicity · Gender

According to Billy Crystal “women need a reason to have sex. Men just need a place” (Moncur 2007). This quote illustrates the common perception that sexual attitudes differ by gender; specifically, that men have more permissive attitudes towards sex while women have (relatively) more conservative attitudes toward sex. Research supports this common perception, showing that men do indeed have more

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permissive attitudes toward sex (especially casual and premarital sex) than women (Chara and Kuennen 1994; Clark and Hatfield 1989; Hendrick et al. 1985; Oliver and Hyde 1993). In this literature review, we address several questions that are not necessarily common perceptions. Specifically, do sexual attitudes differ by ethnic background as well as gender? Do sexual double standards still influence attitudes about the acceptability of sex for men and women? Do members of different ethnic backgrounds differentially endorse sexual double standards? Below we review literature regarding sexual attitudes and double standards in the context of heterosexual relationships, focusing on participant gender and ethnic background.

Sexual Attitudes

Gender

Men's permissive attitudes toward sex are evidenced in a variety of studies. Hendrick et al. (1985) surveyed over 800 college students regarding their sexual attitudes. These authors found that men were "moderately permissive" (p. 1630) in their sexual attitudes while women were "moderately conservative" (p. 1630). Men were more likely to endorse casual sex, many sex partners, and one-night stands while women were more likely to support sex with partners who were well-known, sex only within marriage, and sex with love.

Similarly, almost two decades later, Alexander and Fisher (2003) found that men had more permissive sexual attitudes than women, even when participants were encouraged to report their sexual attitudes honestly. Over 200 (primarily White) participants self-reported their sexual attitudes and behaviors either while attached to a bogus pipeline (a machine described to the participants as similar to a polygraph), under the threat of their answers being accessible to the experimenter (participants were instructed to hand their completed questionnaires directly to the experimenter), or in an anonymous condition (participants deposited their questionnaires into a locked box). The authors found that self-reports of sexual behaviors varied by condition (for example, women admitted to as many sexual partners as men in the bogus pipeline condition and fewer partners than men in the exposure threat condition). To the contrary, self-reports of sexual attitudes did not vary by condition; and, consistent with previous literature, overall men reported more permissive sexual attitudes than women.

Along with their more permissive sexual attitudes, men also desire more sex partners than women (Buss and Schmitt 1993). The researchers asked 75 male and 73 female participants (the ethnic backgrounds of the participants were not reported) how many sex partners they desired during different time intervals (1 month, 6 months, 1 year, 5 years, 10 years, etc.). In 1 month, women stated they would like to have one sex partner, while men stated that they would prefer to have two sex partners. The gap between men and women widened with each passing time interval. During their lifetime, women stated they would optimally like to have five sex partners, while men stated that they would optimally prefer 18 sex partners. Men across all time intervals consistently stated a desire for more sex partners than women.

Not only do men desire more sex partners, men are more likely to agree to casual sex with a virtual stranger than women (Clark and Hatfield 1989). In Clark and Hatfield's research, confederates approached naïve participants of the opposite sex and asked "would you go to bed with me tonight?" (p. 49). As Clark and Hatfield reported, in both Study 1 and Study 2, none of the women who were approached agreed to this request, but 69% and 75% of the men did (in Study 1 and Study 2, respectively).

Oliver and Hyde (1993) performed a meta-analysis of 177 different articles involving gender differences in sexuality. Additively, the participants included over 58,000 men and 69,000 women (the ethnic backgrounds of the participants were not reported). These authors found that across research studies (published between 1974 and 1990), men were significantly more permissive in their attitudes toward casual sex than women. Oliver and Hyde reported a very large effect size of .81 for this difference in attitudes toward casual sex. The authors acknowledged that some gender differences in sexual attitudes decreased in more current research, however the authors also stated that even as differences in sexual attitudes converged, men remained significantly more permissive than women.

Although men continue to express more permissive sexual attitudes than women, sexual attitudes have become more permissive overall, regardless of gender. Harding and Jencks (2003) examined four different nationally representative surveys of attitudes, specifically analyzing changes in sexual attitudes. These researchers found that sexual attitudes became more permissive during the 1960s and 1970s but that they remained relatively stable during the 1980s and 1990s. Harding and Jencks' data shows that while both men's and women's attitudes became more permissive over time, men's attitudes remained more permissive than women's at all times.

While Oliver and Hyde (1993) did not specifically examine how sexual attitudes have changed over time, they examined how *differences* between men's and women's attitudes have changed over time. For example, these authors found that men's and women's attitudes toward premarital sex had converged from the 1960s to the 1980s, but that differences in sexual permissiveness and attitudes toward casual sex remained consistent across the decades.

Recent research suggests that women's sexual attitudes may be becoming more permissive, thus causing the convergence in gender differences in sexual attitudes. Earle et al. (2007) studied the sexual attitudes and behaviors of college students at a religiously affiliated university in 1981, 1991, and 2000. The results suggested that, although men remained significantly more permissive in their sexual attitudes than women, over time women had become more accepting of casual sex and sex within the context of a serious relationship. These findings must be replicated in a more representative sample in order to support the potential interpretation that women are becoming more permissive in their sexual attitudes and therefore differences between men and women are converging.

As gender differences in sexual attitudes are firmly established, researchers then consider why these differences have arisen. Feldman et al. (1999) proposed possible explanations for the observed gender differences in sexual attitudes. According to the authors, from a sociocultural perspective, differences in sexual attitudes between men

and women may spring from early experiences and learned gender roles. These authors stated that women may be more concerned with relationships and relationship status when initiating sexual behaviors because they have been raised to devote more attention to interpersonal relationships than men. For this reason, women may feel that it is necessary to be in a committed relationship in order to engage in sexual behavior and therefore have more conservative attitudes toward sex.

Oliver and Hyde (1993) reviewed different theories that might explain the gender differences they found in their meta-analysis. These authors stated that social learning theory might explain gender differences in attitudes and behaviors which were differentially displayed by adults of different sexes and differentially reinforced. For example, the authors suggested that young men may be more likely to engage in casual sex because they have seen older males engaging in those behaviors and being rewarded for those behaviors. Further, women may not be rewarded for such behaviors and may even be punished through negative comments or negative reputations for engaging in sexual behavior (Oliver & Hyde).

Oliver and Hyde (1993) also suggested that social role theory and script theory might explain gender differences in attitudes and behaviors which tend to be governed by roles and scripts (such as sexual behaviors). For example, the authors suggested that men may have more permissive attitudes toward sex because according to the “standard” sexual script, men should be the initiators of sexual behavior.

Gender differences in sexual attitudes may also be explained by evolutionary theory. Because of the differential investment men and women make in producing an offspring, it is not surprising that men are more permissive in their sexual attitudes and women are more conservative (see Buss 1989; Trivers 1972). Starting with the size of the sex cells (egg and sperm) women put more resources into producing offspring than do men. Women must also expend significant energy and resources on pregnancy. Due to these differences in minimum reproductive effort, poor mate choice is more costly to women and thus women tend to be choosier in selecting a mate (Trivers 1972; Buss 1999). If a woman makes a poor mate choice, she may end up raising a child without help from a partner, but if a man makes a poor mate choice he may not invest in his putative offspring at all, thus minimizing his own costs. Women may also benefit less from mating promiscuously because they can have as many offspring with one partner as with many partners; men, on the other hand, may benefit reproductively with each new partner (Trivers 1972). For these reasons men may have more permissive sexual attitudes and report more sex partners than women.

Ethnicity

Research involving ethnic background and sexual attitudes has revealed that White American students have more sexually permissive attitudes than Mexican American students (Padilla and O’Grady 1987). Padilla and O’Grady surveyed 165 Mexican American students and 99 Anglo-American students. These authors found that Mexican American students were significantly more conservative in their sexual

attitudes than their White peers. Fugère et al. (2008) explored sexual attitudes in two ethnically diverse samples (from a public and a private university). These samples were primarily White (44%) but also included many Asian American (29%) and Hispanic American (18%) participants. These authors found that White participants had more permissive sexual attitudes than their Hispanic and Asian American counterparts.

According to Feldman et al. (1999), most Asian Americans are likely to endorse the “abstinent standard” (p. 47) encouraging abstinence before marriage, while those Asian Americans who have more permissive attitudes toward sex generally approve of sexual behavior only when the partners are “in love” or “engaged” (p. 29). Conversely, Feldman et al. report that young African Americans often endorse the “permissiveness standard” (p. 47), approving of casual sex in a non-committed relationship.

Similarly, Browning and Burrington (2006) reported that young African American men often hold attitudes which encourage early sexual behavior, more so than Whites and Latinos. Browning and Burrington analyzed data collected as part of a larger research project conducted in 77 neighborhoods in Chicago, IL. The participants were 951 individuals from Latino, African American, and European American backgrounds. Browning and Burrington found that young African American men endorsed early sexual behavior and having children at younger ages than their White and Latino peers. The responses of Latino and White participants did not differ significantly from one another.

Consistent with differences in sexual attitudes, there seem to be patterns of ethnic differences in sexual behaviors as well. For example, Padilla and O’Grady (1987) reported that Hispanic American youth had less sexual experience than their White and African American peers. Also, Schuster et al. (1998) reported that Asian American youth were less likely to have sexual intercourse than their African American, Latino, and White American peers. Further, young Asian American adults reported having fewer sexual partners than their White counterparts (McLaughlin et al. 1997). Perhaps a lack of sexual experience reflects more conservative attitudes about sex for themselves and for others. Or perhaps more conservative attitudes preclude early sexual behavior for these young adults.

Although ethnic differences in sexual attitudes are less firmly established than gender differences, researchers have also considered the etiology of differences in sexual attitudes on the basis of ethnic background. Consistent with the sociocultural perspective, Feldman et al. (1999) suggest that sexual attitudes and behaviors may be influenced by parental upbringing styles consistent with different cultural standards. For example, according to Schuster et al. (1998), Asian American students were more likely to be concerned about parental disapproval of their sexual behaviors. Further, Browning and Burrington (2006) and Brown (1985) suggest that peers may influence sexual attitudes. For example, Brown found that African American females with permissive sexual attitudes sought friends with similar sexual attitudes.

Socio-economic status may underlie differences in sexual attitudes that may appear to be associated with ethnic background. Browning and Burrington (2006) and Feldman et al. (1999) both found differences in sexual attitudes associated with

ethnic background which were substantially moderated when socio-economic status and education levels were used as covariates. However, Brown (1985) found that socio-economic status (as measured by family income) was not associated with sexually permissive attitudes in African American females. Likewise, Padilla and O'Grady (1987) found that socio-economic status was not related to sexual attitudes in their sample of White and Mexican American students.

Sexual Double Standards

Gender

Sexual attitudes may involve sexual double standards; that is, typically it is more socially acceptable for men than women to engage in sexually permissive behavior. Further, men may approve of sexual behavior in themselves and other males more so than in females, evidencing the sexual double standard (see Reiss 1964; Crawford and Popp 2003).

Reiss (1964) was one of the first researchers to document sexual double standards. As Reiss explains in his article, the student sample was designed to be diverse; he selected students from different geographical areas of the U.S. and from White and African American backgrounds. Although Reiss states that he used probability and quota sampling to obtain the adult sample, the only demographic characteristics he reports for this sample are that the adults were all over 21 years old and most were not students. Reiss presented both student and adult participants with a list of sexual behaviors and asked them to rate their degree of agreement or disagreement (slight, medium, or strong) that the behaviors were acceptable for males and females. He found that students and adults perceived premarital sex (especially without affection) as more acceptable for men than women, evidencing a double standard.

Ideas regarding sexuality have changed substantially in the decades since Reiss' original research was conducted (1964). The effects of the sexual revolution have impacted the media and sexual education. The spread of HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, and an increase in teen pregnancy have been attributed to changes in social mores. Despite these cultural changes, some research continues to support the existence of a double standard or that sexuality is acceptable for men but not for women. A recent review of sexual double standard research reveals that sexual double standards still exist (Crawford and Popp 2003). Crawford and Popp suggest that presently, although some behaviors are viewed as equally acceptable for men and women, other behaviors, such as casual sex or having many sex partners, are still seen as more acceptable for men than women. For example, Feldman et al. (1999) reported that a large number of sex partners and sexual adventurousness is lauded in men and punished in women.

Sheeran et al.'s (1996) study also shows the recent existence of this sexual double standard in male and female participants. The researchers asked Scottish teenagers (students between the ages of 15 and 20, the ethnic makeup of the sample was not reported) to estimate the number of sexual partners most 20-year old men

and women might have as well as to rate a man and woman who changed sexual partners a number of times during the year. Participants (male and female) expected men to have more sexual partners, and viewed men who had multiple sex partners during the course of a year more positively than their female counterparts.

Sprecher and Hatfield's (1996) study also shows the continued existence of this sexual double standard, especially in male participants. In this research, the authors included convenience samples from the U.S., Russia, and Japan. The authors reported that 77% of the U.S. sample was White, while 94% of the Russian and Japanese samples were White. (Because the questionnaires were translated, the authors also included a note that they questioned the validity of the responses to the question regarding ethnic background for the Russian and Japanese samples.) In this study, participants rated the acceptability of sexual intercourse at five different stages of relationships (first date, casually dating, seriously dating, pre-engaged, and engaged). The authors found that Russian and Japanese samples were more likely to endorse the "traditional" sexual double standard, that sex is acceptable for men but not for women. The research also showed that across relationship stages, men (from the U.S. sample) rated sex as more acceptable for a man than a woman. Finally, Sprecher and Hatfield found that the double standard was strongest at the first date stage, followed by the casual dating stage and the serious dating stage, while at pre-engaged and engaged stages, men's ratings for men and women were equal.

Fugère et al. (2008) investigated sexual attitudes and double standards in two ethnically diverse groups of students from a public university ($n = 69$) and a private religiously affiliated university ($n = 169$) in the Southeastern and Western United States (respectively). Participants completed the Sexual Permissiveness Scale, measures of sexual activity, and measures of attitudes toward sex via computer. While men and women rated the acceptability of premarital sex similarly for female targets, men were more supportive of premarital sex for male targets than female targets, evidencing a sexual double standard. Although the samples were not large enough to explore the interaction between gender and ethnic background in the endorsement of sexual double standards, this research showed that sexual double standards were endorsed by male participants from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds.

Jackson and Cram (2003) found that female high school students from New Zealand (between 16 and 18 years old) recognized but did not endorse the sexual double standard in talking about sexuality (for example, the women took exception to the fact that sexually active women are labeled negatively while sexually active men are labeled positively). The ethnic background of these participants was reported to be "diverse" but details about ethnicity were not provided. Further, Aubrey (2004) reported in a content analysis of television dramas that female characters were more likely than male characters to experience negative emotional and physical consequences when initiating sexual behaviors.

From an evolutionary perspective, men may be less approving of female sexual permissiveness because of paternity uncertainty (see Buss 1989; Trivers 1972). Women always know they are genetically related to any child they have, but men can never be certain that they are genetically related to their partner's children. This uncertainty may have given rise to different standards of sexual behavior for men

and women, especially as evidenced by men's attitudes toward women's sexual behavior.

Further, physiological differences between men and women mean that men can greatly increase their descendents by mating with many women, while women cannot increase their numbers of offspring by having many sex partners. A woman is just as likely to have five children by having one sex partner as by having 20 sex partners (Trivers 1972). Physiological differences may have led to psychological adaptations such as the double standard that are likely to increase an individual's number of offspring. Unfortunately, the authors are aware of no research that specifically addresses the sexual double standard from an evolutionary perspective.

Although many researchers have found support for the double standard, some researchers have not found evidence of a sexual double standard. Sprecher's (1989) research assessed sexual double standards in a sample including 666 students from the Midwestern U.S. (The author did not indicate the ethnic makeup of the sample.) Sprecher investigated the acceptability of different behaviors for different scenario targets (a male, a female, a brother, a sister, the self). For example, one item reads "I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable for a male when he is on a first date" (p. 236). Sprecher found no evidence for the sexual double standard across targets.

Marks and Fraley (2005) reported that in a sample of undergraduate ($n = 144$) and Internet ($n = 8080$) participants, the sexual double standard was not evident. According to the authors, the Internet sample was primarily female and primarily White. The undergraduate sample was primarily female but included large percentages of both White and Asian participants. Participants in Marks and Fraley's research rated either male or female targets who had 0, 1, 3, 7, 12, or 19 sex partners. The researchers found that both male and female targets with more sex partners were evaluated more negatively.

Likewise, O'Sullivan (1995) found little support for the double standard in a sample of Midwestern U.S. college students. O'Sullivan reported that her sample was approximately 94% White, 3% African American, and less than 0.5% Hispanic. Participants in O'Sullivan's research rated either male or female targets with either a "low" or "high" number of sex partners. Interestingly, O'Sullivan employed a double standard when assigning male and female targets to "low" and "high" numbers of sex partners. Male targets were described as having either 2 or 13 sex partners while female targets were described as having either 1 or 7 sex partners. Similar to Marks and Fraley (2005), O'Sullivan also found that both male and female targets with more sex partners were evaluated more negatively. Because men and women were not assigned equal numbers of sex partners, we do not know whether men and women with equal numbers of sex partners would have been evaluated differently.

Feldman et al. (1999) found mixed evidence for sexual double standards when both male and female university students rated the timetables (appropriate ages) for men or women to engage in sexual behaviors in the context of both a serious relationship and a casual relationship. Feldman et al.'s sample was very diverse including almost equal percentages of African American, Latino, Asian American, and White participants. Feldman and colleagues asked young adults to rate the age when it would be acceptable to begin engaging in different sexual activities (kissing,

oral sex, sexual intercourse, etc.) for either a man or a woman in two different relationship contexts: both a serious and casual relationship. Feldman et al. found that both male and female participants rated the appropriate ages for men and women similarly across serious and casual relationships; the authors interpreted this finding as evidence for the decline of sexual double standards. However, the authors also noted that men provided earlier acceptable ages across sexual behaviors for male targets versus female targets and for their own sexual behaviors while women provided later acceptable ages across sexual behaviors for female targets versus male targets and for their own behaviors.

A closer look at the previous research reveals possible reasons for the mixed evidence for sexual double standards. First, in Sprecher and Hatfield's (1996) research, evidence for the sexual double standard was found in men and women in the Japanese and Russian samples, but only men in the U. S. sample. Similarly, in Fugère et al.'s (2008) research, evidence for the sexual double standard was found only in men. Second, as reviewed by Crawford and Popp (2003), some sexual behaviors are seen as equally acceptable for men and women while other behaviors are seen as more acceptable for men. Some studies investigated only the number of sexual partners while others investigated a number of specific sexual behaviors. Third, as reported by Sprecher (1989) the sexual double standard may reveal itself in more subtle ways than ratings of non-specific target persons. For example, some of the most recent research revealing sexual double standards (Aubrey 2004; Jackson and Cram 2003) used interviews and content analyses which are more subjective than ratings of a target person. Further, Marks and Fraley (2006) found that participants tended to remember information consistent with sexual double standards; that is, negative comments associated with a woman's sexual activity.

Ethnicity

Crawford and Popp (2003) recently conducted a meta-analysis analyzing sexual double standards and recommended investigating sexual double standards in diverse groups of participants. According to Crawford and Popp, although several demographic factors have been explored and linked to the existence of the sexual double standard, the authors noted the lack of research involving ethnic background and the double standard. In their review of the past 20 years of research the authors observed that although qualitative research has often included more diverse samples, past experimental research involving sexual double standards has typically involved White college students. Crawford and Popp also stated that in much of the sexual double standard research, the ethnic background of the participants was not reported. The authors also revealed that ethnic background was never explored as a quasi-independent variable.

Although Feldman et al. (1999) explored young adults' reports of the appropriate ages for engaging in sexual activities in a diverse sample of participants, these authors did not originally intend to investigate sexual double standards and they reported finding no evidence for sexual double standards. Although Fugère et al. (2008) intended to explore ethnic background as a quasi-independent variable, their samples were not large enough to explore the interaction between gender and ethnic background in the endorsement of sexual double standards.

To the knowledge of the present authors, only one study regarding ethnic background and sexual double standards exists. Sprecher and Hatfield (1996) performed a cross-cultural study involving samples from the U.S., Japan, and Russia. These authors found that Russian students were most likely to endorse the “traditional” double standard, that sex is acceptable for men but not for women. Also, the authors found that men and women in the Japanese and Russian samples were equally likely to endorse the double standard, but men from the U.S. sample were more likely than women from the U.S. sample to endorse the double standard. This research also revealed that American participants had more sexually permissive attitudes than Japanese and Russian participants.

Implications and Future Research

The review of the above literature shows that men have more permissive sexual attitudes than women (Alexander and Fisher 2003; Oliver and Hyde 1993), and that African Americans have the most permissive sexual attitudes, followed by White Americans, and then by Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans (Browning and Burrington 2006; Feldman et al. 1999; Fugère et al. 2008; Padilla and O’Grady 1987). The literature regarding sexual double standards was mixed; some studies showed evidence of continued sexual double standards (Crawford and Popp 2003; Sheeran et al. 1996) and some studies showed the absence of sexual double standards (Marks and Fraley 2005; O’Sullivan 1995). In some studies, men were more likely to endorse the sexual double standard than women (Sprecher and Hatfield 1996; Fugère et al. 2008). Although the research addressing sexual double standards in participants from different ethnic backgrounds is sparse, one study revealed that non-North American samples were more likely to endorse the traditional double standard, that sex is more acceptable for men than for women (Sprecher and Hatfield 1996).

As Oliver and Hyde (1993) note, even as attitudes toward sex become more permissive in general, women are still more conservative in their sexual attitudes than men. The findings reviewed above with respect to gender differences in sexual attitudes have implications for relations between the sexes. Even as women become more permissive in their sexual attitudes, women are still likely to find that their male counterparts desire more sex and more sex partners. Work by Buss suggests that although men deem sexually permissive women more desirable when considering them for short-term sexual relationships and clearly undesirable when considering them for long-term partners, women always find sexually permissive men undesirable (Buss and Schmitt 1993). Thus, if women express more permissive sexual attitudes, they may be more attractive to men for short-term relationships, while if men express more permissive sexual attitudes, they may be unattractive to women for any type of relationship. Gender differences in sexual attitudes may also have potential implications for men’s and women’s health; if men participate in more risky sexual behaviors based upon their more permissive sexual attitudes, they may be at increased risk for contracting and spreading sexually transmitted diseases.

More research is needed to determine the etiology of gender differences in sexual attitudes. Do they stem from sociocultural forces such as upbringing (see Feldman

et al. 1999) or social learning forces such as differential vicarious reinforcement (see Oliver and Hyde 1993)? Do they emerge because of societal expectations for differential sexual behavior from males and females (see Alexander and Fisher 2003)? Or are they artifacts of our evolutionary history (see Buss 1989; Trivers 1972)? Also, we encourage more research such as that conducted by Alexander and Fisher which encourages the honest self-report of sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Future research should address whether sexual attitudes are once again undergoing a more permissive shift and whether this shift is occurring in the general population or only in college students. Harding and Jencks (2003) found that permissive sexual attitudes abruptly increased during the 1960s and 1970s but then remained relatively static in the 1980s and 1990s in nationally representative samples. Earle et al. (2007) found that women's sexual attitudes had become more liberal between 1981 and 2000 (in their sample from a religiously-affiliated university). As the editor-in-chief of the journal *Sexuality and Culture* pointed out to the present authors, current college students are residents of a "hook-up" culture which did not exist in previous decades.¹ It is possible that college students (perhaps more so than youth who do not attend college) are undergoing another period of shifting sexual attitudes. Weinberg et al. (1997) suggest that the more permissive attitudes and behaviors of college students might stem from the widespread availability of reliable birth control and/or from the saturation of media with sexual advertising and content. Further, once again as suggested by the editor-in-chief of the journal *Sexuality and Culture*, pornographic and sexual content is currently easily and privately accessible to college students via the Internet (see footnote 1). This increased exposure to sexual content may also drive changes in sexual attitudes and behaviors.

The findings reviewed above with respect to ethnic differences in sexual attitudes may have implications for relations between the sexes as well. As contemporary American society becomes more and more culturally integrated, men and women entering relationships may find that they and their partners have mismatched attitudes about the acceptability of premarital sex. Or, as American society becomes more and more ethnically diverse, differential attitudes toward sex may begin to converge (as Oliver and Hyde noted in their 1993 meta-analysis regarding gender differences in sexual attitudes). Further, recent research has shown that minority youth (Perrino et al. 2006) are at an elevated risk for contracting HIV with the possible exception of Asian American youth due to their more conservative sexual attitudes/behaviors (Choi et al. 2005).

Future research should continue to explore both the existence of differential sexual attitudes in young adults of different ethnic backgrounds as well as the potential causes of these differences. For example, Browning and Burrington (2006) found a strong relationship between sexual attitudes and socio-economic standing among African American men. Feldman et al. (1999) also reported that differences in sexual attitudes between White and African American youth were attributable in part to demographic characteristics such as education and income level. Further,

¹ The authors would like to thank the editor-in-chief of *Sexuality and Culture*, Dr. Barry M. Dank, for these suggestions.

research should assess whether interventions, especially for youth with more permissive sexual attitudes, will help decrease the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

This review of literature focused only on sexual attitudes and double standards in the context of heterosexual relationships (see footnote 1) other research is necessary to determine whether the same trends are evidenced when studying sexual attitudes in the context of homosexual relationships. Harris (2002) reviewed literature related to sexual attitudes among heterosexual and homosexual samples. She states that in most of the research, heterosexual and homosexual samples responded similarly. For example, in her own research, men were more likely than women to choose a hypothetical sexual infidelity (versus emotional infidelity) as more upsetting in both heterosexual and homosexual samples. Although in many cases, heterosexual and homosexual respondents react similarly, Harris reports that in some of the research she reviewed, differences due to sexual orientation emerged. For example, monogamy was less important to gay men and lesbians than to heterosexual men and women (Peplau and Cochran 1980, as cited in Harris 2002). Future research should continue to explore sexual attitudes in both heterosexual and homosexual samples. Further, research should explore whether sexual double standards exist in the context of homosexual relationships.

The mixed evidence for sexual double standards evidenced in the current review of research requires future attention. Future research should include both global evaluations of target persons as well as evaluations of specific behaviors (including number of sexual partners) to determine whether some of the mixed evidence for double standards can be explained by the different measures used to assess sexual double standards. Additionally, Marks and Fraley (2006) suggest studying sexual double standards in a more realistic environment as opposed to a laboratory setting. For example, it may be that when evaluating a realistic potential sexual partner of one's own, both men and women may eschew sexual double standards in favor of the potential for sexual activity.

The findings presented in this review which show that men have more permissive attitudes toward sex yet tend to endorse sexual double standards (more so than women) present an interesting paradox for heterosexual men. It is possible that men desire women as sex partners but then view them negatively for engaging in those same sexual behaviors. Moreover, evolutionary predictions should be tested and applied to sexual double standard research. Although evolutionary theory is generally applied to mate selection research, it is certainly relevant to research involving sexual attitudes and double standards.

Considering the lack of research on sexual double standards in diverse samples, future research should address Crawford and Popp's (2003) recommendation to explore the existence of sexual double standards in ethnically diverse samples. Further, also as recommended by Crawford and Popp, ethnic background should be considered as a quasi-independent variable so its relationship to sexual double standards can be explored. It is important to know whether the more conservative sexual attitudes evidenced by Hispanic and Asian American participants apply equally to male and female targets.

Also, consistent with another recommendation from Crawford and Popp (2003), future research should strive to draw participants from non-university samples. Although college students are at the age when they are likely to be sexually active and unmarried, they may be unrepresentative of the broader population in any number of ways. For example, youth who do not attend college may be more permissive or more conservative in their sexual attitudes. Or, young adults who have graduated from college but are not yet in long-term relationships may be more or less likely to endorse sexual double standards. Further, young adults who attend college may have a higher socio-economic status in terms of both family income and education, factors which are associated with sexual attitudes (Browning and Burrington 2006; Feldman et al. 1999). Additionally, as suggested by Feldman et al. (1999), research involving ethnic differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors should compare samples with similar demographic characteristics (for example, age, education level, socio-economic status) so that ethnic background is not confounded with other demographic characteristics.

Finally, future research should continue to explore both sexual attitudes and sexual double standards with respect to gender and ethnic background of the participant. As our society continues to evolve, perhaps gender and cultural differences in sexual attitudes may continue to diminish. As sexual attitudes continue to become more and more permissive, perhaps sexual double standards will eventually disappear. As suggested above, research should continue to explore why we presently hold differential sexual attitudes and double standards with attention to why these differences seem to be diminishing.

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