

Premarital Sexual Standards Among U.S. College Students: Comparison with Russian and Japanese Students

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The study of the sexual permissiveness of young adults has been a popular topic in sociology and social psychology, especially since the empirical and theoretical work of Reiss. We extended previous research on premarital sexual standards by examining the degree of sexual permissiveness and the endorsement of the traditional double standard in a large sample of young adults in the United States (N = 1043). In addition, comparative data were collected from young adults in two other countries: Russia (N = 401) and Japan (N = 223). American subjects expressed more acceptance of premarital sex than did the Russian and Japanese subjects. Men were more sexually permissive than women in the U.S. and in Russia but not in Japan. The degree to which the double standard was endorsed also depended on culture and gender. Russian subjects were more likely to endorse the double standard than Japanese and American subjects. However, American men were most likely to endorse the traditional double standard concerning sex early in the dating relationship.

KEY WORDS: sexual standards; premarital sexuality; double standard; gender differences.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual attitudes refer to how accepting people are of sexual activity, either for themselves or for others. Sexual attitudes have been identified as a central concept in the study of sexuality because attitudes affect many

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other aspects of sexuality, including sexual behaviors, sexual fantasies, and responses to sexual cues in the environment (Kelley and Byrne, 1992). Although people may hold attitudes about a variety of sex-related topics (masturbation, abortion, pornography, extramarital sex, and contraception), most of the research has focused on standards about premarital sex. This research was designed to provide current information about the standards of young adults in the United States and to compare these standards with those of young adults in Russia and Japan.

Background Literature on Premarital Sexual Standards

Reiss (1964, 1967) pioneered research on premarital sexual standards. Beginning in the 1950s, he assessed the sexual standards of college students in the United States. His Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale, a multiple-item Guttman measure, asks about the acceptability of sexual behaviors for premarital relationships of different emotional levels (from no affection to engagement). His scale and other similar Guttman-type scales have been used in several investigations conducted over the past few decades (for research conducted with similar scales, see DeLamater and MacCorquodale, 1979; Sprecher *et al.*, 1988). Items that assess attitudes about premarital sexuality have also been included in more general sexual permissiveness scales, such as Hendrick and Hendrick's (1987) Sexual Attitudes Scale and Simpson and Gangestad's (1991) Sociosexual Orientation Inventory.

When Reiss (1964) began his groundbreaking research on premarital sexual standards in the late 1950s, a majority of the students surveyed believed in either abstinence for both genders or abstinence for females only (i.e., the double standard). Since this earlier period "attitudes toward female sexuality in general, and premarital sexuality in particular, have become increasingly permissive in the United States" (Reiss and Lee, 1988, p. 157). Comparisons across studies conducted at different times (e.g., Darling *et al.*, 1984) and across different cohorts of students from the same universities (e.g., Ferrell *et al.*, 1977; King *et al.*, 1977; Sherwin and Corbett, 1985) have found that premarital sexual standards have become more liberal. Today, most young men and women believe it is acceptable to have sexual relations before marriage—for reasons of affection and/or pleasure. "Permissiveness with affection" (or relational sex) refers to the acceptability of premarital sex under conditions of affection and "permissiveness without affection" (or recreational sex) refers to the acceptability of sex under conditions of pleasure or desire—affection and commitment are not necessary (Reiss, 1960).

A number of issues have been examined in the research conducted on premarital sexual permissiveness. Some research has examined how standards vary for different target individuals. For example, the most frequent comparison is between how subjects complete a sexual permissiveness scale for male versus female targets. This is the primary way in which the existence of the double standard has been investigated. Results based on comparisons between a male version of a sexual permissiveness scale and a female version show very little evidence for a double standard (e.g., DeLamater and MacCorquodale, 1979; Ferrell *et al.*, 1977; Sprecher, 1989; Sprecher *et al.*, 1988). The effects of other target characteristics, including age and personal relevance, have also been studied. People hold more liberal standards for older teens and young adults than for younger teens, and less permissive standards the more personally relevant the target in the scale items (e.g., a brother vs. "a male") (Kaats and Davis, 1970; Sprecher, 1989). However, generally, there are no differences between standards for a hypothetical male or female and standards for the self (Sprecher, 1989). Comparisons have also been made between responses to the different items of a premarital sexual permissiveness scale, which ask about sex at different premarital relationship stages and about different kinds of sexual acts. Respondents are more permissive about sex in relationships of greater commitment or affection than of lesser commitment and are more permissive about less intimate sexual behaviors such as petting than about more intimate sexual behaviors such as sexual intercourse (see Sprecher *et al.*, 1988).

Sexual permissiveness has been found to covary with certain background, personality, and other individual difference variables. The effect of gender is the most frequently examined individual difference variable and it has been found to have a strong influence on sexual attitudes. Consistently, men are found to have more permissive attitudes than women (see, e.g., DeLamater and MacCorquodale, 1979; Hendrick *et al.*, 1985; Sprecher, 1989; Sprecher *et al.*, 1988). Other individual difference variables associated with sexual permissiveness include an internal locus of control, low religiosity, high self-monitoring, and extraversion (for a review, see Sprecher and McKinney, 1993). Subcultural membership has also been found to influence sexual standards. For example, studies have found blacks to have more permissive premarital sexual standards than whites (e.g., Harrison *et al.*, 1974; Staples, 1978; Weinberg and Williams, 1988; for a review, see Cortese, 1989) and Mexican American students to have more conservative sexual attitudes relative to other racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Padilla and O'Grady, 1987). A less consistent relationship has been found between social class and sexual standards, although some research has shown that

lower class respondents are more permissive than middle or upper class respondents (e.g., Kantner and Zelnick, 1972).

The Effect of Culture on Premarital Sexual Standards

The attitudes people have toward sexuality are also likely to be affected by their cultural background. In fact, it would be very surprising if there were not variations in sexual permissiveness from culture to culture. Anthropologists, who have frequently studied nonindustrialized societies, have established that societies differ widely in areas of sexuality (e.g., Ford and Beach, 1951; Frayser, 1985; Gregersen, 1986). Although sex is present in all societies, societies vary in their level of repressiveness and permissiveness with regard to adolescent sexuality, extramarital sexuality, homosexuality, and other forms of sexuality (for a review, see Hatfield and Rapson, 1995). However, there has been little social scientific research comparing samples from two or more cultures on standard measures of sexual permissiveness.

It is important to conduct cross-cultural research on premarital sexual standards for a number of reasons. First, it allows us to examine the degree to which certain conclusions reached about premarital sexual standards based on data collected in the United States are culture-bound. Although it has been concluded that young adults in the U.S. are now sexually permissive, that men are more sexually permissive than women (e.g., Oliver and Hyde, 1993), and that a double standard has virtually disappeared, will we find these results in other industrial countries as well? Furthermore, increased knowledge of life-styles and customs of other countries is important to acquire as the countries of the world become more interdependent. In this study, we learn more about Japan and Russia, two societies of significance to the United States. Another advantage of conducting cross-cultural research on premarital sexual standards is that it helps determine the degree to which social context variables influence sexual standards. The degree to which variation in sexual standards is found across societies suggests the degree to which sexual standards are influenced and molded by larger social context variables (as opposed to internal "sex-drive" factors).

The limited cross-cultural research that has been conducted on premarital sexual standards suggests that individuals from different societies do have different sexual standards. Some countries are permissive in their sexual standards; others are more restrictive. In almost every study that has compared samples from two or more societies, significant cross-cultural differences were found. Iwawaki and Eysenck (1978) compared Japanese students with British students on sexual attitudes and behaviors and found

Japanese students were less permissive overall. On the items that referred specifically to premarital sex, the researchers found that Japanese students were somewhat accepting of premarital sex, but not as accepting as the British students. Perlman *et al.* (1978) had English-speaking students from five different "cultures" (from four countries) complete eight items from the Reiss Premarital Permissiveness scale. Students from Bard College in New York State were most permissive; students from the University of Manitoba in Canada had moderate sexual attitudes; and students from the other three cultures were least permissive. These other cultures were the University of Dacca in Bangladesh, the University of Malaya, and conservative religious colleges in the province of Manitoba. LaBeff and Dodder (1982) compared college students from the United States with college students from Mexico on premarital sexual standards for a female (as measured by items from the Reiss scale) and found that Mexican students were less permissive.

In a large cross-cultural study on mate selection preferences, Buss (1989) provided indirect evidence about cross-cultural differences in premarital sexual standards. Included in a mate selection list distributed to 10,000 men and women in 33 countries was the item "chastity" (i.e., the respondents were asked how much they desired chastity and a number of other traits in a marriage partner). The societies varied in the degree to which chastity was important. Samples from China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Taiwan, and Israel were particularly likely to value chastity in a partner (these samples tended to say that it was indispensable). In contrast, samples from Sweden, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, West Germany, and France rated chastity as irrelevant or unimportant. The subjects from North America also rated chastity as relatively unimportant, although they did not rate it as unimportant as did the samples from the Scandinavian countries.

What do we know about the sexual standards of young adults in Japan and Russia, the other two cultures surveyed in this study? Japan has traditionally been a sexually restrictive society. Sexuality in Japan has been described as "minimized (and hence regulated) because it is tangential to the proper performance of duty, thereby making sex secondary to the more basic standards of Japanese society" (Abramson, 1986, p. 3). Above we reported on a study conducted by Iwawaki and Eysenck (1978), in which Japanese respondents' scores on several sex-related measures were compared to British respondents' scores. Although these researchers found that Japanese respondents were less liberal than the British, they reported that "Japanese students tended to accept premarital sex" and "they did not expect virginity in their partner for marriage" (p. 295). Furthermore, there is evidence of a change toward a more liberal climate in Japan. The Japanese Association for Sex Education distributed a questionnaire on various aspects of sexuality

to Japanese high school and college students in 1974, 1981, and 1988. Based on these data, Hatano (1991) reported on changes in the developmental patterns of sexual experiences, behaviors, and concerns of the Japanese youth. Hatano reported that there was an increase in sexual experiences between 1974 and 1981 and that this may be "a reflexion of more liberal societal attitudes on sexual conduct in 1981 than in 1974" (p. 13). However, a similar change did not occur between 1981 and 1988. Hatano stated that the university entrance examination in Japan is a controlling factor of sexual behaviors among the Japanese youth of high school age. The importance of the preparation time leads to societal and parental pressure exerted on high school students to postpone sexual activity. However, there is more sexual freedom once Japanese youth reach college.

Russia (U.S.S.R.) has also traditionally been a restrictive society. Sexual freedom—along with other types of free expression—were discouraged under early Soviet policy and the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (Riordan, 1993). However, sexual pleasure became one of the goals of modern Soviet society. Shlapentokh (1984), in an analysis of sex and relationships in the Soviet Union, wrote:

The change in public attitudes toward sex, combined with the rise of education (a critical factor in every sphere of Soviet life) and the greater access to Western styles of life, has contributed to the marked rise of sex as a hedonistic value in the general system of personal values in the USSR. People have become much more demanding of each other concerning sex, both inside and outside of marriage. (p. 55)

On the specific topic of premarital sexual attitudes in the Soviet Union, Shlapentokh (1984) wrote "the information available suggests that the Soviet people support a fairly high level of permissiveness in premarital sexuality" (p. 139). However, he also added that while "it is difficult to make valid international comparisons on attitudes toward premarital and extra-marital sexuality, I would gingerly speculate that, though 'ahead' in extra-marital relations, the Soviets are still 'behind' U.S. society in premarital sex" (pp. 140-141). More recently, Golod (1993) described a few studies conducted among Soviets in the 1960s and 1970s and concluded that a majority of Russian students approved of premarital sex, although there was also considerable diversity in their views.

Purposes of This Investigation

In this study, college students from the United States, Russia, and Japan completed the Sprecher *et al.* (1988) Sexual Permissive scale, which asks about the acceptability of sexual behavior at different relationship stages. The students completed the scale three times: for self ("me"); for a hypothetical male, and for a hypothetical female. With these data, we

examine sexual permissiveness (for the self) and the degree to which there is a double standard (difference between scores on the male version of the scale and scores on the female version).

The first purpose of this study is to provide current information about the premarital sexual standards of U.S. college students. Because the data were collected recently (since 1990) and from different locations in the U.S., we provide up-to-date information about sexual standards among young adults in the United States. We expect to find that premarital sex is perceived to be quite acceptable by these young adults and particularly for more advanced stages of dating, that men will have more permissive standards than women and particularly for more casual stages of dating, and that there will be no or very little evidence for a double standard.

The second purpose of the study is to compare the data collected from college students in the U.S. with the data collected from college students in Japan and Russia. In making these cross-cultural comparisons, we address three questions:

How does sexual permissiveness (for self) vary across the three societies? We would expect to find the U.S. sample to be the most sexually permissive and the Japanese sample to be the least sexually permissive. However, given the recent societal changes in Russia and Japan, the standards in these two countries are likely to be almost as permissive as the standards in the U.S.

Do men have more permissive sexual standards than women in all three societies? Previous research, as referred to above, has shown that U.S. men are more sexually permissive than U.S. women. There is a suggestion that this gender difference in sexual permissiveness is fairly universal (e.g., Perlman *et al.*, 1978). Thus, we expect to find men are more permissive than women in premarital sexual standards in all three societies. However, we expect the differences between men and women in sexual standards may not be the same in all three societies. According to Christensen's (1969) conceptual framework for predicting cross-cultural differences in sexuality, the greatest difference between men and women in sexuality should occur in the most sexually restrictive societies, which would be Japan in this study. However, as noted by Perlman *et al.* (1978), Reiss's (1967) "identification of an egalitarian abstinence standard suggests that in some sexually restrictive societies the gap between male and females standards should be small" (p. 547). Because of these contrasting views, we explore how the degree of gender differences in sexual attitudes depends on the culture.

Does the existence and degree of the double standard vary across the societies? We noted earlier that the double standard has virtually disappeared in the U.S. However, it may still exist in other societies. Cross-cultural researchers (Shapurian and Hojat, 1985) have argued that the more power

men have in a society, relative to women, the more likely the double standard is to exist. Generally, men have more power in traditional societies, and Japan would be considered the most traditional of the three countries considered in this study. However, traditional societies are also most likely to have a single abstinence standard (Reiss, 1967), and as discussed above, this gender abstinence standard means that a double standard would be unlikely. Because it is unclear what to predict, we explore this issue.

Table I. Background Information on the United States, Russian, and Japanese Samples

	U.S. (<i>n</i> = 1043)	Russia (<i>n</i> = 401)	Japan (<i>n</i> = 223)
Gender (% female)	63	50	53
Age			
% 18–21	75	60	84
Mdn	20	21	20
Race/ethnic background ^a (%)			
White	77	94	94
Asian	9	—	—
Black	9	—	—
Other	5	6	6
Setting grew up in (%)			
Rural	8	14	7
Small town	18	12	20
Large town or small city	20	44	35
Suburb	39	3	20
Large city	14	28	18
Family's social class ^b (%)			
Upper	7	3	1
Upper middle	37	12	23
Middle	44	49	56
Lower middle	8	11	15
Working	4	24	5
Lower	1	1	1

^aWe have more confidence in the validity of the ethnic/race question for the U.S. sample than for the Russian or Japanese samples. For example, the 6% of the subjects from Japan who chose a category other than "Asian" were probably Asian (Japanese) as reported by the two individuals who distributed the questionnaire in their classes. Furthermore, an expert on the Russian language from the U.S. reported that the question on ethnicity was inappropriate for the Russians. Although we did not ask subjects whether they were native-born, we believe that either 100% or nearly 100% of the subjects in each country were native-born.

^bOne of the experts on the Russian language from the U.S. noted that the Russians would probably be confused by the question that asks about social class and would not be able to identify which social class they belong to. Thus, it may not be meaningful to compare this item across cultures.

In sum, we examine sexual permissiveness and endorsement of the double standard for premarital relationships in the United States, Russia, and Japan.

METHOD

The Sample

Questions on premarital sexual standards were included in a larger questionnaire that was distributed to convenience samples of young adults in the United States, Russia, and Japan. After subjects who did not identify their gender were eliminated, the total sample consisted of 1667 respondents (695 men and 972 women); 1043 from the United States, 401 from Russia, and 223 from Japan.

The United States sample consisted of 389 men and 654 women from five different universities or colleges: Illinois State University in Normal ($n = 478$), Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX ($n = 326$), University of Hawaii in Honolulu ($n = 104$), Bradley University in Peoria, IL ($n = 79$), and Millikin College in Decatur, IL ($n = 56$). The Russian sample consisted of 201 men and 200 women from the Vladimir Poly-Technical Institute (which is about 100 miles from Moscow). The Japanese sample consisted of 105 men and 118 women from Nanzan University in Nagaya ($n = 108$) or Tohoku University in Sendai ($n = 115$). Background information on the samples can be found in Table I.

The eight universities represented from the three countries were selected because of convenience—the authors of this article were located at two of the universities and colleagues were available to distribute questionnaires at the other universities. The American sample is particularly diverse because over 1000 students were sampled and the five colleges or universities represented different regions, included large public universities as well as one private university and one multiethnic university. The two universities in Japan were also quite different from each other. Tohoku University is one of the two largest public universities in Japan, whereas Nanzan university is a smaller, private university. Although we were able to collect data from only one university in Russia, it was located in a city similar in size and character to the city in which Illinois State University is located (in fact, the two cities are called “sister cities”). Nonetheless, any of the cross-cultural comparisons we make in this study must be interpreted with caution because we are comparing three convenience samples that may differ in ways other than nationality.

Procedure

In each country, the questionnaire was completed by university or college students, most often during class time. The one exception was at Tohoku University in Japan, where students received class credit for completing the questionnaire at home. The questionnaire took 20 to 30 min to complete. Students recorded their responses to the 120-item questionnaire on an op-scan sheet. Machine-readable op-scans were used primarily so that the data from Russia and Japan could be more easily transported back to the United States.

For the Russian sample, the questionnaire was translated into Russian. A professor of Russian languages from a university in the United States later back-translated the Russian questionnaire into English and assessed the accuracy of the original translation. Furthermore, an independent assessment was made by a second professor of Russian languages from another U.S. university. Both experts concluded that the original translation was good. Only a few problems in the lengthy questionnaire were noted and only one was found with measures used in this study (discussed below).

The questionnaire remained in English for the Japanese sample. This was done because the Japanese students who were contacted had excellent command of the English language. Many of the Japanese subjects were English language or American Studies majors and thus had many years of formal instruction on the English language. Japanese subjects were also allowed to use Japanese-English dictionaries if it was necessary. The professors who distributed the questionnaire in their class reported that the subjects did not seem to have any problem completing and understanding the questionnaire.

Measurement

Premarital sexual standards were measured by a portion of the Sprecher *et al.* (1988) Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale. Although the full Sprecher *et al.* scale measures standards about three sexual behaviors—heavy petting, sexual intercourse, and oral-genital sex—we included only the items that assessed attitudes about sexual intercourse (which are similar to the standards about oral-genital sex among U.S. students; see Sprecher, 1989). The version of the scale used in this study contains five items asking about the acceptability of sexual intercourse at five relationship stages: first date, casually dating, serious dating, preengaged, and engaged. Each of the five items was included in the questionnaire three times, each time with a

different target: self (or “me”); a male; and a female. For example, the items that refer to “me” are:

I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable for me on a first date.

I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable for me when I’m casually dating my partner (dating less than one month).

I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable for me when I’m seriously dating my partner (dating almost one year).

I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable for me when I’m pre-engaged to my partner (we have seriously discussed the possibility of getting married).

I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable for me when I’m engaged to my partner.

An example item that refers to a male is: “I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable for a male who is seriously dating his partner.” An example item that refers to a female is: “I believe that sexual intercourse is acceptable for a female on a first date.” The 15 items were listed in a random order in one section of the questionnaire. For each item, subjects could *agree* (1) strongly, (2) moderately, or (3) slightly, or *disagree* (4) slightly, (5) moderately, or (6) strongly. Thus, lower numbers indicate greater sexual permissiveness.

The experts who studied the Russian translation noted that the term “preengaged” did not get translated correctly. Instead, the word was translated as “engaged.” However, the description in the parentheses (“we have discussed the possibility of getting married”) did get translated correctly. Thus, it is unclear whether the Russians were thinking of a preengaged or engaged relationship when responding to this item.

From the responses to these 15 items, indices of sexual permissiveness and endorsement of the double standard were created for the cross-cultural analyses, as described next.

Index of Sexual Permissiveness. Sexual permissiveness is operationalized as sexual permissiveness for the self (“me”). A total sexual permissiveness score is represented by the mean response of the five items in the Sprecher *et al.* (1988) Sexual Permissiveness Scale when the target is “me.” It should be noted that sexual permissiveness for self is highly related to sexual permissiveness for “a male” ($r = .87$) and for “a female” ($r = .87$).

Index of the Double Standard. The total double-standard index is the difference between the total scores on the male and female versions of the sexual permissiveness scale. A negative score on this double-standard index indicates a traditional double standard—the granting of more sexual freedom to men than to women. The larger the number (the farther away from zero in the negative direction), the greater the traditional double standard. On the other hand, a positive difference score indicates a reversal of the double standard—more sexual freedom granted to women than to men.

Table II. Responses to the Sexual Permissiveness Items for U.S. Men and Women^a

Stage	Male subjects			Female subjects		
	Me	Female	Male	Me	Female	Male
First date	3.78 (46)	4.37 (32)	3.70 (47)	5.58 (6)	5.43 (8)	5.35 (10)
Casual dating	2.94 (65)	3.32 (54)	3.12 (58)	4.69 (25)	4.35 (31)	4.41 (29)
Serious dating	1.83 (88)	1.87 (88)	1.77 (90)	2.20 (82)	2.12 (84)	2.08 (84)
Preengaged	1.74 (90)	1.87 (89)	1.95 (86)	2.10 (84)	2.11 (84)	2.12 (84)
Engaged	1.67 (91)	1.77 (89)	1.77 (88)	1.87 (88)	1.83 (89)	1.91 (88)
Total	2.39	2.64	2.46	3.29	3.16	3.17

^aThe first number in each column is the mean response; the lower the number the more agreement or permissiveness. The number in the parentheses is the percentage who agreed with the item—either slightly, moderately, or strongly.

In our focus on differences across cultures, we run the analyses reported below for these total indices and for each item of the scales. Each item asks about the acceptability of sexual intercourse at a specific relationship stage for a specific target. We do the more detailed analyses as well because culture and gender differences may depend on the specific relationship stage.

RESULTS

Sexual Standards in the United States

Before we present the results from the cross-cultural analyses, we describe the sexual standards of the U.S. respondents. Table II contains descriptive information on the sexual standards of the U.S. men and women. The mean response to and the percentage who agreed are presented for each individual scale item. The last row presents the total mean scores for the index of sexual permissiveness for the three targets (for male and female subjects separately).

As can be seen in Table II, the degree to which sexual intercourse is perceived as acceptable increases with each increase in relationship commitment. Respondents, and especially women, were more likely to disapprove than approve of sex on a first date (for all three targets). However, with each increase in relationship commitment, there was an increase in the number of respondents who expressed acceptance of sexual intercourse. The largest increases occurred between first date and casual dating and between casual dating and serious dating. When respondents were asked about their acceptability of sexual intercourse for the engaged stage, all but about 10% of the respondents expressed at least some approval. From

these data we can conclude that a large number of U.S. college students find premarital sex to be acceptable in premarital relationships that have some affection and commitment. Furthermore, a substantial minority of subjects (especially men) find premarital sex to be acceptable in earlier relationship stages—before affection has developed.

As predicted, men were more permissive than women in the United States. Men had more permissive total scores than women for all three versions of the permissiveness scale: permissiveness for self ($t = 11.35, p < 0.001$), permissiveness for a male ($t = 9.12, p < 0.001$), and permissiveness for a female ($t = 6.73, p < 0.001$). The differences between men and women in sexual permissiveness were particularly large for early dating stages (e.g., first date). On the other hand, no significant gender differences were found regarding the acceptability of sex at the engaged stage.

We also examined whether either men or women in the U.S. endorsed the double standard. There was some evidence of the double standard among the men. Their total score on the sexual permissiveness scale for “a male” was significantly lower and hence more permissive than their total score on the scale for “a female” (paired $t = 5.96, p < 0.001$). Comparisons conducted at each relationship stage indicated that men’s endorsement of a double standard was strongest at the first date stage (paired $t = 9.56, p < 0.001$), but also existed at the casual dating stage (paired $t = 3.58, p < 0.001$) and the serious dating stage (paired $t = 2.98, p < 0.01$). However, men had the same standards for a woman as for a man at the preengaged and engaged stages.

On the other hand, U.S. women were egalitarian in their standards at all stages. There was no significant difference between how they responded to the male version of the sexual permissiveness scale and how they responded to the female version. Furthermore, women did not endorse a traditional double standard about sex at any of the specific relationship stages. In fact, a reverse double standard was found among women when they responded to the items asking about acceptability of sex at the engagement stage. Female respondents were slightly more permissive about sex at this advanced stage of courtship for a woman than for a man (paired $t = 2.82, p < 0.01$), although they were very accepting of sex for both men and women.

We also examined whether the U.S. respondents had different standards for the self (me) than they did for a hypothetical other. To do this, we compared subjects’ self standards with their standards for a hypothetical person of the same gender. Males were slightly more permissive for the self than they were for a hypothetical man (paired $t = 2.76, p < 0.01$). More specifically, men were more accepting of sexual intercourse for themselves than for a hypothetical person of the same gender for the stages: casual dating (paired $t = 3.69, p < 0.001$), preengaged (paired $t = 4.19$,

Table III. *F* Values from Culture \times Gender ANOVA for Sexual Permissiveness Scores for Self

	<i>F</i> value		
	Culture main effect ^a	Gender main effect ^b	Culture \times Gender interaction
Total permissiveness	23.25 ^d	58.42 ^d	9.71 ^d
Permissiveness for specific stages			
First date	10.70 ^d	288.82 ^d	6.15 ^c
Casual dating	3.24	183.09 ^d	5.08 ^c
Serious dating	24.40 ^d	0.14	5.88 ^c
Preengaged	27.63 ^d	0.19	6.81 ^d
Engaged	64.25 ^d	3.85	5.98 ^c

^aControlling for gender and age.^bControlling for culture and age.^c $p \leq 0.01$.^d $p \leq 0.001$.

$p < 0.001$), and engaged (paired $t = 2.51$, $p = 0.01$). On the other hand, the reverse was found for women. Women were more accepting of sexual intercourse for a hypothetical woman than they were for the self (paired $t = 6.78$, $p < 0.001$). Further analyses indicated that significant differences were found for two specific stages: first date (paired $t = 4.25$, $p < 0.001$) and casual dating (paired $t = 8.11$, $p < 0.001$).

Cross-Cultural Analyses

Above we reported that the U.S. sample was quite permissive overall, that U.S. men were more permissive than U.S. women, and that U.S. men considered sexual intercourse more acceptable for males than for females in early dating stages (i.e., men only endorsed a double standard). The second purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which the results for the U.S. sample were replicated in the Russian and Japanese samples.

To examine cultural differences, we conducted a 3 (Culture) \times 2 (Gender) ANOVA with the measures of sexual permissiveness and the double standard as the dependent variables. We conducted the regression version of ANOVA (Option 9 in SPSS-X), in which one factor is assessed with the other factor controlled. This approach was used because the ratio of males to females varied across the three societies. We also controlled for age, a demographic variable that has been found in some studies to be related to sexual permissiveness (e.g., DeLamater and MacCorquodale, 1979; Ferrell *et al.*, 1977). (The mean age was significantly different across the three samples and was significantly different between genders.) Because

of the large sample, significance was set to $p < 0.01$. When a significant effect for culture was found, follow-up Scheffé tests were conducted to see which pairs of samples differed.

Who Is More Sexually Permissive?

The results of the ANOVA with sexual permissiveness scores (for self) as the dependent variables can be found in Table III. We had hypothesized that the U.S. sample would be most sexually permissive and the Japanese sample would be least permissive. This hypothesis was supported. As indicated in the first column in Table III, the effect of culture was significant for the total permissiveness score (with self as the target). Respondents from the United States were most sexually permissive ($\bar{x} = 2.96$), followed by the respondents from Russia ($\bar{x} = 3.17$); whereas the Japanese respondents were least permissive ($\bar{x} = 3.34$). Although the mean for the U.S. sample was significantly different from the mean for the Japanese sample, the mean for the Russian sample was not significantly different from the mean for the other two samples. Thus, although the effect of culture was significant, all three samples scored, on the average, around the same point of the response scales; that is, the differences were significant but not large.

As can be seen in Table III, the effect of culture was significant for four of the five specific scale items. American subjects were more permissive than subjects from the other two countries about sex at the serious dating, preengaged, and engaged stages (but no significant differences were found between the Japanese and Russian subjects on these items).⁴ On the other hand, the significant effect of culture for the item asking about sex on a first date actually departed from the other effects. The Russian subjects were more permissive ($\bar{x} = 4.31$) than both the Japanese subjects ($\bar{x} = 4.88$) and the American subjects ($\bar{x} = 4.92$) about sex on a first date. No significant effect of culture was found for sexual permissiveness at the casual dating stage. Thus, cultural differences on sexual permissiveness (for self) are due primarily to differences on standards for more serious dating stages.

Do Men Have More Permissive Standards Than Women in All Three Societies?

We reported above that U.S. men were more sexually permissive than U.S. women. In the total cross-national sample, the effect of gender was

⁴The mean on these items for the American, Japanese, and Russian samples, respectively, were: Serious dating: 2.07, 2.55, 2.64; Preengaged: 1.97, 2.68, 2.42; and Engaged: 1.80, 2.44, 2.81.

Table IV. Means for Sexual Permissiveness (for Self) for Men Versus Women in the U.S., Russia, and Japan

	U.S.			Russia			Japan		
	Men	Women	<i>t</i>	Men	Women	<i>t</i>	Men	Women	<i>t</i>
Total permissiveness	2.39	3.29	-11.35 ^b	2.90	3.46	-5.16 ^b	3.25	3.42	-1.19
Permissiveness for specific stages									
First date	3.77	5.58	-16.92 ^b	3.44	5.22	-11.17 ^b	4.35	5.37	-5.42 ^b
Casual dating	2.94	4.69	-15.24 ^b	2.89	4.48	-9.39 ^b	3.72	4.58	-4.13 ^b
Serious dating	1.83	2.20	-3.69 ^b	2.73	2.54	0.98	2.75	2.41	1.90
Preengaged	1.74	2.10	-3.82 ^b	2.56	2.30	1.46	2.79	2.56	1.14
Engaged	1.67	1.87	-2.30	2.89	2.71	0.95	2.71	2.18	2.87 ^a

^a*p* ≤ 0.01.

^b*p* ≤ 0.001.

Table V. *F* Values from Culture \times Gender ANOVA for Double-Standard Scores

	<i>F</i> value		
	Culture main effect ^a	Gender main effect ^b	Culture \times Gender interaction
Total double standard	7.21 ^d	5.61	4.32 ^c
Double standard for specific stages			
First date	5.68 ^c	2.98	12.24 ^d
Casual dating	20.21 ^d	2.81	4.98 ^c
Serious dating	7.06 ^d	1.00	0.65
Preengaged	4.93 ^c	0.05	0.60
Engaged	0.13	2.92	0.39

^aControlling for gender and age.^bControlling for culture and age.^c $p \leq 0.01$.^d $p \leq 0.001$.

also significant for the total permissiveness score which has the self as the target (see second column in Table III). Men had more liberal sexual permissiveness scores ($\bar{x} = 2.67$) than did women ($\bar{x} = 3.34$).

The ANOVA conducted for each scale item reveals that the gender effect found for the total permissiveness score is due to a strong gender effect for the items asking about the acceptability of sex on a first date and during casual dating. In the total cross-national sample, men, relative to women, were much more sexually permissive about sex for self on a first date ($\bar{x} = 3.77$ vs. 5.48) and somewhat more sexually permissive about sex at the casual dating stage ($\bar{x} = 3.03$ vs. 4.64). However, no significant differences were found between men and women in sexual permissiveness at the serious dating stage ($\bar{x} = 2.23$ vs. 2.30), the preengaged stage ($\bar{x} = 2.13$ vs. 2.20), or the engaged stage ($\bar{x} = 2.18$ vs. 2.07).

The significant main effect for gender in the cross-national sample is qualified by a Gender \times Culture interaction, which was found for the total permissiveness score and for all five specific items (see third column in Table III). Hence, the degree to which men are more permissive than women does vary across the societies. The means for men vs. women within each of the three societies can be found in Table IV. There was a large difference between the U.S. men and the U.S. women on the total permissiveness score. The gender difference was moderate for the Russian sample, and there was actually no significant difference between Japanese men and Japanese women on the total permissiveness scale.

The ANOVA results for the individual items, however, show that in all three societies men were more permissive than women about sex on a first date and during the casual dating stage. For the U.S. sample only,

Table VI. Means for the Double-Standard Indices for Men Versus Women in the U.S., Japan, and Russia

	U.S.			Russia			Japan		
	Men	Women	<i>t</i>	Men	Women	<i>t</i>	Men	Women	<i>t</i>
Total permissiveness	-.18	.01	-5.63 ^a	-.26	-.16	-1.14	-.11	-.15	0.61
Permissiveness for specific stages									
First date	-.66	-.09	-7.64 ^a	-.61	-.58	-0.41	-.23	-.47	1.32
Casual dating	-.21	.06	-4.02 ^a	-.58	-.34	-1.67	.10	-.11	1.34
Serious dating	-.10	-.03	-1.68	-.27	-.18	-1.35	-.10	-.14	0.14
Preengaged	.06	.03	0.74	.20	.15	0.34	-.25	-.10	-1.12
Engaged	.01	.08	-1.45	-.02	.15	-0.29	-.05	.05	-0.41

^a*p* ≤ 0.001.

men were also more permissive than women about sex at the serious dating and preengaged stages. (In Japan, women were more permissive than men about sex at the engaged stage.)

Existence and Degree of Double Standard Across the Three Societies.

Above we reported that U.S. men held a double standard about sex at early dating stages but not about sex at later stages, and that the U.S. women were egalitarian in their standards for all stages. Next we compare results in Russia and Japan. Table V presents the F values from the ANOVAs conducted with the double standard indices as the dependent variables.

We examined which culture is more likely to endorse the double standard (ignoring gender of subject). As indicated in Table V, the effect of culture was significant for the total double-standard index. Subjects from Russia were significantly more likely to endorse a traditional double standard (\bar{x} diff = -0.21) than were subjects from the U.S. (\bar{x} diff = -0.06). The score for Japan was intermediate (\bar{x} diff = -0.13), but was not significantly different from the scores for either the United States or Russia.

The ANOVA results for the individual items show that the effect of culture is significant for all items except for acceptance of sex at engagement. The Russian sample's greater endorsement of the double standard was found for the first three relationship stages. At the preengaged stage, however, the Russians had a reverse double standard—granting more sexual freedom to women than to men. (Recall, however, that the Russian translation of this item may have created an item that would have made many Russians think of the engagement stage.)

Although we reported above that U.S. men endorsed the double standard to a greater degree than U.S. women, the effect of gender was not significant in the cross-national sample. We note, however, that there was a trend for the effect of gender to be significant ($p < 0.05$). Men had a higher double standard score (\bar{x} diff = -0.19) than did women (M diff = -0.04).

Furthermore, there was a significant Gender \times Culture interaction for the total double-standard index and for the double-standard indices for first date and casual dating (see Table V). As the means in Table VI indicate, only in the United States were there gender differences in the degree of endorsement of the double standard. In Japan and Russia, on the other hand, there were no differences between men and women in the degree to which the double standard was endorsed. For example, the largest gender difference is in standards for a first date within the U.S. sample. The U.S. men had the largest double-standard index (\bar{x} diff = -0.66), whereas the U.S. women scored near zero.

DISCUSSION

A large sample of young adults from the United States completed a premarital sexual permissiveness scale that assessed how accepting they were of sexual intercourse for five different premarital relationship stages (first date, casual dating, serious dating, preengaged, and engaged) for three different targets: the self, a male, and a female. We generated recent information on American college students' *sexual permissiveness* (defined as acceptance of sexual intercourse for the self) and degree of endorsement of the *double standard* (defined as the difference between acceptance of sexual intercourse for a man and acceptance of sexual intercourse for a woman). In addition, comparative data were collected from two other countries: Russia and Japan.

Sexual Permissiveness

Our data suggest that most young adults in the United States were somewhat permissive in regard to premarital sex. However, the degree of acceptance of premarital sex depended on relationship stage. Most men and women approved of sexual intercourse for couples who were seriously dating, preengaged, or engaged to be married. They were less accepting of sexual intercourse on a first date or at the casual dating stage. This finding is consistent with previous research (e.g., DeLamater and MacCorquodale, 1979; Sprecher, 1989; Sprecher *et al.*, 1988) and suggests that "permissiveness with affection" (Reiss, 1964) is the prominent standard today.

As hypothesized, American men were more permissive sexually than American women. Men were more likely to approve of premarital sex for themselves, for men in general, and for women in general, than were women. Gender differences were most pronounced when subjects were asked whether they approved of premarital sex on a first date or in a casual relationship. These gender differences are consistent with a number of other studies that have found men to be more accepting of premarital sex than are women especially for casual relationships (e.g., DeLamater and MacCorquodale, 1979; Hendrick *et al.*, 1985; Sprecher *et al.*, 1988; Sprecher, 1989; for a meta-analysis study, see Oliver and Hyde, 1993). Oliver and Hyde (1993) reviewed several theories that would all predict that men would be more accepting of premarital sex in casual relationships. These theories are neoanalytic theories, sociobiology, social learning theory, social role theory, and script theory.

The gender differences we found in acceptance of sex early in the relationship has implications for our understanding of male-female relation-

ships. These results suggest that American men and women may have difficulty negotiating with each other about which sexual activities are appropriate during the early dating stages. It is on a first date or early in the relationship when men might be inclined to assume that they are entitled to sex and that it should be acceptable for both of them. On the other hand, women may assume that such activities are inappropriate. Research has found that conflicts over sexual activity are common in beginning stages of dating relationships (Byers and Lewis, 1988). It has been speculated that such conflicts may lead to serious problems, such as date rape (Shotland, 1989). Once couples start to become more seriously involved, however, they are more likely to agree on what sorts of sexual activities are appropriate.

In our analysis of the U.S. data, we found that subjects invoked different standards when judging their own behavior than when judging that of others. Surprisingly, whether people are "tougher" on themselves than on others depended on gender. Men were more accepting of their own sexual liaisons than of those of men in general. More specifically, men were more accepting of sexual intercourse for themselves than for a hypothetical person of the same gender at the casual dating, preengaged, and engaged stages. Women were less accepting of their own sexual liaisons than of those of women in general. More specifically, women were less accepting of sexual intercourse for themselves than for a hypothetical person of the same gender at the first date and casual dating stages. Thus, these results suggest that only for men is there support for the "selfish" double standard identified by Robinson and Jedlicka (1982)—more restricted standards for the other than for the self. It may be that any group that holds restrictive attitudes (e.g., women, religious individuals) are more tolerant of sexual activity in others than in the self.

How does the sexual permissiveness of the young adults in the United States compare to those of young adults in Japan and Russia? We found support for our hypothesis that Americans would be more permissive than young adults from the other two countries, and that the Japanese sample would be the least permissive in their standards. However, how pronounced these cultural differences were depended on the stage of the relationship asked about. Respondents from all three countries believed that sexual activity is relatively inappropriate on a first or casual date. Cultural differences became evident when respondents were asked their attitudes about sex in more serious premarital relationships. Americans were more accepting of sex at the stages serious dating, preengagement, and engagement than were the Russians or Japanese. Thus, Americans seemed to be greater "relativists" than were the Russians or Japanese. Sexual standards in the United States seem to be powerfully influenced by how committed and close the relationships are. The Russians and Japanese attitudes are less

swayed by context. Possibly, for these groups the real dividing line is marriage.

Although subjects from the different cultures were found to differ significantly in their sexual standards, we must not exaggerate the magnitude of these differences. In the grand scheme of things, the attitudes of the young people in these modern, affluent, industrialized societies were more similar than different. To a greater or lesser extent, young men and women in these three countries seemed to endorse a sex with affection standard. We know from anthropological research that there is greater range of sexual permissiveness/restrictiveness in the larger world than was represented in this sample of only three countries.

We had expected to find men's greater sexual permissiveness relative to women to be almost universal. In the total cross-national sample, men were more permissive than women. Furthermore, in the U.S. and Russian samples, men had more permissive sexual standards than women. However, no gender difference in overall sexual permissiveness was found in Japan. These results suggest support for the argument that differences between men and women are smaller in a society with restrictive standards, such as Japan (see Perlman *et al.*, 1978; Reiss, 1967). However, these results should be interpreted with caution. In this study, the Japanese sample was relatively small ($n = 223$), the women were slightly older than the men, and the men and women were drawn primarily from different universities. Furthermore, even though there was not a significant gender difference for the total permissiveness scale, Japanese men were significantly more permissive than Japanese women about sex on a first date and during a casual dating relationship. Thus, we can conclude that men's greater acceptance of casual sexual intercourse, although certainly not universal, may be quite common, at least as evidenced by the findings from these three societies.

Different theoretical explanations have been offered for gender differences in sexual permissiveness (in casual relationships). Evolutionary psychologists, such as Buss and Schmitt (1993), argue that because men's and women's parental investments differ so markedly, they have been programmed to possess very different sexual standards, particularly in regard to short-term relationships. They have assembled some evidence in support of the contention that men are more likely to approve of casual sexual encounters and to actually engage in them than are women. Men have been found to be less traditional, less conforming, and more willing to engage in all sorts of risky sexual activities than are women (Hyde, 1993; Oliver and Hyde, 1993). Men have also been found to be more willing to engage in sexual activity at unusual times and places and to engage in more taboo kinds of activities than are women (Clark and Hatfield, 1989; Hatfield *et al.*, 1988). However, some sociobiologists have taken issue with such

theorizing. Hrdy (1981), for example, argued that in the course of evolution, both men and women were programmed to be intelligent, nurturant (in some situations), and desirous of sexual variety. Men and women, she argued, possess more similarities than differences in their genetic makeup. (For other sociobiological explanations of gender differences in permissiveness, see Fausto-Sterling, 1986.)

Most historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists, on the other hand, have looked not to ancient genetic codes but to differences in the ways men and women are socialized and to gender differences in physical and social power to explain existing gender differences in sexual attitudes and behavior. This approach has been variously called the "social argument," "principles of social factors," "social learning theory," the "structural powerlessness hypothesis," and the "socioeconomic explanation." These theorists, who we will call "social learning theorists," contend that people's attitudes and behaviors are profoundly influenced by cost-benefit considerations. In traditional male-dominated societies, they point out, men generally possessed far more physical power and/or social, educational, and economic opportunities than did women. Thus, it is probably not surprising that men also had more permissive sexual attitudes (especially concerning casual sex for themselves) than did women. Unlike the sociobiologists, however, social learning theorists would predict that as social conditions change (as, say, casual sex becomes safer and as birth control techniques become increasingly effective, as women's social and economic position improves) men and women should become increasingly similar in their attitudes toward casual sex. There is some evidence in support of social learning theorists' contentions. In different times and places, men's and women's sexual attitudes and behavior have varied markedly.

Evolutionary psychologists may be correct in thinking that existing gender differences may be genetically determined: To some extent, genetics may be destiny. However, men and women have always turned out to be more adaptable than people have supposed. Thus, in attempting to account for gender differences in permissiveness, we would tend to focus less on genetic endowment than on social conditions. We suspect that many of the gender differences that seem so natural today are about to be swept away by the winds of social change.

The Double Standard

At one time in American society, a traditional double standard existed (Reiss, 1964). Although most recent studies have found no evidence for a double standard (e.g., Sprecher, 1989; Sprecher *et al.*, 1988), this study

found American men endorsed a double standard when they were asked about their attitudes toward "recreational" sex. Men in the United States showed less bias when asked how appropriate it is for men and women to have sex in more serious dating relationships. All traces of the double standard disappeared when the men were asked about the acceptance of sexual intercourse in preengaged and engaged relationships. American women were far more egalitarian when asked about the appropriateness of sex in various kinds of liaisons. They did not believe in a traditional double standard at any relationship stage. The finding that men's endorsement of the double standard depended on the stage of the relationship may help explain why some researchers have declared the double standard dead, whereas others insist it is still alive and well. It may simply be that researchers who focus on very casual relationships still detect remnants of the double standard, whereas others, who focus on more serious relationships or who do not consider the context of the sexual activity, do not find evidence for it.

Next, we turn to the question: Were young people from three very different cultures—the United States, Russia, and Japan—equally accepting of the double standard? Recall that theorists have proposed two very different hypotheses concerning possible cultural differences in the double standard: (i) Some cross-cultural researchers have argued that the more power men have in a society (relative to women), the more likely a double standard is to exist (Shapurian and Hojat, 1985). If this hypothesis is true, we might expect that in America, where gender inequalities are relatively small, there should be the least acceptance of the double standard, and in Japan, where gender power differentials are somewhat greater, there should be the greatest endorsement of the double standard. (ii) On the other hand, researchers also point out that traditional societies are most likely to have a single abstinence standard (Reiss, 1967). According to this logic, the Japanese would endorse the double standard to a lesser extent than the Americans and the Russians. Unfortunately, the data fail to provide clear-cut support for either alternative. It was the Russians who were most likely to endorse a traditional double standard; the Japanese and the Americans (especially American women) were less likely to endorse such a standard. However, the degree to which there was a double standard in the different societies depended on the stage of the relationship. For example, when focusing on casual relationships, we see that Russians adhere to the double standard more than do the Americans or the Japanese.

Are men and women throughout the world equally accepting of the traditional double standard (which, after all, favors males)? We find that they are not. When we examined the Gender \times Culture interactions for the total permissiveness index, we found that in the United States, men

and women differ markedly in the extent to which they endorse the double standard. Overall, in America men still endorse a double standard, although only for early dating stages. American women no longer do; they advocate a single standard of behavior. In Japan and Russia, on the other hand, men and women were equally likely to endorse the traditional double standard. The largest gender difference, then, was found in the United States and in standards about what is appropriate for men vs. women on a first date.

CONCLUSIONS

We were interested primarily in exploring the current sexual attitudes of American college students from a variety of regions. (Our respondents comprised over 1000 U.S. college students from five universities or colleges, located in different regions of the country. The universities were of different sizes, and included public universities, a religious/private university, and a multiethnic university.) In the U.S. sample, most college students generally endorsed a “sex with commitment and affection” standard. Only a minority advocated “recreational sex.” Men were more tolerant of their own sexual behavior than that of other men; women were less permissive when judging their own behavior than when judging that of other women. Men tended to endorse a traditional double standard of sexual behavior for early relationship stages; women were no longer willing to accept this gender-biased standard.

A secondary aim was to compare U.S. sexual standards with those in other parts of the world—specifically, Russia and Japan. Researchers have collected surprisingly little cross-cultural data on sexual standards. As a consequence, our cross-cultural comparisons provide some intriguing results. It was evident that people’s sexual standards were influenced by culture, gender, and the stage of the relationship described. American students were the most tolerant of premarital sex; the Japanese were the least tolerant. In the United States and Russia, men were far more permissive than were women; in Japan, men and women did not differ in their sexual permissiveness. Nor was the double standard a cultural universal. In general, Russian students were most likely to endorse a double standard; American students were least likely to advocate such a dual standard. In the United States, there were significant gender differences in the extent to which people were willing to advocate a double standard (men were far more willing than were women to accept traditional double standard); in Russia and Japan, men and women were equally likely to accept or reject the double

standard. Of course, follow-up studies with larger (and possibly even national) samples from different countries are important to conduct.

Given our finding that culture seems to have an important impact on sexual standards, we suggest that subsequent researchers explore existing cross-cultural differences in greater depth. Traditionally, in the beginning stages of cross-cultural research on some topic, scientists have selected a potpourri of convenience samples and have set out to determine how similar/different these populations are. In the end, researchers are often left being able to do little more than point to the dazzling array of attitudes and behaviors that exist throughout the world. Subsequent researchers might aspire to something more. For example, researchers might begin to conduct longitudinal research on the sexual attitudes of a sampling of Western versus non-Western populations. This would enable us to determine whether non-Western societies are becoming increasingly sexually permissive over time. Furthermore, cross-cultural researchers might wish to adopt a less ethnocentric approach in the methods they use to study sexual standards cross-culturally. They would certainly want to collaborate with researchers from a variety of host countries. American social psychologists have been exploring sexual attitudes and behaviors for the past 30 years. The premarital sexual permissiveness scale used in this study and those used in previous cross-cultural research were developed by Western researchers. A truly cross-cultural collaboration would allow us to refine our theories, gain a greater depth of understanding of the meaning of sexual permissiveness in different societies, an understanding of how attitudes might be shaped by families, religious and civil authorities and peers, and develop pancultural measures of sexual attitudes.

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