

Some Correlates of Women's Childhood Sexual Experiences: A Retrospective Study

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Abstract

Relatively few empirical studies have addressed long-range effects of childhood sexual experiences. This study examined the relationships of various childhood sexual experiences to adult functioning in five areas: (a) family relations, (b) depression, (c) marital satisfaction, (d) sexual satisfaction, and (e) self-esteem. A retrospective survey was conducted with a sample of 501 predominantly middle-class women. No clinical or offender populations were used. Five standardized scales were used as dependent variables. On none of the five variables were the scores of women with childhood sexual experiences significantly different from those of women with no childhood sexual experiences. However, the interactions of negative experiences, such as the use of force and abusive behavior, with the type of partner, such as a parent or other relative, were significantly associated with adult functioning. Some of the findings challenge commonly held beliefs and have far-reaching implications for the helping professions and others who study human sexuality.

Researchers studying childhood sexual experiences have reported conflicting findings regarding the correlates of these experiences. Some report harmful consequences (De Francis, 1969; Fritz, Stoll, & Wagner, 1981; Justice & Justice, 1979; Kempe & Kempe, 1978; Landis, 1956; Lukianowicz, 1972; Sloane & Karpinski, 1942). Clinicians cite case after case where adult functioning, especially in regard to sexual adjustment, is moderately to severely impaired due to abusive sexual experiences during childhood. Other researchers state that it is society's reaction to the sexual experience that is harmful (De Francis; Giarretto, 1976; McKerrow, 1973; Miner, 1966; Schultz, 1973; Sgroi, 1978). Still others report few, if any, harmful consequences of childhood sexual activity (Bender & Grugett, 1952; Gagnon, 1965; Rasmussen, 1934; Schultz). There are also people who believe that

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childhood sexual experiences may be beneficial to the child. Calderone (1974) believes that self-initiated sexual self-exploration by children should not be punished by their caretakers; Reich (1971) advocates that children be permitted to sexually explore and gratify themselves; Wells (1978) states that children have the right to sexual pleasure. A few groups (e.g., the Rene Guyon Society and the Childhood Sensuality Circle) support the idea of adult-child sexual relations as beneficial to the child (Davila, undated; Farson, 1974; Thorstad, 1979; Yates, 1978).

However, in spite of the continuing debate in professional, lay, and legal circles over the consequences of childhood sexual experiences for functioning in adult life, few empirical studies have been done concerning the long-range correlates, let alone consequences.

A review of the existing literature reveals major problems in conducting such research. One problem is the confusion in the definition of such terms as *children*, *sexual experiences*, *incest*, *victimized*, and *sex offenses*: Different researchers use varying operational definitions. Another problem is the measure of the dependent or criterion variable used by researchers. There is often a vagueness of meaning and lack of specificity in terms like *character disorder*, *neurosis*, *damage*, *harm*, *poor social functioning*, *mental disturbance*, etc. Most studies have been descriptive, and the conclusions offered are impressionistic, anecdotal, or theoretical.

A third problem concerns sampling methods. A preponderance of studies have used clinical or offender populations, and it is difficult to generalize findings from these studies to other settings. Another sampling problem is that the majority of studies used only a small number of cases, making representativeness questionable. Notable exceptions are the studies conducted by De Francis (1969), Finkelhor (1979), Fritz et al. (1981), and Gagnon (1965). However, the De Francis study dealt with a clinical population. Gagnon, in his retrospective study of women could have been more specific about the measures used. For example, one measure of adult functioning was marital happiness, but no details are given describing how it was measured. Further, Gagnon considered difficulty in adult functioning to exist if the female had had three or more divorces, a history of institutionalization for crime or mental illness, or a history of prostitution. No attempt was made, however, to separate the relationship of other factors, such as demographic variables, from the relationship of childhood sexual experiences for adult functioning. Finkelhor and Fritz et al. both con-

ducted retrospective studies of college student populations. Although Finkelhor used well-defined terms and data on specific behaviors, he did not study long-term consequences. Fritz et al. studied long-term correlates but only in the area of sexual adjustment.

In this study I attempted to minimize these problems as much as possible by using clear definitions of terms, specific measures, a large number of cases, and nonclinical, nonoffender populations.

As in all retrospective studies that relate early experiences to a person's current functioning, it is not possible to trace the current condition in a direct causal line from the previous condition. However, I did explore the relationships of background variables to specific measures of adult functioning and then hold these relationships constant for other analyses. This was done in order to separate the relationships of childhood sexual experiences from the relationships of background variables for adult functioning.

The threats to the validity of recall data are recognized. There is the possibility of loss of memory or impression management, and there is no way to confirm the data with the reported partner.

The major purpose of the research reported here was to obtain more data on the types of sexual experiences women had as children and the relationship of these experiences to later adult functioning, and to provide useful information to clinicians presently working with clients who have a history of sex with others as children.

Previous researchers (De Francis, 1969; Finkelhor, 1979; Justice & Justice, 1979; Rallings & Nye, 1979) have indicated that the demographic characteristics of age, education, income, occupation, ethnicity, marital status, number of children, size of community in which subjects grew up, and whether both parents worked when respondents were children have implications for adult functioning. Therefore, information was gathered on these variables in order to explore their relationships with adult functioning further. Data on present age were requested in order to determine the trend in childhood sexual experiences over time. The specific areas of adult functioning studied were self-esteem, depression, marital and sexual satisfaction, and family relations. Researchers have consistently indicated these areas as problematic in cases of childhood sexual trauma (De Francis; Justice & Justice; Katan, 1973; Kempe & Kempe, 1978; Meiselman, 1979; Peters, 1973).

Research questions for this study related both to the description of childhood sexual experiences and to their correlation with adult func-

tioning. The following questions were asked: (a) What was the nature of the sexual experiences? (b) Is ethnicity a significant variable for childhood sexual experiences? (c) Is the percentage of women having childhood sexual experiences increasing? (d) What is the relationship of the nature of sexual experiences to demographic variables? and (e) What were the respondent's reactions to the experiences?

Under the category of correlates for adult functioning, the following questions were asked: (a) What is the correlation between the measures of adult functioning and demographic variables? (b) What are the correlations of sexual experiences with different types of partners (e.g., parents, other relatives, older nonrelatives) on adult functioning? and (c) What are the correlations of demographic characteristics, partner type, conditions of, and reactions to the experience with adult functioning?

Method

Sample

The respondents were 501 women from Georgia (53%) and Florida (47%), ranging in age from 18 to 61, with a median age of 25 ($M = 28$), the mode being 20 years. The sample contained 63% white women, 35% black women, and 2% other ethnic groups. Single women comprised 48%, and married women comprised 39% of the total sample. The remaining 13% consisted of divorced, widowed, or separated women. The majority (60%) had no children. Of those having children, the range was from one to seven children with 16% of the women having two children and 14% having only one child. The largest number (30%) grew up in communities consisting of 5,000 to 25,000 population with 21% growing up in smaller communities, 20% in 25,000–100,000 population communities, and the remainder in larger communities. Half of the women (50%) were graduate or undergraduate students. The primary occupational category was professional (31%). Other categories were clerical (6%), service (6%), homemaker (3%), sales (1%), and production (1%). Nearly half of the respondents (49%) reported that both parents worked when the respondents were children. The years of schooling ranged from 3 to 24, with a median of 15 years ($M = 15$), and the mode being 16 years. Income ranged from 0 (for some students) to \$10,000 per month, with a median income of \$1,200 ($M = \1400). Although elderly women and women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were included in the study, these two groups

were under-represented in the sample, compared to the total U.S. population.

To increase heterogeneity the deliberate sampling model was used (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The sample included students in institutions of higher learning (52% of which were primarily in an occupation but were sampled in a classroom setting), women in vocational-technical classes (15%), public school teachers (16%), church groups (5%), community groups (7%), and professional groups (5%).

Measures

The survey questionnaire package requested three different types of information.

Demographic information. This section requested information regarding age, education, income, marital status, ethnicity, number of children, type of present occupation, size of community in which respondents lived before age 14, and whether both parents worked when respondents were children.

Measures of adult functioning (the Hudson Scales). The second type of information requested concerned present adult functioning. Five standardized scales were used as dependent variables to measure the correlates of childhood sexual experiences for present adult functioning (Hudson, 1982). The five scales were the (a) Index of Self-Esteem (ISE), which measures self-esteem problems; (b) Generalized Contentment Scale (GCS), which measures depression; (c) Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS), which measures marital discord; (d) Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS), which measures sexual discord; and (e) Index of Family Relations (IFR), which measures intrafamilial stress. These scales are part of a larger "Clinical Measurement Package" (Hudson), and each has been found to be reliable and valid. Hudson reported that each scale has a coefficient alpha reliability of .90 or better. In order to check these assertions, the reliability for each of the five scales was examined by using the data obtained in this study. Coefficient alpha was computed and found to be .90 for ISE, .96 for IMS, .90 for GSC, .93 for ISS, and .93 for IFR scales. These findings were consistent with Hudson's and confirm the reliability of the measures. Methods used to establish validity for the scales are described by Hudson (1982). For further data and a description of procedures used in establishing reliability and validity of the scales, see Hudson.

Hudson describes each scale as having a clinical cutting score of 30. In other words, if a person scores above 30 on any of the scales, the

person probably has a clinically significant problem in the area being measured whereas persons who score below 30 are generally found to be free of such problems.

Sexual experiences. The third type of requested information concerned the respondents' sexual experiences from birth through age 17. Because sexual experiences from ages 15-17 are rather normative in our culture, the data on ages from birth through 14 have been analyzed and are reported here. Data for ages 15-17 will be reported in a later publication. This section of the questionnaire package was specifically designed for this study and was the most complex. Information was requested for 13 different sexual behaviors ranging from kissing and hugging in a sexual way to intercourse. Some of the wording of questions in this section was adapted from Finkelhor's (1979) questionnaire. Utilizing some of his items in regard to sexual behaviors allows for comparisons of results between the two studies. Because so few women reported experiencing the behaviors of touching another person's breasts, performing anal sex, having anal sex performed on them, or unsuccessfully attempting intercourse, these behaviors were not included in this analysis. Therefore, only nine behaviors were analyzed and reported here. There were 14 questions asked about each of these behaviors. These 14 questions concerned who initiated the behavior, the age discrepancy between the partner and the person, the frequency of each behavior with each type of partner, the short-term reaction to the experience (three questions), whether the experience was voluntary/forced (two questions), with whom and how often the experience had been discussed, who had been helpful in dealing with the experience, the long-range impact on the person's view of sex and their life in general, how the individual wished the incident had been handled if it was perceived as abusive or harmful, and whether others knew of the behavior and, if so, should have done something about it. Each question asked for each experience, reaction, or behavior during six different age spans: 0-6, 7-10, 11-14, 15, 16, 17. In this paper the results from ages 0-14 are reported. No reliability studies have been done on this part of the questionnaire package.¹

Procedure

I made personal contact with groups to collect the data during the summer of 1981. This procedure was used because the return rate is higher than for mail surveys. It also allowed for clarification of in-

¹The questionnaire package is available upon request from the author.

structions and ensured the anonymity of the participants. Data were collected from 40 different groups ranging in size from 3 to 38 participants. Student groups from four state institutions of higher learning in north Florida and middle and north Georgia completed the questionnaire package. One institution was a large university in a metropolitan area, one was a large university in a small town, a third was a smaller college in an urban area with a predominantly black population, and the fourth was a small college with graduate programs which was located in a small town in a rural area. Classes in which the questionnaire package was administered included statistics, research, anthropology, child development, social work, home and family life, sociology, home economics, psychology, women's studies, criminology, teacher education, and nursing. Courses ranged from introductory and upper-level courses to graduate courses at the doctoral level. Various community groups such as newcomers groups and Parents Without Partners, church groups, professional groups, public school teachers, and women in vocational-technical classes were surveyed. All groups used were contacted in advance, informed of the nature of the study, and requested to participate. Some groups, such as senior citizens, did not want to give up their activity time to participate, and some church leaders would not consent for its members to participate because of the sexual content of the study.

The procedure used with each was (a) presentation of the research project, including the personal and sensitive nature of the study, and the precautions that were being taken to assure confidentiality and anonymity (care was taken to be sure that neither individual nor particular group responses would be recognizable); (b) discussion of the contents of the study; (c) request for volunteers and signing of informed consent forms; (d) emphasis on voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity; and (e) completion of the questionnaire with instructions given for each section. Extreme care was taken in both the printed booklet and in the verbal instructions to avoid communicating any bias or value judgments in regard to any type of sexual experience or no sexual experience. Very few women refused to participate. Most participants completed the questionnaire package in about 45 minutes. In some university classes, not enough time was allowed for the completion of the questionnaires, and the women took them home to complete. Thirty-one (6%) of the questionnaires were not returned. Four women (0.7%) started the questionnaire but did not complete it, and three women (0.5%) returned completely blank ques-

tionnaires. Thus, a total of 38 questionnaires (7%) were lost or were not completed.

Results

Childhood Sexual Experiences

Of the 501 women, 55% reported one or more sexual experiences during childhood. These experiences are summarized by type of partner in Table 1. The sexual behaviors most often reported were kissing and hugging in a sexual way and exhibition. Only 2% of the women reported experiencing intercourse at age 14 or younger. Sexual experiences were most often with unrelated male partners.

One of every four women (24%) had sexual experiences with relatives. However, only 0.6% of the sample had incestuous experiences, using Webster's (1978) definition of incest as sexual intercourse between persons too closely related to marry legally. The most frequent partners were male relative outside the immediate family, brother, female relative, and father, in that order. Again, kissing and hugging in a sexual way and exhibition were the behaviors most often reported.

Initiation of sexual experiences one or more times was reported by 23% of the total sample; 30% reported that both they and their partner had mutually initiated the experiences one or more times, and 42% reported that the experiences had been initiated by their partner one or more times. Some women answered in more than one of these categories.

Sexual experiences were reported by 67% of the white sample, but by only 36% of the black sample, as shown in Table 2. Significantly more whites than blacks had experienced the sexual behaviors of kissing and hugging, partner showing you genitals, you masturbating partner, you performing oral sex on partner, and intercourse. An analysis was also conducted on the ethnicity of respondent by partner. Significantly more white women had sexual experiences with step-father, husband of nonrelative, father, brother, female relative, unrelated male, and unrelated female. An analysis of ethnicity by partners at least 5 years older than the respondent revealed that white women had the higher percentage of experiences with older partners.² Care must be taken in interpreting some of these results, however, because of the small number of women in some categories.

²The details of this analysis are available from the author.

Table 1
Proportion of Women Reporting Type of Sexual Behavior, by Partner

Partner	Types of Sexual Behavior ^a						
	Sexual kiss & hug	Show you genitals	You show genitals	Partner felt breasts	You masturbated	You are masturbated	No. of women
	(n = 43)	(n = 81)	(n = 52)	(n = 18)	(n = 10)	(n = 11)	N
<i>Had experiences with relatives</i>							278 ^b 55
Father	8.6%	16.2%	10.4%	3.6%	1.9%	2.2%	120 24
Stepfather	1.8	1.2	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.2	16 3.2
Mother	0.6	0.2	—	0.4	0.4	—	5 1.0
Stepmother	0.4	0.2	0.2	—	—	—	4 0.8
Sister	0.2	—	—	—	—	—	1 0.2
Brother	1.2	1.6	2.0	0.4	—	—	15 2.9
Male relative	4.9	5.6	4.2	0.8	0.4	0.8	40 7.9
Female relative	1.6	7.4	3.6	1.0	0.4	0.4	60 11.9
		3.8	2.0	1.2	0.6	0.4	34 6.8
<i>With</i>	(n = 141)	(n = 102)	(n = 75)	(n = 52)	(n = 16)	(n = 22)	(n = 6)
<i>nonrelative</i>	28.1	20.4	15.0	10.4	3.2	4.4	1.2
Unrelated male	25.4	16.4	10.6	7.2	2.4	3.2	1.2
Unrelated female	4.4	5.8	6.9	3.6	1.2	1.4	—
Husband	0.4	0.2	0.2	—	—	—	—
Stranger	1.2	1.2	0.2	0.6	—	—	—
% of all women ^b	37.1	35.1	22.9	15.2	4.9	1.8	1.8
							No experiences
							223 45

^aOral sexual behaviors were omitted from this table because there was only one report of oral sex by subject (on brother) and only two reports of oral sex on subject (by brother and unrelated male).

^bTwenty-three women with experiences did not give partner. There were 75 women who had sexual experiences with both relatives and nonrelatives. Because some women had multiple experiences, the numbers inside the various categories do not add up to the total category number.

Table 2

Percentage of Women Who Reported Sexual Behavior by Ethnicity

Behavior	Ethnicity of Respondent		Total Women (N = 498)	χ^2
	White (n = 316) %	Black ^a (n = 182) %		
Had Experiences	67	36	55	43.84*
Kiss & hug	53	24	43	38.52*
Show you genitals	58	19	44	71.78*
You show genitals	44	8	31	65.50*
Felt breasts	22	4	16	26.24*
You masturbated	9	—	6	—
You are masturbated	10	—	7	—
Oral sex by you	2	—	1	—
Oral sex on you	—	—	0	—
Intercourse	4	—	2	—
No Experiences	33	64	45	—
Total Sample	100	100	100	498

^aEight nonwhite respondents were included in the black sample for purposes of analysis.

^bTwo women with experience did not report ethnicity.

^cAn additional woman with no experience did not report ethnicity.

* $p < .01$. ($df = 1$, $N = 498$ for each)

Analysis by different age groups in the sample revealed a trend toward *decreasing* childhood sexual activity for the sample as a whole over the past 60 years. There is an inverse relationship between the birth years of the women and the percentage of women having childhood sexual experiences, with the percentage of women with experiences *decreasing* as the year of birth increases from 1915 to 1964. These percentages by birth years are: 1915-1929 = 74%; 1930-1939 = 63%; 1940-1944 = 72%; 1945-1949 = 70%; 1950-1954 = 58%; 1955-1959 = 55%; 1960-1964 = 46%. Several five-year intervals were combined because of the small number in that age group. The chi-square statistic for birth year and sexual experiences was $\chi^2 (6, N = 500) = 17.48$, $p < .01$. A caveat must be given in looking at this trend, however, because of the relatively small number of older women who participated in this study. Significant ($p < .05$) Pearson correlations were found with age and use of force ($r = .10$), shock reaction ($r = .08$), seeing the experience as harmful ($r = .13$), feelings of extreme guilt ($r = .09$), and use of physical force ($r = .10$).

The number of women reporting sexual experiences was analyzed by size of community. Fifty-five percent of women from farms had sexual experiences, 37% from rural nonfarm areas up to 5,000 population,

55% from 5,000 to 25,000 population, 63% from 25,000 to 100,000 population, 45% from 100,000 to 5,000,000 population, and 53% from larger areas, $\chi^2 (5, N = 473) = 11.3, p < .05$. The largest proportion of women who had sexual experiences with relatives (34%) grew up on farms. The largest proportions of those with father-daughter (4.3%) and stepfather-stepdaughter (2.1%) sexual experiences also came from farm backgrounds.

Respondents comprised seven types of groups: vocational training classes, undergraduate students, graduate students, school teachers, church groups, community groups, and professional groups. Professional groups (73%) and church groups (70%) reported the highest percentages of experiences with community groups (66%), graduate students (60%), vocational training classes (55%), undergraduate students (41%), and public school teachers (40%) following, $\chi^2 (6, N = 501) = 23.99, p < .01$.

The data concerning reactions to the sexual experiences are summarized in Table 3: 38% found the experience to be pleasant; 37% found it to be neither pleasant nor unpleasant; and 25% found it unpleasant. Participation was 67% voluntary and 33% forced. There were 68% of the women who had positive responses, and the most typical reaction to the sexual experience was interest. About as many women reported feeling not guilty at all as reported feeling extremely guilty, with 54% having less guilty rather than more guilty reactions. The type of pressure most often exerted was subtle pressure with 77% of the women reporting little pressure rather than much pressure on the scale used.

Correlates for Adult Functioning

Pearson product-moment correlations of the five Hudson scale scores with continuous background variables were done. Although 10 correlations were statistically significant, the relationships could only be regarded as trivial (Squared Multiple Correlation = $< .06$).³

In analyses of variance, the amount of variance explained by the type of sexual partner that women had as children (with relative, nonrelative, older partner, or no partner) were not statistically significant for any of the five measures of adult functioning. This finding suggests that whether the partner was related, unrelated, or older, by the time the girl reached adulthood, she was generally functioning in the normal range.

³The correlational analyses are available from the author.

Table 3
Frequency and Proportion of Reactions of Women to Types of Sexual Behaviors

Reactions	Types of Sexual Behavior								Intercourse %	Oral sex on you %	Oral sex by you %	Totals N	%
	Kiss & hug %	Show you genitals %	You show genitals %	Felt breasts %	You masturbated %	You are masturbated %	Oral sex by you %	Oral sex on you %					
Pleasure	11	19	8	8	17	11	25	—	27	—	27	103	13
Very unpleasant	11	14	10	10	24	17	13	—	27	—	27	102	12
Unpleasant	22	41	44	57	25	23	25	67	33	67	302	37	27
Neither	35	23	33	17	31	23	25	33	13	33	226	27	27
Pleasant	21	3	5	8	7	26	12	—	—	—	—	93	11
Very pleasant	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	826	100	100
Total	69	61	80	58	67	66	43	50	58	50	402	67	67
Participation	31	39	20	42	33	34	57	50	42	50	202	33	33
Voluntary	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	604	100	100
Forced	6	8	5	15	9	4	13	—	15	—	65	7	7
Response	11	14	9	14	16	19	37	—	31	—	114	13	13
Anger	10	16	7	15	12	13	12	—	15	—	103	12	12
Fear	19	14	14	16	17	20	—	—	8	—	149	17	17
Shock	33	39	50	26	41	24	25	67	31	67	316	37	37
Surprise	21	5	15	13	6	20	13	33	—	33	118	14	14
Interest	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	865	100	100
Enthusiasm	19	24	24	34	42	32	57	50	40	50	174	26	26
Total	17	20	21	23	21	23	29	—	27	—	137	20	20
Guilt	28	27	27	16	16	22	—	—	20	—	170	25	25
Extremely guilty	36	29	28	27	21	23	14	50	13	50	201	29	29
Moderately guilty	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	682	100	100
A little guilty	61	62	73	56	74	82	33	—	38	—	179	63	63
Not guilty	13	16	12	14	10	6	50	100	12	100	41	14	14
Pressure	26	22	15	22	16	17	17	—	50	—	62	22	22
Subtle pressure	—	—	—	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	1	1
Verbal threats	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	285	100	100
Physical force	61	62	73	56	74	82	33	—	38	—	179	63	63
Use of a weapon	13	16	12	14	10	6	50	100	12	100	41	14	14
Total	26	22	15	22	16	17	17	—	50	—	62	22	22
	—	—	—	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	1	1
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	285	100	100

Note. The total number of reactions may exceed the number of women having sexual experience (278) because some women had reactions to more than one type of experience. Numbers represent women, not experiences.

The Regression Model

To make these analyses more meaningful, data were weighted to reflect the degree of involvement in the sexual behavior. The sexual behaviors studied represent different degrees of intensity of sexual involvement. Six experts in the field of sexual behavior rated the nine behaviors on a scale from 1 to 10 according to the degree of sexual involvement, with a rating of 10 meaning the most intense involvement. The mean weights for each behavior were: kissing and hugging = 2; you see genitals = 3; you show genitals = 3; breasts fondled = 4; you masturbate other = 6; you are masturbated = 6; oral sex by you = 8; oral sex on you = 8; intercourse = 10. These weights were used to scale the respondents' responses in relation to the behaviors in which they engaged.

New variables were also created for these analyses. Respondents were asked how much pleasure, guilt, and pressure were involved in their participation. Responses to these questions were on a continuum; for example, the continuum for pleasure was *very unpleasant*, *unpleasant*, *neither pleasant nor unpleasant*, *pleasant*, and *very pleasant*. To analyze these responses, new variables of pleasure, guilt, and pressure were created by thus ranking and weighting the reactions from 1 to 4 or 5, with 5 meaning *more pleasant*, *less guilty*, and *more pressure*. To get a total pleasure score for each respondent for all the behaviors, the new pleasure variable was also weighted according to the expert ratings for each behavior and totaled.

Data on variables obtained from the survey were organized in sets for the analyses and entered hierarchically into the regression equation. Five separate analyses were done, one for each measure of adult functioning. The first set was composed of all the socioeconomic, family, and other background variables. The second set consisted of weighted sexual activity scores with the various partners of (a) non-relative, (b) relatives other than parents, (c) parents, and (d) both relatives and nonrelatives. The four variables in the second set were entered hierarchically as four separate sets in the order given above. The variables were entered in the order given to find out how much of the scale score variance was accounted for by each variable over and above that accounted for by the variables entered previously. For example, sexual activity with parents would account for only that variance over and above any other sexual activity with nonrelatives and with relatives other than parents.

The third set of variables represented conditions that existed at the

time sexual activity took place. These variables represent the amount of pressure, voluntary participation, forced participation, and the presence of older partner (all weighted according to the ratings by experts). These variables were all entered as one set or block. The fourth set of variables represented the reactions to the sexual activity in terms of pleasure, guilt, harm, and abuse (all weighted). These variables were also entered as a single set. The fifth and final set consisted of the interactions between the sexual activity with various partner variables and the conditions and reactions variables, all entered as a single set.

The socioeconomic, family, and other background variables were entered first for each of the five analyses in order to eliminate those effects and therefore control for them. In this manner, some conclusions could be drawn about the effects of sexual activity, entered later, under the conditions that differences in socioeconomic, family, and background variables have been controlled for. Therefore, any effects associated with sexual activity could not be spuriously attributed to differences in socioeconomic, family, and background variables. The sexual activity with different partner variables were entered second in the analyses to find out how much of the scale score variance was accounted for by sexual activity over and above that accounted for by the demographic variables. The condition variables that existed at the time of the sexual activity, of necessity, had to follow the sexual activity set and was the third set entered into the analyses. The reaction variables logically followed the sexual activity and conditions sets as the fourth set entered. The last set entered into the analyses was, of course, the interactions of the sexual activity with various partners, with the conditions and the reactions.

The results of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses for the measures of adult functioning and sets of variables are given in Table 4. The multiple regression analysis for the Index of Family Relations was significant for all five sets of variables $p < .01$: Each set added significantly to the total variance accounted for by the model. The background variables explained 14.2% of the variance. The remaining sets (sexual partners, conditions, reactions, and interactions) accounted for an additional 9.5% of the variance when the background variables were held constant. The set with the highest squared multiple correlation (SMC or R^2 in Table 4) change (after the 14.2% SMC change by the background variables) was interactions with 6.4% SMC change. The remaining sets each had less than 2% SMC change.

Table 4

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for Scales and Sets of Variables

Scales and Sets	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Change ^a	<i>p</i> <
<i>Index of Family Relations (n = 485)</i>				
Background variables	.377	.142	.142	.001
Sexual partners	.401	.161	.019	.0005
Conditions	.408	.167	.006	.0005
Reactions	.416	.173	.006	.001
Interactions	.487	.237	.064	.0005
<i>Generalized Contentment Scale (n = 496)</i>				
Background variables	.372	.138	.138	.001
Sexual partners	.383	.146	.008	.001
Conditions	.386	.149	.003	.003
Reactions	.394	.156	.007	.004
Interactions	.479	.229	.073	.001
<i>Index of Marital Satisfaction (n = 259)</i>				
Background variables	.455	.207	.207	.028
Sexual partners	.461	.212	.005	.045
Conditions	.477	.228	.016	.062
Reactions	.494	.244	.016	.065
Interactions	.607	.368	.124	.019
<i>Index of Self-Esteem (n = 496)</i>				
Background variables	.321	.103	.103	.055
Sexual partners	.329	.108	.005	.068
Conditions	.333	.111	.003	.138
Reactions	.338	.114	.003	.209
Interactions	.442	.195	.081	.023
<i>Index of Sexual Satisfaction (n = 382)</i>				
Background variables	.303	.092	.092	.577
Sexual partners	.304	.092	.001	.684
Conditions	.311	.097	.005	.815
Reactions	.350	.122	.025	.587
Interactions	.443	.196	.074	.424

^aThis column reports the significance of each set, not just the model up to that point.

For the Generalized Contentment Scale, all five sets of variables were again significant, $p < .01$. The set of background variables again accounted for more variance (13.8%) than any set following it in the analysis. When the background variables were held constant, the other sets had a total of 9.1% SMC change. The set with the next highest amount of SMC change, after background variables, was again interactions with 7.3%. The remaining sets had less than 0.8% SMC change each.

The analysis for the Index of Marital Satisfaction was significant for the sets of background variables, sexual partners, and interactions, $p < .05$. The SMC change was 20.7% for the background variable set

and 16.1% for all the other sets combined. The interactions set had a SMC change of 12.4%, and sexual partners had a SMC change of 0.5%.

For the Index of Self-Esteem, the analysis was significant ($p < .05$) for only the set of interactions. This set accounted for 8.1% of the variance after the set of background variables had accounted for 10.3% and the other sets had each accounted for 0.5% or less of the variance (for a total of 9.2% for all sets following the background variables set). The analysis of the final measure of adult functioning, the Index of Sexual Satisfaction, was not significant for any of the sets. However, only women who currently had a sexual partner (383 women or 75%) completed this scale.

When the focus is on the specific sets across the five analyses, Table 4 shows that the individual sets explained a varying amount of variance for the different measures of adult functioning. These varying amounts are as follows. The background variables accounted for from 9% of the variance (the Index of Sexual Satisfaction scale) to 21% of the variance (the Index of Marital Satisfaction scale). The background variables set consisted of socioeconomic, family, and other demographic variables. When the effects of background variables were controlled, sexual partners accounted for less than 2% of the variance for any of the scale scores. When the effects of both the background variables and sexual partners sets were controlled for, conditions accounted for 2% or less of the variance for all scale scores also. Then, when the effects of all three of the previous sets were controlled, reactions accounted for 3% or less of the variance for all scale scores. With the effects of all four previous sets controlled, the interactions accounted for from 6% (Index of Family Relations scale) to 12% (for the Index of Marital Satisfaction scale) of the variance for all scale scores over and above any additive combination of their separate effects. In other words, there was a joint effect. The relationship of adult functioning to sexual activity with various partners is associated with the conditions of and reactions to the experiences. These analyses show that sexual activity with various partners *interacting with* the conditions of and reactions to the sexual experience explained more variance for all the measures of adult functioning than sexual partners, conditions, and reactions alone explained. The sets of conditions and reactions have identical amounts of SMC change over and above that of the previous sets for the Index of Family Relations scale (.006), the Index of Marital Satisfaction scale (.016), and the Index of Self-Esteem scale (.003).

The specific variables in each set which were significant for a particular measure of adult functioning are given in Table 5. For the Index of Family Relations scale, the amount of income and being married were the only significant background variables. Being married was also a significant variable in the analyses for the Generalized Contentment scale and Index of Marital Satisfaction scale. The variables of sexual activity with nonrelatives (in the analysis of the Index of Family Relations scale) and other relatives (in the analysis of the Generalized Contentment scale) were both significant for only the one analysis. The only reaction that reached significance in the analysis of the Index of Sexual Satisfaction scale was pleasure. The remaining significant variables were interactions. The single variable that explained the most variance (amount of SMC change) was the interaction of parents as sexual partners with the reactions of pleasure for the Index of Sexual Satisfaction scale which was 6.7% (although the total regression analysis for the ISS scale was not significant). The second largest amount of explained variance was by the background variable of ethnicity for the Index of Marital Satisfaction scale (3.2%); the third largest was by the background variable of income for the Index of Family Relations scale (2.5%); and the fourth largest amounts were by the background variables of community size for the Index of Self-Esteem scale (2.5%) and the occupation of production for the Generalized Contentment scale (2.5%).

The interaction variables of sexual partner with either conditions or reactions variables which had negative connotations were significant in all five analyses. The condition variables with negative connotations were "pressure" and "forced." The reactions variables with negative connotations were "harmful," "abusive," and "guilt." The interaction variables of sexual partner with conditions or reactions which had positive connotations were significant only for the analyses for the Index of Family Relations and the Index of Sexual Satisfaction. This condition variable was "voluntary," and the reaction variable was "pleasure." However, the largest amount of explained variance for any of these specific interaction variables was less than 7%.

Discussion

This study of a primarily middle-class, nonclinical, and nonoffender sample balances the seminal work by De Francis (1969), who studied a lower socioeconomic class, multiproblem, clinical, and offender sample. This study also corroborates in some ways (and challenges in

Table 5

Multiple Regression Analyses for Scales and Sets of Variables: Significant Variables Within Sets

Scales, sets and variables	F to Enter	p	R ² Change
<i>Index of Family Relations</i>			
Background variables			
Income	11.009	.001	.028
Married	6.379	.012	.013
Sexual partners			
Nonrelative	6.738	.010	.013
Interactions			
Other relative x pleasure	5.712	.017	.0005
Nonrelative x harmful	3.902	.049	.003
Other relative x voluntary	7.150	.008	.006
Other relative x abusive	8.735	.003	.010
Nonrelative x voluntary	4.337	.038	.011
<i>Generalized Contentment Scale</i>			
Background variables			
Production occupation	10.212	.001	.025
Community size	12.769	.0005	.020
Ethnicity	5.287	.022	.011
Number times married	11.276	.001	.009
Married	4.778	.029	.009
Sexual partners			
Other relative	3.881	.049	.007
Interactions			
Parents x pressure	5.471	.020	.0005
Parents x abusive	8.483	.004	.015
<i>Index of Marital Satisfaction</i>			
Background variables			
Agricultural occupation, spouse	8.667	.004	.020
Ethnicity	8.273	.004	.032
Married	8.655	.004	.031
Interactions			
Nonrelative x harmful	9.938	.002	.016
Parents x forced	4.080	.045	.013
<i>Index of Self-Esteem</i>			
Background variables			
Production occupation	4.828	.029	.013
Community size	10.709	.001	.025
Interactions			
Nonrelative x harmful	5.081	.025	.005
Other relative x abusive	4.585	.033	.010
Nonrelative x forced	4.724	.030	.009
Parents x abusive	5.102	.024	.010
<i>Index of Sexual Satisfaction</i>			
Reactions			
Pleasure	4.011	.046	.016
Interactions			
Parents x guilt	4.718	.031	.0005
Parents x pleasure	4.333	.038	.067

others) the study of middle-class women by Gagnon (1965) and the study of undergraduates by Fritz et al. (1981) and Finkelhor (1979), in that it combines the two populations in one study. A difference, however, is the inclusion of graduate students (16% of the sample). The study of the sexual experiences of this group has not been reported in previous major works.

The incidence rates of childhood sexual experiences (55% of the total sample) and sexual experiences with relatives (24% of the total sample) found in this study were comparable to those found by Finkelhor (1979) which were 66% and 28%, respectively. Incest, as defined by Webster's (1978), had only a 0.6% incidence rate, however. The types of behaviors most often reported in the present study were kissing and hugging in a sexual way and exhibition with both relatives and nonrelatives. This finding differed from De Francis' (1969) finding that rape occurred in more of the cases (40%). The disparity in these findings could be due to the differences in middle- and lower-class experiences, but De Francis' findings may also reflect both clinical and offender population characteristics.

The findings of this study are consistent with De Francis' (1969) findings that adult functioning is related to both childhood sexual experiences and background or demographic characteristics. The analyses done in this study isolated specific background variables that were found to be significant for some area of adult functioning.⁴ However, when the effects of these background variables were controlled, the contributions of other variables concerning childhood sexual experiences and their effects on adult functioning, over and above that accounted for by background variables, are seen. These findings are considered to be the most important of the study and have far-reaching implications. A striking finding was that adult functioning scores of women *with* childhood sexual experiences were not significantly different from those of women *with no* childhood sexual experiences when analyzed across samples experiencing forced versus non-forced, etc. interactions. However, sexual experiences that were abusive, forced, guilt-producing, harmful or pressured, interacting with the partner type, *were* significant for all measures of adult functioning except for the sexual satisfaction scale. That is, the joint effect

⁴Notably missing from the significant background variables was the variable of parents working when the women were children. Contrary to traditional views, whether or not both parents worked when children were 12 years of age and younger was inconsequential for adult functioning.

of abusive, harmful experiences with children involving sexual behaviors that were forced, pressured or guilt-producing, plus type of partner, had more correlation with adult functioning than the identity of the partner alone, and are related to intrafamilial stress, depression, marital discord, and self-esteem problems. This study found that the relationship of childhood sexual experiences with adult sexual satisfaction was not found to be statistically significant for women who had a current sexual partner. Women who did not have a current sexual partner did not complete this measure of adult functioning.

A finding of no small import is that "incest" in middle-class families does *not* reach the alarming proportions that are currently reported (Phillips, 1981). It seems that rather than the incidence rate of "incest" increasing, it is the definition of "incest" that has expanded.

Two findings challenge commonly held beliefs. One finding is that significantly *more white women* had childhood sexual experiences than black women. The other is that there is a definite trend toward *decreasing* childhood sexual activity as a whole over the past 60 years. Further research in both these areas with different populations is suggested.

Under no circumstances should the above findings be interpreted as saying that childhood sexual experiences are not important or that offenders of societal norms should not be prosecuted. Overreaction to these events by assuming that harm has been done to the child should, however, be tempered.⁵

Also, under no circumstances should the above findings be used as a sanction for child-adult sexual relationships. These relationships are violations of principles of informal consent. Unequal power relationships are also involved. Sexual relationships with children under these circumstances constitute psychological if not physical coercion and should be treated as such.

These analyses raise the issue of statistical significance versus substantive significance. Although many of the sets in the five analyses were statistically significant, the largest SMC change (20.7%) can only be described as small when the researcher's goal is to explain 100% of the variance. Thus, a caveat is given to those who would look at

⁵An excellent example of this point is provided by de Young's (1982) research and inappropriate conclusions. Although de Young asserts that her study demonstrates a causal relationship, she does not adhere to accepted rules of evidence in interpreting her observations. (See the review of this book by Elizabeth Rice Allgeier in *The Journal of Sex Research*, 1983, 19, 397-400.)

statistical significance only. It can be said, however, that a foundation has been laid by these analyses upon which future research can build. Perhaps the specific variables that were significant in these analyses can be analyzed more closely in future longitudinal studies which can eliminate the problem of validity of recall data as discussed previously.

A final caveat: Because the sample was primarily middle class, the findings of this study are not generalizable to lower-class populations. An area for further research would be the use of *The Clinical Measurement Package* (Hudson, 1982) with lower socioeconomic groups, using the methodology employed in this study.

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