



From kissing to coitus? Sex-of-partner differences in the sexual milestone achievement of young men

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Scientific information regarding normative patterns of young men's sexual behavior is insufficient, especially regarding the impact of sex of partner. We explored the age at which 255 young adult men achieved several milestones (e.g., first kiss, manual-genital contact, intercourse) as well as the sequence of milestone achievement and stability in sex-of-partner preferences as a function of sex-of-partner experiences. Mean ages of milestone achievement were consistent with the extant empirical literature. Men with only female partners were younger at first kiss and first relationship, and older at first intercourse than men with only male partners; they also reported an almost universal sequence of milestone achievement and little change in sex-of-partner preferences. Most men with male partners reported increased preference for male partners over time. Men with partners of both sexes tended to demonstrate patterns consistent with the relevant sex-of-partner group. Findings suggested a common male sexual trajectory and sex-of-partner dependent trajectories.

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Sexual behaviors and romantic relationships are critical milestones for many adolescents and young adults (Diamond, 2008; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2009; Savin-Williams, 2005; Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003). Indeed, most North American youth experience several significant romantic and sexual "firsts" between the ages 10–20 years (CDCP, 2005; Regan, Durvasula, Howell, Ureno, & Rea, 2004; Savin-Williams, 2005; Schwartz, 1999). The research focuses primarily on identifying which adolescents engage in penile–vaginal intercourse, the predictors of this experience, and outcomes such as pregnancy and disease prevention (see reviews by Bouchey & Furman, 2006; Collins, 2003; Kirby, 2002; Welsh, Rostosky, & Kawaguchi, 2000; Zimmer-Gembeck & Helfand, 2008). Consistent with this emphasis, most researchers have portrayed sex during adolescence as a risky, negative behavior and many adults consider teenage sex to be morally problematic and their love affairs to be trifling (Collins, 2003; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2009). Indeed, the focus on intercourse is sufficiently pervasive that studies routinely provide a brief description of participants who have "only" engaged in "pre-coital" behaviors (e.g., kissing, petting), before omitting them from the focal analyses (e.g., Schwartz, 1999). This has led to substantial gaps and a poor understanding of sexual milestones as a whole (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2009; Tolman, 2002).

Although adolescent boys are more likely than adolescent girls to engage in sexual behavior of any type (Kirby, 2002; Oliver & Hyde, 1993; Zimmer-Gembeck & Helfand, 2008), the knowledge base regarding boys' sexual behavior other than intercourse is particularly impoverished (Crockett, Raffaelli, & Moilanen, 2003; Frankel, 2004; L. Smith, Guthrie, & Oakley, 2005). A smaller database relies on "homosexual" or gay youth and their development of sexual orientation milestones and the coming out process (Savin-Williams, 2005, 2009). The separation of these populations and research foci is consistent

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with, and may reinforce, the notion that these are distinct sexual categories (Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000; Smiler & Gelman, 2008). However, as one reviewer noted, there are few direct comparisons of sexual behavior among these groups, which is particularly striking given that the basis for grouping is often sexual (Diamond, 2003). This fragmentation of populations and topics has contributed to our poor understanding of boys' sexual development.

Accordingly, we explored the age and sequence by which boys achieve a variety of sexual milestones and their retrospective stability and change in preference for female and male partners. Our examination relied on a normative approach to sexuality. This approach emphasizes that sexual development is experienced by all individuals, and includes a range of sexual behaviors, contextual factors such as relationship status, and beliefs and feelings related to these behaviors (Russell, 2005; Tolman et al., 2003). In particular, we focused on several sexual firsts, or milestones, that typically occur during adolescence such as first kiss, first coitus, and first serious relationship, and the sequence in which first kiss and first coitus occur. We also explored change in attraction to both female and male partners.

We use the term "sex-of-partner" because "sexual orientation" is a poorly defined construct with multiple meanings that are sometimes contradictory (Diamond, 2003; Savin-Williams, 2006; Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002). Further, many boys who identify as "gay" have sexual experiences with girls, and some boys who identify as "straight" have sexual experiences with other boys (Savin-Williams, 1998, 2005; see also King & Hunter, 2004; Malcolm, 2000). The data are too limited to make clear predictions about the sexual behaviors of men who have sex with both sexes, either as a function of their partner's sex (i.e., for female vs. male partners) or in comparison to their peers with only single-sex experiences with females or with males. This suggests that an alternative method that is more specific to sex-of-partner rather than sexual orientation identity might yield important findings, especially during a time period, adolescence, when males engage in their initial sexual behavior with an unstable understanding of what that sexual behavior means for their sexual identity.

Age of sexual milestones

The extant research indicates that relatively few young men have their first *real* kiss or first voluntary coitus prior to age 10. However, by age 18 more than 90% have their first kiss and more than 60% have had experienced penile-vaginal intercourse (CDCP, 2005; Regan et al., 2004; Wells & Twenge, 2005). Data on pre-coital sexual behaviors are relatively rare because researchers often report the percentage of male youth who engage in these activities, but not the age at which they do so (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005; Schwartz, 1999; Shtarkshall, Carmel, Jaffe-Hirschfield, & Woloski-Wruble, 2009; Smith & Udry, 1985). In one exception, undergraduate men reported an average age of 15.4 years at first kiss, 18.3 years at first serious relationship, and 17.3 years at first intercourse (Regan et al., 2004); a community college sample reported a slightly younger age at first kiss (Feldman, Turner, & Araujo, 1999). Male-female kissing games are relatively common (Striepe & Tolman, 2003) but kissing during the first male-male experiences is relatively rare (Savin-Williams, 2004), which suggests that youth may be relatively older at first kiss with another boy. Further, kissing often signifies an ongoing romantic relationship (Rostosky, Galliher, Welsh, & Kawaguchi, 2000) and thus may carry implications for the possible stigmatized meaning of loving another male and of being gay (Dubé & Savin-Williams, 1999; Savin-Williams, 2004). This perspective indicates that first kiss will occur at a relatively older age for boys who have sex with other males.

College men typically report first intercourse at age 16 or 17 years (Regan et al., 2004; Schwartz, 1999; Smiler, Ward, Caruthers, & Merriwether, 2005; Wells & Twenge, 2005). Data from male youth who prefer male partners indicate that sexual encounters with male peers during adolescence are not uncommon. Indeed, summaries of first sex among pre-adult young men concluded that boys with same-sex partners may have their first experiences at a slightly younger age than boys with other-sex partners (Savin-Williams, 1998, 2004). At the same time, many youth who prefer same-sex partners may not have the opportunity to experience sex with other males until they leave home, which suggests a relatively older age of first sexual milestones. These are opposing hypotheses and, taken together, they imply that same-sex behaving youth may be more variable than other-sex behaving youth in their age of sexual milestones.

Behavioral sequence of sexual milestones

Consistent with the dearth of information regarding age of milestone achievement, little data exist regarding the movement from one sexual milestone, such as kissing, to other milestones, especially coitus. The mean ages reported by U.S. adolescents suggest the following sequence for young men in male-female pairings: kissing first briefly and then for a long time, petting (feeling breasts over clothes), heavy petting (feeling breasts under clothes or vagina over clothes), hand-vagina contact, oral sex, and penile-vaginal intercourse (Halpern, Joyner, Udry, & Suchindran, 2000; Rosenthal & Smith, 1997; Smith & Udry, 1985; see Shtarkshall et al., 2009, for an Israeli sample). Indeed, this sequence is assumed in several attempts to predict levels of individual sexual activities (Collins et al., 2004; Martino et al., 2006) and is routinely portrayed in adolescent-preferred media (Kunkel, Eyal, Finnerty, Biely, & Donnerstein, 2005; Lambiase, 2003; Taylor, 2005; Ward, 1995). Evidence indicates that this is the most common sequence; 73% of Dutch adolescents (de Graaf, Vanwesenbeeck, Meijer, Woertman, & Meeus, 2009) and 93% of Norwegian adolescents under age 16 (Jakobsen, 1997) followed this sequence (although the Norwegian sample did not include coital activity). Accordingly, we expected to find that most male youth with a female partner would follow the expected sequence that leads from kissing to intercourse.

Among male youth with same-sex partners, little is known about the sequence of such sexual experiences because the aforementioned studies did not address sex-of-partner or explicitly assess behaviors with other-sex partners. Reports of furtive

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