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Early Sexual Behavior in a Sample of Low-Income, African American Children

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This study describes the sexual behavior of 2- to 12-year-old African American children without known histories of sexual abuse and explores the relation of this behavior to gender and age. Primary caregivers were recruited from a public "Well Child" clinic and administered the Child Sexual Behavior Inventory (CSBI), a parental report measure that assesses a broad range of childhood sexual behaviors within 9 specific domains. CSBI data were collected on 249 African American children. Results indicate that African American children display a broad range of sexual behavior that was not reported to frequently occur. Sexual behaviors that involved requesting, planning, or forcing other children and adults into sexual activity were not reported. Although significant differences were not found between frequency levels of sexual behavior reported for boys and girls, the range of sexual behavior observed and reported for girls was narrower in comparison to boys. Significant differences were found between frequency levels of sexual behavior observed and reported for children of different ages. Analysis of the behavioral differences found between children of different ages indicates the emergence of a marked interest in sexuality as African American children approached puberty.

Sexuality is widely accepted as a fundamental and important dimension of human life, but few empirical studies are available regarding the sexual behavior of children. Contributing to this paucity of research is a cultural belief in the sexual innocence of children and an attendant commitment to its protection that emerged with the conceptualization of childhood as a distinct period of life characterized by purity, innocence, and faith (Bullough, 2004). Protecting the sexual innocence of children has evolved over time to not only include protection from those who would destroy their innocence through sexual contact but also protection from exposure to material with overt sexual themes (Bullough, 2004; Mirkin, 1999). As a consequence, few existing studies have involved asking children about their behavior. Instead, researchers have relied on parental observation and retrospective report from adults. Given the challenges associated with these methodological approaches, some researchers may have been

deterred from pursuing studies in this area. Similarly, institutional review boards that call into question the fundamental aims of childhood sexual behavior research, as well as the intentions of those proposing such research, may dissuade researchers. Ultimately, the unique cultural, methodological, and ethical challenges confronting the field have impeded the generation of knowledge and curbed our understanding of the sexual behavior of children.

Two interrelated literatures associated with the cultural commitment to protect the sexual innocence of children illuminate the limited state of knowledge regarding the sexual behavior of children. One area seeks to understand the nature and effects of child sexual abuse, and the other examines children as a category of sexual aggressors who prey on other children. Although the child sexual abuse literature shows that sexually abused children have significantly higher levels of sexual behavior than non-abused children (Browning & Laumann, 1997; Einbender & Friedrich, 1989; Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; White, Halpin, Strom, & Santilli, 1988), both literatures critically speak to the difficulty of identifying problematic sexual behavior in children in the absence of knowledge of typical ranges of sexual behavior.

Some recent studies of primarily White, middle-class children have expanded our knowledge of the types of sexual behavior observed in children without known or suspected histories of sexual abuse. These studies

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show that children engage in sexual play (Lamb & Coakley, 1993; Leitenberg, Greenwald, & Tarran, 1989; Okami, Olmstead, & Abramson, 1997); show interest in viewing the bodies of others, as well as displaying their own (Friedrich, Fisher, Broughton, Houston, & Shafran, 1998; Friedrich, Grambsch, Broughton, Kuiper, & Beilke, 1991; Phipps-Yonas, Yonas, Turner, & Kauper, 1992; Shafran, 1995); and have knowledge of sexual anatomy and function (Gordon, Schroeder, & Abrams, 1990a,b; Grocke, Smith, & Graham, 1995). Taken with the findings from earlier descriptive studies that document the occurrence of such sexual behavior as penile erections in male infants, genital manipulation and play, and masturbation (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953; Moll, 1913; Spitz, 1949), non-abused children are suggested to display a wide range of sexual behavior. Behavioral differentiation by gender has been suggested, as genital manipulation and masturbatory behavior have been reported to be more common among boys (Friedrich et al., 1998; Gagnon, 1985; Rutter, 1971). Older children are suggested to be more knowledgeable than younger children about sexual behavior, pregnancy, and sexual abuse prevention (Gordon et al., 1990a), whereas hugging and kissing, self-stimulation, and exhibitionism are reported to be more common among younger children (Friedrich et al., 1991; Kinsey et al., 1948). The findings of some studies have noted an inverse relation between age and childhood sexual behavior, suggesting that the sexual behavior of children becomes covert over time (Friedrich et al., 1998; Friedrich et al., 1991; Gagnon, 1985).

The nearly exclusive focus on White, middle-class children hampers our evolving understanding of childhood sexual behavior and is potentially harmful, as race and ethnicity have been found to be important sociocultural factors that influence sexual behavior. In fact, researchers have called attention to the omission of African American children from studies of childhood sexual behavior, particularly noting that the findings of existing studies may not represent the range and frequency of sexual behavior of this group of children (Gordon & Schroeder, 1995). DeLamater and Friedrich (2002) asserted that, although children are born with the capacity to reach sexual maturation, the shape and texture of their sexual development and behavior are significantly influenced by the social world in which they are embedded. Research indicates that African Americans, on average, begin heterosexual sex earlier, have higher rates of sex in adolescence, and have higher numbers of sexual partners in adulthood (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Mahay, Laumann, & Michaels, 2001). Research also shows that masturbation, as well as anal and oral sex, is a less common mode of sexual expression among heterosexual African Americans (Laumann et al., 1994; Sterk-Elifson, 1994).

More important, these patterns have been theorized to emerge from shared sexual meaning that exists at the group level. As sexual meaning is acquired through an acculturative process (Frayser, 1994; Gagnon & Simon, 2005), the unique sexual learning and, hence, sexual behavior that occurs in childhood is likely to reflect, at least in part, the context in which it occurs. Given the influence of race and ethnicity on sexual behavior, the imposition of a normative standard of childhood sexual behavior derived from studies of White, middle-class children is potentially problematic. Thigpen, Pinkston, and Mayefsky (2003) documented and discussed the potential for mislabeling the sexual behavior of African American children in the absence of normative data, as well as the harmful effects of labeling. Gaining knowledge of the sexual behavior of African American children can contribute to and enhance what is known about the sexual behavior of children, as well as aid professionals in evaluating claims of sexual behavior problems (SBPs).

This study was undertaken to enhance knowledge of childhood sexual behavior as it occurs within a specific ethnic subgroup. More specifically, the study sought to describe the range and frequency of sexual behavior in a sample of low-income, 2- to 12-year-old, African American children without known or suspected histories of sexual abuse. In addition, differences in the average frequency of sexual behavior for boys and girls, as well as children of different ages, were explored. Finally, exploratory latent class analysis (LCA) was used to extend the description of sexual behavior beyond prevalence and frequency toward establishing typologies of sexual behavior that would further reveal patterns of sexual behavior within gender and age subgroups. LCA is well-suited for this type of analysis, as it has been used to investigate different types of anxiety and depression in children and adolescents (Wadsworth, Hudziak, Heath, & Achenbach, 2001), generate typologies of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Neuman, Todd, & Heath, 1999), and provide epidemiologic estimates utilizing symptom data (Kohlman & Formann, 1997).

Method

Data Collection

Following institutional review board approval, sexual behavior data were collected via a survey administered in face-to-face format to primary caregivers of 2- to 12-year-old, African American children receiving non-emergent "Well Child" pediatric care from a publicly funded primary care clinic located in a large urban Midwestern city. At the time of the study, 60% of children receiving care from the clinic were identified as African American; 60% of children were characterized as uninsured.

The study's sampling methodology entailed approaching African American caregivers of African American children scheduled to be seen at the clinic. Caregivers were individually approached in the waiting area of the clinic by research staff and asked if they would be interested in participating in a study about their child's sexual behavior. After ascertaining the primary caregiver's initial interest, but before beginning the informed consent process and interview, an eligibility screen was conducted to ensure that the primary caregiver was eligible for participation in the study. Because the study focused on the sexual behavior of African American children without known histories of sexual abuse and without mental, physical, or developmental disabilities, primary caregivers of children with these histories were excluded. It should be noted that the process for identifying primary caregivers of children with a history of sexual abuse involved asking the primary caregiver if their child had a known or suspected history of sexual abuse. Therefore, it is possible that primary caregivers of children with a history of sexual abuse may have been recruited into the sample, particularly if the primary caregiver was the abuser.

Three hundred six primary caregivers of 2- to 12-year-old, African American children were screened for inclusion in the study. Four primary caregivers, or 1%, were deemed ineligible as a result of their child having a known or suspected history of sexual abuse or a mental, physical, or developmental disability. Seventy-five primary caregivers, or 25%, refused to participate in the study, indicating a lack of interest or time as the basis of the refusal. Two hundred twenty-seven primary caregivers were recruited into the sample and interviewed, representing a 74% participation rate. Child Sexual Behavior Inventory (CSBI) data were collected on 249 children because 22 primary caregivers reported on 2 of their children provided that both children received services from the clinic and were present at the time of the interview.

Measures

Sexual behavior was operationalized using the CSBI, a 38-item, standardized instrument that relies on parental report to assess a broad range of childhood sexual behavior (Friedrich, 1997).¹ Nine behavioral domains are assessed: boundary problems (i.e., developmentally or individually related difficulties with maintaining interpersonal distance), exhibitionism (i.e., revealing sexual parts to adults or children), gender role behavior (i.e., interest in being or acting like a member of the opposite gender), self-stimulation (i.e., touching oneself for sexual pleasure), sexual anxiety (i.e., distress upon

witnessing adult sexuality), sexual interest (i.e., interest in the opposite gender and in sexual behavior), sexual intrusiveness or sexual aggression (i.e., violation of another person's sexual privacy), sexual knowledge (i.e., awareness of sexual behavior beyond typical age-level knowledge), and voyeuristic behavior (i.e., a specific aspect of sexual interest reflected by efforts to observe the sexual parts of others; see Table for a complete list of items).

The CSBI captures the frequency of its items as they were observed in the 6-month period preceding the administration of the instrument—the scale ranges from 0 (*never*), 1 (*less than once per month*), 2 (*one to three times per month*), to 3 (*once per week*). CSBI raw scores range from 0 to 123, and reflect the overall level of sexual behavior. A mean frequency score is computed by dividing the raw score by the number of items, representing the average frequency of sexual behavior. CSBI raw and mean frequency scores can be computed for the entire sample, subgroups within the sample, as well as individual cases.

Although the CSBI is primarily used as a clinical tool to aid practitioners in distinguishing sexually abused from non-abused children, the breadth of its items make it a useful instrument for measuring the sexual behavior of non-abused children. Toward assessing the reliability and validity of the instrument, data were collected from samples of primary caregivers of sexually abused and non-abused children. Analyses of the psychometric properties of the CSBI suggest that it is both a reliable and valid measure of childhood sexual behavior (Friedrich, 1997). Because 20% of the non-abused sample ($n = 1,114$) on which the CSBI was standardized was characterized as non-White and low-income, the instrument is thought to be an appropriate measure for children from families of diverse social and economic backgrounds (Friedrich, 1997). As less than 8% of the non-abused sample was African American, the reliability of the CSBI was addressed in this study. Analyses of the CSBI's reliability in the Friedrich non-abused sample and in this sample yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.72 and 0.78, respectively.

Statistical Analyses

To accomplish the goals of the study, CSBI data were analyzed in three stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to determine the prevalence and frequency of individual CSBI items in the overall sample and in gender and age subgroups. The second stage of analysis involved use of non-parametric statistical tests to assess differences in CSBI mean frequency scores calculated for gender and age subgroups. It is important to note that nonparametric statistical tests were used because analyses of histograms of CSBI mean frequency scores revealed non-normal distributions of these scores in all gender and age subgroups. The average CSBI mean frequency score computed for

¹The third version of the Child Sexual Behavior Inventory contains 38 items. Three items reflecting sexually intrusive behavior were added in consultation with the instrument's author.

Table 1. Prevalence and Frequency of Child Sexual Behavior Inventory (CSBI) Items ($N=249$)

CSBI Items by Domain of Sexual Behavior	Overall Sample (%)	Frequency of Observed Behavior		
		Less Than Once Per Month (%)	1 to 3 Times Per Month (%)	Once Per Week (%)
<i>Boundary-related behavior</i>				
1. Stands too close to people	18.0	8.4	4.0	5.6
2. Touches or tries to touch mother's or women's breasts	18.0	10.0	4.8	3.2
3. Overly friendly with men they don't know well	5.6	2.8	1.6	1.2
4. Hugs adults they don't know well	4.4	2.8	0.8	0.8
5. Puts mouth on mother's or women's breasts	2.4	0.8	0.8	0.8
6. Rubs body against people or furniture	2.0	1.6	0.4	†
7. Kisses adults they do not know well	0.8	0.4	0.4	†
<i>Exhibitionistic behavior</i>				
8. Shows private (sex) parts to adults	2.0	1.2	0.4	0.4
9. Shows private (sex) parts to other children	1.2	0.8	0.4	†
<i>Gender role-related behavior</i>				
10. Dresses like the opposite gender	2.4	1.2	0.8	0.4
11. Wants to be the opposite gender	1.6	1.2	0.6	†
<i>Sexual intrusiveness or sexual aggression</i>				
12. Kisses children they don't know well	3.2	2.0	0.8	0.4
13. Tries to put tongue in the other person's mouth when kissing	2.0	1.2	0.4	0.4
14. Touches another child's private (sex) parts	1.6	1.6	†	†
15. Tries to have sexual intercourse with children or adults	1.6	1.6	†	†
16. Touches adults' private (sex) parts	1.2	0.4	0.8	†
17. Tries to undress adults against their will	1.2	0.8	†	0.4
18. Touches other children's private (sex) parts after being told not to	0.8	0.8	†	†
19. Puts mouth on another child's private (sex) parts	0.4	0.4	†	†
20. Touches animals' sex parts	0.4	0.4	†	†
21. Tries to undress other children against their will	0.4	0.4	†	†
22. Asks others to engage in sexual acts	†	†	†	†
23. Forces other children to do sexual acts	†	†	†	†
24. Plans how to sexually touch other children	†	†	†	†
25. Puts finger or object in other children's vaginas or rectums	†	†	†	†
<i>Sexual anxiety</i>				
26. Gets upset when adults are kissing or hugging	11.6	4.4	4.8	2.4
<i>Sexual interest</i>				
27. Is very interested in the opposite sex	24.9	9.6	6.8	8.4
28. Talks flirtatiously	6.8	.4	4.8	1.6
29. Draws sex parts when drawing pictures of people	4.4	1.2	2.4	0.8
30. Makes sexual sounds (signs, moans, heaving breathing)	1.6	1.6	†	†
<i>Sexual knowledge</i>				
31. Pretends that dolls or stuffed animal are having sex	5.6	9.6	1.2	0.8
32. Knows more about sex than other children their age	4.4	1.2	1.6	1.2
33. Talks about sexual acts	3.2	1.6	1.2	0.4
<i>Self-stimulation</i>				
34. Touches private (sex) parts at home	17.7	6.4	3.6	7.6
35. Touches private (sex) parts in public	6.0	1.2	2.8	2.0
36. Masturbates with hand	3.6	2.4	0.8	0.4
37. Masturbates with toy or object	2.0	1.2	0.8	†
38. Puts objects in vagina or rectum	0.4	0.4	†	†
<i>Voyeuristic behavior</i>				
39. Tries to look when people are nude or undressing	14.9	7.6	4.4	2.8
40. Wants to watch TV or movies that show nudity or sex	8.4	4.4	1.6	2.4
41. Tries to look at pictures of nude or partially dressed people	6.4	4.0	1.6	0.8

† Not observed at this frequency level.

each subgroup was above both the median and mode scores, rendering the average CSBI mean frequency score a less reliable measure of central tendency. In consequence, the Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis tests were respectively used to examine differences in overall levels of sexual behavior between gender and age subgroups (Gibbons, 1993). The Mann–Whitney U test, the

nonparametric analog to the independent samples t test, compares the medians of two samples. Akin to a one-way analysis of variance, the Kruskal–Wallis test assesses differences in the medians of three or more samples. It should also be noted here that three age subgroups were used in the present study as analysis of the data from which the CSBI was standardized showed marked variance in the

raw and mean frequency scores between 2–5, 6–9, and 10–12 year-old children (Friedrich, 1997).

The third stage in the analysis involved use of exploratory LCA. LCA is a statistical method capable of reducing a sample of cases containing multiple categorically measured variables into a small number of mutually exclusive classes or subtypes that account for the entire set of cases within the sample (Lazarsfeld & Henry, 1968; McCutcheon, 1987). Analogous to cluster analysis, LCA groups cases that are similar to each other and different from other cases into distinct classes. The general latent class model estimates the number of classes or subtypes of the latent variable under study, the proportion of cases within the entire sample that have membership in each of the classes, and the probability of a response on the observed indicator variables given membership in a particular class (McCutcheon, 1987). The goal in LCA is to select the model with the least number of classes that describes the associations among the set of observed variables in a theoretically meaningful way (Cox, Orme, & Cuddeback, 2003). A latent class model is considered plausible when the p value associated with the likelihood ratio chi-square statistic (L^2) and its related degrees of freedom meet or exceed conventional statistical modeling (i.e., $p \leq .05$; McCutcheon, 1987). A statistically significant result means that the conditional and latent class probabilities can be taken as faithful representations of the observed data. Because the L^2 statistic cannot be used to compare models with different numbers of classes, the Vuong–Lo–Mendell–Rubin likelihood ratio test (LRT) is suggested to test $k - 1$ against k classes (B. Muthén, 2004). The Bayesian information criterion (BIC; Schwartz, 1978) and the Akaike information criterion (AIC) are indexes of parsimony that are used to aid in choosing from a number of models with different classes. In comparing models with different numbers of classes, the model with the smallest BIC and AIC values is suggested (B. Muthén, 2004; L. Muthén & Muthén, 2003; Uebersax, 2001).

The nine behavioral domains of the CSBI were the basis for the LCAs conducted in this study. Derived from responses to the 41 items of the CSBI, subscores were calculated for each of the nine behavioral domains for all cases in the sample. Analyses of the subscores in each domain showed subscores of zero for the majority of cases, indicating that the behavioral items reflective of the nine domains had not been observed. Analyses of non-zero subscores for each domain revealed a narrow range of subscores with the average subscore being one or very close to one. As a result, domain subscores were dichotomized to reflect whether behavior reflective of a given domain of sexual behavior had or had not been observed. The dichotomized domain subscores calculated for each case in the sample served as the observed indicator variables. There was no missing data. MPlus (Version 3.01) was used to obtain maximum

likelihood estimates for both the latent class and conditional probabilities (L. Muthén & Muthén, 2003). Models ranging from one to five classes were run for each gender and age subgroup. The L^2 and its related p -value, the Vuong–Lo–Mendell–Rubin LRT, the BIC, and AIC indexes associated with each model were assessed toward selecting the model that best fit the observed data. A three-class solution was selected for each gender and age subgroup. The three classes of sexual behavior that emerged within each subgroup were descriptively labeled to typify the nature of sexual behavior distinctive of the class.

Results

Sample

Primary caregivers were, on average, unmarried biological mothers with a high school education caring for approximately three children with an annual income of less than \$15,000. Other primary caregivers included biological grandmothers, legal foster parents, and adoptive mothers. All 249 children for whom the survey was completed were African American and between 2 and 12 years of age with an average age of 5.8 years. Slightly over one half were boys (53%). Sixty percent of these children were school age (i.e., above 5 years of age), and none were reported to have histories of sexual abuse or mental, physical, or developmental disabilities.

Range and Frequency of Sexual Behavior in the Overall Sample

Primary caregivers observed their children display a broad range of sexual behavior reflecting all nine domains of the CSBI (see Table 1 for the prevalence of CSBI items in the sample). Behavioral items commonly observed by primary caregivers included boundary-related behavior such as touching or trying to touch women's breasts and standing too close to people, self-stimulatory behavior of touching one's genitals at home, behavior of a voyeuristic nature that involved attempting to look at people who were nude or undressing, and behavior that reflected an interest in members of the opposite gender. Intrusive or aggressive sexual behaviors that specifically involved requesting, planning, or forcing other children and adults into sexual activity were not observed. None of the 41 behavioral items were observed by more than 25% of the primary caregivers, and the sexual behaviors that were observed were reported to occur less than once per month.

Gender

Table 2 shows the prevalence of CSBI items by gender. Several gender-related behavioral patterns emerged. First, primary caregivers reported a narrower range of

Table 2. *Prevalence of Child Sexual Behavior Inventory Items (CSBI) by Gender^a (n = 249)*

CSBI Items by Domain of Sexual Behavior	Boys ^b	Girls ^c
<i>Boundary-related behavior</i>		
1. Stands too close to people	15.9	20.5
2. Touches or tries to touch mother's or women's breasts	15.2	21.4
3. Overly friendly with men they don't know well	4.5	6.8
4. Hugs adults they don't know well	3.8	5.1
5. Puts mouth on mother's or women's breasts	0.8	4.3
6. Rubs body against people or furniture	3.8	0.0
7. Kisses adults they do not know well	0.0	1.7
<i>Exhibitionistic behavior</i>		
8. Shows private (sex) parts to adults	2.3	1.7
9. Shows private (sex) parts to other children	2.3	0.0
<i>Gender role-related behavior</i>		
10. Dresses like the opposite gender	2.3	2.6
11. Wants to be the opposite gender	3.0	0.0
<i>Sexual intrusiveness or sexual aggression</i>		
12. Kisses children they don't know well	1.5	5.1
13. Tries to put tongue in the other person's mouth when kissing	2.3	1.7
14. Touches another child's private (sex) parts	3.0	0.0
15. Tries to have sexual intercourse with children or adults	2.3	0.9
16. Touches adults' private (sex) parts	1.5	0.9
17. Tries to undress adults against their will	0.8	0.0
18. Touches other children's private parts after being told not to	1.5	0.0
19. Puts mouth on another child's private (sex) parts	0.8	0.0
20. Touches animals' sex parts	0.0	0.0
21. Tries to undress other children against their will	0.8	0.0
22. Asks others to engage in sexual acts	0.0	0.0
23. Forces other children to do sexual acts	0.0	0.0
24. Plans how to sexually touch other children	0.0	0.0
25. Puts finger or object in other children's vaginas or rectums	0.0	0.0
<i>Sexual anxiety</i>		
26. Gets upset when adults are kissing or hugging	10.6	12.8
<i>Sexual interest</i>		
27. Is very interested in the opposite gender	33.3	15.4
28. Talks flirtatiously	6.8	6.8
29. Draws sex parts when drawing pictures of people	3.8	5.1
30. Makes sexual sounds (sighs, moans, heaving breathing)	2.3	0.9
<i>Sexual knowledge</i>		
31. Pretends that dolls or stuffed animals are having sex	4.5	6.8
32. Knows more about sex than other children their age	4.5	4.3
33. Talks about sexual acts	3.0	3.4
<i>Self-stimulation</i>		
34. Touches private (sex) parts at home	23.5	11.5
35. Touches private (sex) parts in public	10.6	0.9
36. Masturbates with hand	4.5	2.6
37. Masturbates with toy or object	3.0	0.9
38. Puts objects in vagina or rectum	0.8	0.0
<i>Voyeuristic behavior</i>		
39. Tries to look when people are nude or undressing	16.7	12.8
40. Wants to watch TV or movies that show nudity or sex	9.8	6.8
41. Tries to look at pictures of nude or partially dressed people	9.8	2.6

^a The results of the Mann-Whitney *U* test revealed no significant differences in the overall level of sexual behavior observed for boys and girls. ^b*n* = 132. ^c*n* = 117.

behavior for girls. Thirty-six of the 41 behavioral items were observed for boys compared to 28 of the 41 items for girls. Second, striking differences emerged in the percentage of primary caregivers who had observed commonly reported behaviors. For example, 23% of primary caregivers of boys reported having observed their child touch his genitals compared to 11% of girls. Similarly, nearly 10% of primary caregivers of boys reported that their child tried to look at pictures of nude

or partially dressed people compared to 2.6% of primary caregivers of girls. Further, only 15% of primary caregivers of girls reported that their daughters showed a keen interest in the opposite gender compared to 33% of primary caregivers of boys. Although the median CSBI mean frequency score was higher for boys, the difference was not significant.

The results of the LCAs revealed further behavioral patterns both within and between gender groups (see

Table 3. *Latent Class Analyses of Sexual Behavior by Gender*

CSBI Behavioral Domain	Conditional Probability of Engaging in Sexual Behavior related to Behavioral Domain					
	Latent Classes: Gender Group, Class Characterization, and Class Prevalence					
	Boys ^a			Girls ^b		
	Nominal Class (76%)	Mixed Class (18%)	Intrusive Class (6%)	Nominal Class (60%)	Boundary Class (31%)	Mixed Class (9%)
Boundary-related behavior	0.15	0.72	0.87	0.21	0.72	0.59
Exhibitionism	0.01	0.17	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.20
Gender role-related behavior	0.04	0.13	0.00	0.04	0.03	0.20
Self-stimulation	0.16	0.74	0.63	0.00	0.28	0.50
Sexual anxiety	0.09	0.21	0.00	0.00	0.39	0.10
Sexual interest	0.24	0.84	0.38	0.22	0.12	0.32
Sexual intrusion or aggression	0.00	0.26	0.99	0.00	0.25	0.10
Sexual knowledge	0.02	0.26	0.25	0.01	0.00	1.00
Voyeurism	0.08	1.00	0.00	0.08	0.14	0.88

Note. CSBI = Child Sexual Behavior Inventory.

^a $n = 132$. Likelihood ratio chi-square fit = 86.769 with 29 parameters and 481 df , $p < .05$. ^b $n = 117$. Likelihood ratio chi-square fit = 71.393 with 29 parameters and 482 df , $p < .05$.

Table 3). A three-class model was selected for both boys and girls based on reviews of the significance of L^2 , the Vuong–Lo–Mendell–Rubin LRT for testing $k - 1$ against k classes, the BIC, and the AIC associated with models containing one to five classes. Table 4 details indexes of fit for models containing one to three classes, as indexes of fit declined for models containing four and five classes. As previously stated, three distinct classes or categories of sexual behavior emerged for boys. The classes were labeled *nominal*, *mixed*, and *intrusive* to characterize the essence of sexual behavior occurring within the class. The likelihood of engaging in sexual behavior was small for boys having membership in the nominal class of sexual behavior, as the conditional probabilities of engaging in any type of sexual behavior assessed by the CSBI

ranged from 0.00 for sexual intrusion to 0.24 for sexual interest. Seventy-six percent of boys belonged to the nominal class of sexual behavior. Eighteen percent of boys had membership in the mixed class of sexual behavior. Boys in this class were likely to engage in differential or mixed types of sexual behavior. The conditional probabilities of engaging in boundary-related behavior, self-stimulation, behavior reflective of sexual interest, and voyeuristic behavior were at or above 0.72. In comparison to boys in the nominal class of sexual behavior, the conditional probabilities of engaging in all nine types of sexual behavior were markedly higher for boys in the mixed class. The remaining proportion of boys (6%) belonged to the intrusive class of sexual behavior, as intrusive and boundary-related sexual behaviors were the two types

Table 4. *Indexes of Model Fit: Latent Classes for Gender and Age Subgroups*

Variable	Model With k Classes	No. of Parameters	L^2	p	LRT for $k - 1$ Classes (p)	BIC	AIC
Gender subgroups							
Boys	1	9	153.685	.00	<i>na</i>	996.172	999.172
	2	19	107.993	.00	.00	912.706	918.030
	3	29	86.769	.00	.05	909.304	917.430
Girls	1	9	101.734	.00	<i>na</i>	763.686	767.276
	2	19	100.831	.00	.00	762.529	734.109
	3	29	71.393	.00	.00	713.101	724.670
Age subgroups							
2 to 5 years	1	9	111.621	.00	<i>na</i>	953.951	956.677
	2	19	118.320	.00	.18	919.255	925.009
	3	29	98.280	.00	.05	916.187	924.969
6 to 9 years	1	9	47.089	.00	<i>na</i>	429.655	437.521
	2	19	41.523	.00	.02	386.457	403.063
	3	29	31.798	.00	.00	377.261	402.607
10 to 12 years	1	9	71.579	.00	<i>na</i>	329.660	341.055
	2	19	45.027	.00	.00	263.057	287.112
	3	29	29.334	.00	.00	254.703	291.418

Note. L^2 = likelihood ratio chi-square; LRT = likelihood ratio test; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; AIC = Akaike information criterion.

of behavior most probable within the class. The conditional probabilities of engaging in these two forms of sexual behavior were 0.99 and 0.87, respectively.

Comparable nominal and mixed classes of sexual behavior emerged for girls. None of the conditional probabilities of engaging in the differential types of sexual behavior were above 0.21 for girls in the nominal class. Sixty percent of girls had membership in this class of sexual behavior. A considerably smaller percentage of girls belonged to the mixed class of sexual behavior. These girls, however, were likely to engage in all types of sexual behavior at varying conditional probabilities ranging from 0.10 for behavior reflecting sexual anxiety to 1.00 for sexual knowledge. Dramatic increases in the conditional probabilities of engaging in each of the nine domains of sexual behavior are noted between girls in the nominal and mixed classes of sexual behavior. Girls in the third and final class of sexual behavior had markedly lower conditional probabilities of engaging in the nine types of sexual behavior than girls in the mixed class but higher conditional probabilities in a number of domains than those in the nominal class of sexual behavior. The 31% of girls belonging to this class were more likely to engage in boundary-related behavior than any other type of sexual behavior. The conditional probability of engaging in boundary-related behavior was 0.72 for this group compared to 0.59 for girls in the mixed class and 0.21 for girls in the nominal class.

In comparing the results of the LCAs across gender subgroups, three behavioral patterns emerged. First, the conditional probabilities of engaging in sexual behavior of any type were relatively consistent between boys and girls having membership in the nominal class of sexual behavior. Second, within the mixed category of sexual behavior, boys had higher conditional probabilities of engaging in the majority of the nine types of sexual behavior. Third, boys belonging to the intrusive class of sexual behavior had a 0.99 conditional probability of engaging in sexually intrusive behavior. This type of sexual behavior was not probable within any of the three classes of sexual behavior that emerged for girls.

Age

Table 5 lists the prevalence of the 41 items of the CSBI by the three age subgroups. Three patterns are noted. First, a broader range of behavior was observed in 2- to 5-year-old children. Thirty-three of the CSBI items were observed by varying percentages of primary caregivers of this group of children compared to 22 of the 41 items for both 6- to 9- and 10- to 12-year-old children. Behavioral items not observed by primary caregivers of the two older groups of children primarily fell within the intrusive and boundary-related domains of sexual behavior. Although the broadest range of sexual behavior was observed in the youngest group of children, 10- to 12-year-old children were reported to

display sexual behavior more frequently. Figure 1 plots the CSBI mean frequency scores computed for the three age-based subgroups. As can be seen, the CSBI mean frequency score decreased between 2- to 5- and 6- to 9-year-old children but dramatically increased between 6- to 9- and 10- to 12-year-old children. Differences in the median CSBI mean frequency scores for the three subgroups were significant, ($X^2 = 5.83$, $p = .05$).

A second behavioral pattern noted between the three age subgroups involves marked declines and increases in the proportion of primary caregivers having observed behaviors common within the overall sample. Nearly 30% of caregivers of 2- to 5-year-old children observed their child touching or trying to touch their mother's or another woman's breasts compared to 4% and 8% of 6- to 9- and 10- to 12-year-old children, respectively. Similarly, 17% of primary caregivers of 2- to 5-year-old children reported that their child showed interest in the opposite gender compared to 30% of 6- to 9-year-olds and 37% of 10- to 12-year-old children. This age-related pattern held for several other behavioral items including becoming upset when adults are kissing or hugging, pretending that dolls or stuffed animals are having sex, and wanting to watch television or movies that show nudity or sex. That the percentage of primary caregivers having observed self-stimulatory behaviors of masturbation and touching the genitals was equivalent between 2- to 5- and 10- to 12-year-old children is a third and final age-related behavioral pattern noted in the analysis.

The results of LCAs revealed further differences both within and between the three age subgroups (see Table 6). A three-class model was selected for each age group (see Table 4 for indexes of fit associated with models containing 1 to 3 classes). Within each age group, a proportionally large class of sexual behavior emerged in which the conditional probabilities of engaging in any type of sexual behavior were low. To reflect the minimal chance of engaging in sexual behavior, this class was descriptively labeled the nominal class of sexual behavior. Sixty-two percent of 2- to 5-year-old children, 78% of 6- to 9-year-old children, and 64% of 10- to 12-year-old children belonged to this class of sexual behavior. A proportionally smaller category of sexual behavior in which members of the class were likely to engage in a variety or mixed types of sexual behavior at varying conditional probabilities also emerged within each age subgroup. Seventeen percent of the oldest group of children belonged to this class, 12% of the youngest cohort of children, and 11% of 6- to 9-year-old children. The third class of sexual behavior that emerged within each age cohort reflected a single type of sexual behavior that was highly probable within the class (i.e., a conditional probability equal to 1.00). The specific behavior highly probable within the class differed across the three age subgroups, however. The third class of sexual behavior found for each of

Table 5. *Prevalence of Child Sexual Behavior Inventory Items (CSBI) by Age^a*

CSBI Items by Domain of Sexual Behavior	Age Cohort (%)		
	2 to 5 Years Old ^b	6 to 9 Years Old ^c	10 to 12 Years Old ^d
<i>Boundary-related behavior</i>			
1. Stands too close to people	20.2	16.7	14.6
2. Touches or tries to touch mother's or women's breasts	29.5	4.2	8.3
3. Overly friendly with men they don't know well	7.8	5.6	†
4. Hugs adults they don't know well	7.0	2.8	†
5. Puts mouth on mother's or women's breasts	4.7	†	†
6. Rubs body against people or furniture	1.6	†	6.3
7. Kisses adults they do not know well	1.6	†	†
<i>Exhibitionistic behavior</i>			
8. Shows private (sex) parts to adults	2.3	1.4	2.1
9. Shows private (sex) parts to other children	1.6	1.4	†
<i>Gender role-related behavior</i>			
10. Dresses like the opposite gender	3.1	1.4	2.1
11. Wants to be the opposite gender	3.1	†	†
<i>Sexual intrusiveness or sexual aggression</i>			
12. Kisses children they don't know well	6.2	†	†
13. Tries to put tongue in the other person's mouth when kissing	3.9	†	†
14. Touches another child's private (sex) parts	1.6	2.8	†
15. Tries to have sexual intercourse with children or adults	1.6	†	4.2
16. Touches adults' private (sex) parts	2.3	†	†
17. Tries to undress adults against their will	1.6	†	2.1
18. Touches other children's private (sex) parts after being told not to	1.6	†	†
19. Puts mouth on another child's private (sex) parts	0.8	†	†
20. Touches animals' sex parts	†	†	2.1
21. Tries to undress other children against their will	0.8	†	†
22. Asks others to engage in sexual acts	†	†	†
23. Forces other children to do sexual acts	†	†	†
24. Plans how to sexually touch other children	†	†	†
25. Puts finger or object in other children's vaginas or rectums	†	†	†
<i>Sexual anxiety</i>			
26. Gets upset when adults are kissing or hugging	17.1	6.9	4.2
<i>Sexual interest</i>			
27. Is very interested in the opposite gender	17.1	30.6	37.5
28. Talks flirtatiously	3.1	4.2	20.8
29. Draws sex parts when drawing pictures of people	†	†	22.9
30. Makes sexual sounds	†	2.8	4.2
<i>Sexual knowledge</i>			
31. Pretends that dolls or stuffed animal are having sex	3.1	5.6	12.5
32. Knows more about sex than other children their age	1.6	1.4	16.7
33. Talks about sexual acts	1.6	†	12.5
<i>Self-stimulation</i>			
34. Touches private (sex) parts at home	21.7	8.3	20.8
35. Touches private (sex) parts in public	5.4	5.6	8.3
36. Masturbates with hand	4.7	1.4	4.2
37. Masturbates with toy or object	2.3	2.8	†
38. Puts objects in vagina or rectum	†	1.4	†
<i>Voyeuristic behavior</i>			
39. Tries to look when people are nude or undressing	17.1	15.3	8.3
40. Wants to watch TV or movies that show nudity or sex	4.7	6.9	20.8
41. Tries to look at pictures of nude or partially dressed people	2.3	9.7	12.5

^a The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed significant differences in the overall level of sexual behavior observed for 2- to 5-, 6- to 9-, and 10- to 12-year-old children, ($X^2 = 5.83$, $p = .05$). ^b $n = 129$. $n = 72$. ^d $n = 48$. [†]Not observed for this age group.

the age subgroups was descriptively labeled to reflect the nature of the sexual behavior most probable within the class. Boundary-related sexual behavior was highly probable among 2- to 5-year-old children. Voyeuristic behavior and behavior reflective of sexual interest were highly likely among 6- to 9- and 10- to 12-year-old

children. Twenty-six percent of 2- to 5-year-old children had membership in the boundary-related class of sexual behavior. Eleven and 19% of 6- to 9- and 10- to 12-year-old children, respectively, had membership in the voyeuristic and sexual interest classes of sexual behavior.

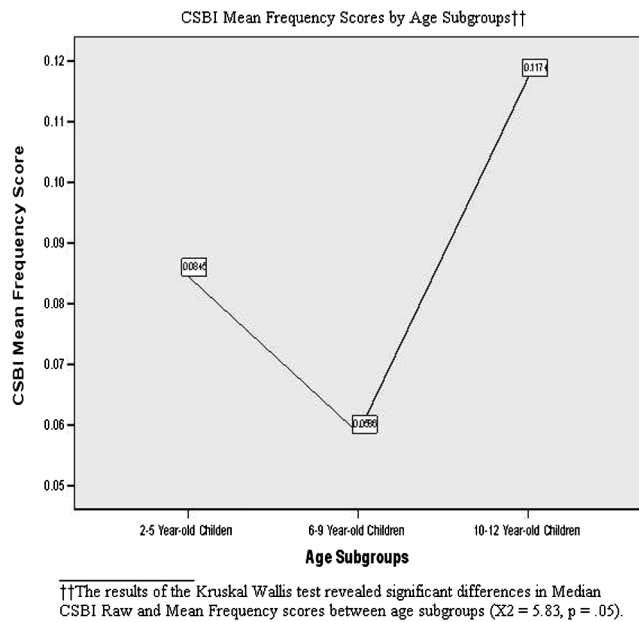


Figure 1. Child Sexual Behavior Inventory (CSBI) mean frequency scores by age subgroups.

In addition to differences in the third class of sexual behavior that emerged across the three age subgroups, differences in the conditional probabilities of engaging in the nine types of sexual behavior were noted between the three age subgroups, especially among children having membership in equivalent classes. For example, the conditional probabilities of engaging in self-stimulatory behavior for children in nominal classes of sexual behavior were 0.13 for the youngest group of children, 0.05 for 6- to 9-year-old children, and 0.07 for the oldest group of children. Similarly, the conditional probabilities of engaging in voyeuristic behavior for children in

the mixed classes of sexual behavior were 0.65 for 2- to 5-year-old children, 1.00 for 6- to 9-year-old children, and 0.75 for 10- to 12-year-old children.

Discussion

African American children were reported to display a broad range of sexual behaviors. However, the prevalence of individual behaviors in the overall sample was low, and the sexual behaviors that were observed were reported to occur infrequently. Although significant differences in the frequency of sexual behavior were not found between African American boys and girls, a narrower range of behavior was noted for girls. Moreover, older children (i.e., 10–12 years of age) were observed to more frequently display a narrower range of behavior. Taken together, the findings in this study suggest that, although African American children engaged in behavior that may be construed as sexual, sexual behavior was not elevated or pronounced among them. Although biological, cognitive, and other developmental processes that are yet unfolding are likely to account for the low prevalence and frequency of sexual behavior observed for this group of children, sociocultural factors are also likely to contribute to this in that children are not culturally viewed or recognized as sexual beings. Further, parents and other adult figures may respond to the behavior of children they interpret as sexual in such a way that future occurrences of the behavior are diminished. Gagnon and Simon (1973, 2005) theorized that sexual behavior is not prominent among children partly because parental reactions morally condition children toward sexual secrecy and shame until adolescence, the developmental period in which sexual capacity is

Table 6. Latent Class Analyses of Sexual Behavior by Age

CSBI Behavioral Domain	Conditional Probability of Engaging in Sexual Behavior related to Behavioral Domain								
	Latent Classes: Age Group, Class Characterization, and Class Prevalence								
	2 to 5 Years Old ^a			6 to 9 Years Old ^b			10 to 12 Years Old ^c		
	Nominal Class (62%)	Boundary Class (26%)	Mixed Class (12%)	Nominal Class (78%)	Voyeuristic Class (11%)	Mixed Class (11%)	Nominal Class (64%)	Sexual Interest Class (19%)	Mixed Class (17%)
Boundary-related behavior	0.21	1.00	0.56	0.14	0.00	1.00	0.10	0.00	1.00
Exhibitionism	0.00	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.12
Gender role-related behavior	0.05	0.00	0.24	0.00	0.12	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.12
Self-stimulation	0.13	0.22	1.00	0.05	0.00	0.75	0.07	0.30	0.62
Sexual anxiety	0.11	0.29	0.24	0.05	0.00	0.25	0.06	0.00	0.00
Sexual interest	0.13	0.19	0.41	0.27	0.37	0.87	0.16	1.00	1.00
Sexual intrusion or aggression	0.02	0.37	0.38	0.00	0.12	0.12	0.00	0.00	0.25
Sexual knowledge	0.00	0.03	0.24	0.02	0.37	0.12	0.00	0.33	1.00
Voyeurism	0.06	0.26	0.65	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.55	0.75

Note. CSBI = Child Sexual Behavior Inventory.

^a $n = 129$. Likelihood ratio chi-square fit = 98.280 with 29 parameters and 482 df , $p < .05$. ^b $n = 72$. Likelihood ratio chi-square fit = 31.798 with 29 parameters and 482 df , $p < .05$. ^c $n = 48$. Likelihood ratio chi-square fit = 29.334 with 29 parameters and 482 df , $p < .05$.

culturally recognized. That showing interest in the opposite gender, touching of the genitals, and attempting to view nude or partially dressed people emerged as behavioral items observed by higher percentages of primary caregivers in the sample may indicate that African American children are in the process of exploring their bodies and acquiring knowledge about sexually related matters that will serve as the foundation for further sexual development and experience.

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of earlier descriptive studies of primarily White, middle-class children that suggest that children display a broad range of sexual behavior. However, race and ethnicity can be brought to bear on the findings in this study in three ways. First, race and ethnicity may explain the increased frequency of sexual behavior noted for 10- to 12-year-old African American children (see Figure 1). This finding is inconsistent with studies of other groups of children in that the frequency of sexual behavior did not decline or become covert as children approached puberty (Friedrich et al., 1998; Friedrich et al., 1991). That African American children are known to begin sexual maturation earlier than children of other racial groups may underlie this finding, as some children of primary caregivers in the study may have been pubertal (Sun et al., 2002). It is plausible, however, that both biological and social factors account for this finding, as increases in the release of sex hormones known to coincide with sexual maturation conspired with an increasing social awareness of a child's emerging sexual capacity. Second, race and ethnicity may account for the low prevalence of masturbatory behavior in the sample, even among primary caregivers with higher levels of education. Of considerable importance here is the prevalence of masturbatory behavior found for White, middle-class children in the Friedrich et al. (1991) study using the CSBI. Fifteen percent of primary caregivers in the study reported having observed their child engage in masturbatory behavior. As noted earlier, masturbation has been found to be a less common mode of sexual expression among heterosexual African American adults (Laumann et al., 1994; Sterk-Elifson, 1994).

A third and final way in which race and ethnicity may come to bear on findings in this study involves the way in which African American primary caregivers may have represented their children. West (2001) contended that sexuality has long been a taboo topic and issue both between African Americans and Whites, as well as within the African American community. He explained that the legacy of sexual silence within the African American community emerged from perceptions created and widely held by Whites that the sexual appetites of African Americans could not be controlled, which, in turn, fueled fears of African American sexuality in general and miscegenation in particular. In awareness of these fears, long-standing institutions within the African American community—primarily the church, family,

and schools—promoted sexual silence by condemning sexuality as a way to survive and as a means of attaining social acceptance. Ward (2005) asserted that African Americans remain reluctant to discuss sexuality openly out of fear that discussions of this nature will confirm long-standing stereotypes. In consequence, African American primary caregivers in this study may have represented their children in such a way that racialized notions of hypersexuality among African Americans were not reinforced.

A considerable amount of attention has recently been devoted to identifying children with SBPs out of concern for child-to-child sexual abuse, as well as the potential for sexual aggression in childhood to progress and continue into adolescence and adulthood (Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act, 2006; Burton, 2000; Marshall, Barbaree, & Eccles, 1991; Thigpen et al., 2003). Although definitions of SBP vary, they are typically conceived of as persistent and developmentally *atypical* sexual behaviors (Carpentier, Silovsky, & Chaffin, 2006). Very little continues to be known about typical sexual behavior in children, however. Building a body of knowledge in this area is extremely important because some state child welfare systems have enacted procedures that register, segregate, and monitor children identified as having SBP to include placing these children on lifetime public sex offender registries and Internet sites (Carpentier et al., 2006; Thigpen et al., 2003). In the absence of empirically derived knowledge that establishes typical childhood sexual behavior, it is likely that practitioners working within formal helping systems such as child welfare, health and mental health, and juvenile justice will continue to rely on anecdotal information to inform their assessments and impressions. Inclusion of African American children in studies of typical childhood sexual behavior is especially warranted given that they are disproportionately represented in some of these systems.

Although tentative and preliminary, the patterns of sexual behavior found for African American children in this study have implications for clinicians and other helping professionals who are often required to formulate diagnostic impressions of normalcy for this group of children. First, the results of the LCAs revealed three classes of sexual behavior for each of the three age subgroups: a proportionally large class of behavior in which children were unlikely to engage in any type of sexual behavior; a proportionally smaller class of behavior in which children were likely to engage in diverse types of sexual behavior; and a proportionally smaller class of behavior in which a single type of sexual behavior emerged as highly probable, potentially reflecting a child's developmental stage. The three classes of sexual behavior that emerged for each of the three age subgroups may all be characterized as typical. It is highly conceivable that some children may display very little to no sexual behavior within a specified period of time,

whereas others may engage in behavior that reflects their developmental stage. Others, however, may display a variety of sexual behaviors. Although these analyses did yield results that suggest that some behaviors may be developmentally related, the results also suggest that children of different ages engage in similar types of behaviors. These findings not only underscore the necessity of identifying contextual factors emanating from the child's environment that may explain variance in sexual behavior but also ascertaining a child's motivation for engaging in behavior, as children at different stages of development are likely to be motivated for and experience sexual behaviors differently. Moreover, it is likely that children who fall outside of the class of sexual behavior in which no sexual behavior is observed are most at risk for having their behavior labeled as atypical in accordance with cultural notions that children are asexual in thought and behavior.

A second clinical implication emergent from the behavioral patterns found for African American children in this study involves the potential for the behavior of girls to be problematized. As noted earlier, several gender-related behavioral patterns emerged in the analysis. The way in which children are socialized into being male and female may underlie these patterns, as children are guided by parents and other important figures in their lives toward behavioral patterns that are consistent with cultural norms pertaining to appropriate gender role behavior. Behaviors that are interpreted as being consistent with these norms may be reinforced, whereas behavioral inconsistencies may be strongly rebuked and, in consequence, curtailed or extinguished. Researchers have suggested that adults experience more anxiety over girls' displays of sexual behavior than boys (Borneman, 1990; Goldman & Goldman, 1982), and that adult reactions inhibit the sexual expression of girls (Boat & Everson, 1994). It follows that the behavior of girls may be pathologized when it falls outside of cultural norms pertaining to appropriate gender role behavior. A final implication stemming from patterns observed in the data involves the four items not observed by African American primary caregivers in the sample. These items were reflective of sexual intrusiveness that specifically involved requesting, planning, or forcing other children and adults into sexual activity. That these behaviors were not observed may indicate that these behaviors are beyond typical behavior for African American children.

In conclusion, the findings of this study contribute to and enhance our growing knowledge and understanding of childhood sexual behavior by providing a description of sexual behavior as it occurred within an ethnic subgroup. The findings also have important implications for clinicians and helping professionals. The sampling methodology of this study precludes the extension of these findings to all African American children. Although measures were taken to exclude primary

caregivers of children with histories of sexual abuse, it is possible that primary caregivers of such children were recruited in the sample given the way in which sexual abuse was screened. Further, reliance on primary caregiver report is unlikely to provide a complete picture of the sexual behavior of children.

Future research should be undertaken to confirm the behavioral patterns found in this study, as well as further investigate typical childhood sexual behavior. Future research should also be undertaken to elucidate the influence of race and ethnicity on the sexual development and behavior of children. Particular attention should be given to the role primary caregivers play in socializing their children toward (or away from) particular types or modes of sexual expression. Research in this area should also examine the impact of racism and other forms of social oppression on the sexual development of children, as Herdt (2004) pointed to sexual abuse and sexual risk taking as potential outcomes of these conditions. As the continuities (and discontinuities) of sexual development and behavior over the life course are not well understood, future research is needed to theorize the role and significance of childhood sexual behavior, particularly the influence of the unique sexual learning that takes place in childhood on future development and behavior. Finally, contextual factors, such as the sexual culture within the family, should receive attention, as DeLamater (1987) asserted that the family as an institution has a particular ideology about the nature of sexuality and its function and purpose. To that end, the familial sexual culture—that is, the beliefs, attitudes, customs, knowledge, sexual decision making, and risk-taking (Herdt, 2004)—comes to bear on the sexual development and behavior of children in that it is likely to contain important messages about what it means to be sexual for given individuals at a particular time in life.

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