

Decision-making and other Influences on Adolescents' First Sexual Experience, and its' Impact.

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An Original Research Project and Presentation for Adolescent Psychology Seminar with

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**Abstract**

This study was looking at one's First Sexual Experience, which was defined as only intercourse both for heterosexual and same-sex relationships, and the circumstances surrounding it. Such circumstances were how different decision-making tactics; such as who the person was, or the reasons for initiation; one's emotions as a result of this experience (positive or negative); and the differences that appeared along gender lines. We wanted to know how they all interacted and thus affected how the individual felt about this first person and experience looking back, and if that was more significant than others since, and thus its overall impact on one's view of sex today. Contrary to our hypothesis, most of the subjects did not feel more strongly about this person and 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience overall, when looking back, despite most considering it a positive experience.

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Love and sex are one of the only concepts that are of interest to everyone: it is universal for all, across genders, ages, sexual orientations, races, cultures, and socio-economic classes etc. Benedict Carey is concerned that there is to little researchers know on such critical questions such as “how sexual desire affects judgment ... and how personality and mood affect sexual health” (p.1). One of the problems is that government studies are too infrequent, because they are apprehensive about asking teens sexually based questions. These have been issues since Dr. Kinsey was held up by public threat as a pervert (Carey, 2004), as he stressed the importance of not being ambivalent or squeamish about these topics.

Another issue is that in today's society, since culturally sex is no longer automatically associated with marriage, people feel free to start having it at much younger ages. The Walsh study from 2011 showed that 32.8% of students had engaged in intercourse before 9<sup>th</sup> grade (high school), 64.6% of students had engaged in intercourse by 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and over 30% of youths engage in first intercourse after turning 19. Plus, many have recently adopted the attitude that casual sex and friends-with-benefits, where sex is purely for physical pleasure, is becoming acceptable and normal. In the U.S. nearly ½ of sexually active adolescents have had sex with a casual partner (Jones & Furman, 2010). Also, studies show that there are more potential risks with early sexual activity, as demonstrated by Joyner & Udryin in Jones & Furmen, who found that earlier onset of sexual intercourse is associated with being pressured into sex more often for both genders, depressive characteristics and risky behaviors like violence, substance abuse, smoking, and delinquency (p.147). But no matter what age you start, with each increasing year, the odds of transitioning into having intercourse increases three fold (Sullivan & Hearn, 2008).

If that wasn't enough, in the modern world there are even more prevalent dangers surrounding sexual activity than talked about in the past. “In 2002, American teenagers had the

highest rates of premarital pregnancies in the world,” even with a larger use of contraceptives, and availability of abortions, as well as a rise in STDs, then in the previous years” (*USA Today Newspaper*, 2002, p.151). Even more shocking, is that adolescents and young adults make up  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the STD infections but are only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the entirely sexually active population (Jones & Forman, 2010). In addition, sexual-harassment training is now a mandatory protocol of middle school classrooms, because sexual assault is becoming increasingly common; this has serious consequences on young people, such as binge drinking and suicidal ideation. In fact, out of a poll of 100 high school students nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  said they had had sex while on drugs or alcohol (Thiel, 2005, p.34). This is growing prevalence of adolescent sex, and how much it can affect an adolescent's psyche is why it is so imperative to know what teens are thinking about sex.

In this particular study, I am focusing on an adolescents' "FIRST SEXUAL EXPERIENCE" which refers only to intercourse both for heterosexual and same-sex relationships, and the circumstances surrounding it. These include: partner, intentions, gender, age of onset, whether you were secretive about it or not, how you felt emotionally as a result of this experience and did that change over time, any history of sexual assault, and most importantly how one currently feels about this person and this experience in comparison to others since and how has this 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience impacts one's current views on sex and intimacy. My hypothesis is that overall most people, would consider their 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience as momentous and thus feel a closer bond to that person and so consider that person and that time more "special" than other times after, because since it is a once in a lifetime experience that you could never get back it would stick with you the most. Furthermore, I feel that this would only be the case if after the fact one felt comfortable with the circumstances leading to it, and the reasons for doing it, felt confident about sharing this experience with confidants, and felt positive emotions about it when reflecting back, and I think most will report such positive feelings.

However, if one felt that the situation was not what one wanted and felt regret or other negative emotions as a result, I think one would not look back on this moment or person with extra fondness. I also do think that these effects would be more exaggerated for girls than boys, and would be different for younger vs. older adolescents, in that both earlier adolescents and boys would probably have less strong feelings about the person/experience as compared to girls because they are less mature. In terms of a lasting impression, on one's view of sex, I feel that if overall one felt positively about the experience, one would have an overall more comfortable and positive outlook on sex today; whereas if one's experience was negative one may have a more cautious or tenuous outlook today. Yet, it is important to keep in mind the influence of extenuating factors like sexual assault for example, and how that could change a person's current mindset about sex, regardless of their initial 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience. In the end, we are trying to see how the subtle factors mentioned above combine together, to make an overall impression of one's first sexual experience and how that influences later views on sexual intimacy.

The reasons for targeting adolescents are based on convention; moreover, it is well documented that adolescence is the critical time during which a person experiences sexual development. Freud has always stressed that children are curious about their bodies, from a young age, and constantly have underlying sexual urges. This is because there is an increase in libido due to the raging hormones as a result of the rapid biological changes one experiences during and after puberty and the appearance of secondary sex characteristics, that help to promote sexual attraction. Hence Freud's philosophy that "Love is lust combined with the ordeal of civility" (Austen, p.90), basically says that all intentions are based on sexual motivations as opposed to an emotional bond or romantic love. So with this heightened sexual arousal, adolescents experience lots of anticipation, confusion, uncertainty, and an over

sexualization during this phase (Austen 2003). This makes sexual activity more common during adolescence and these behaviors are more unique to this period as compared with adults.

On the bright side, there are also lots of changes in emotional development during adolescence. Adolescents do “gain abilities in differentiating emotions, begin to recognize that conflicting emotions can occur simultaneously, and become capable of recognizing a range of motivations influencing their behaviors” (Sullivan & Hearn, 2008, p.169). They have changes in their inner view of sexuality and this is in part from a combination of emotional and cognitive growth, as Piaget would say they have entered the formal operational stage and have developed the capacity for abstract reasoning, hypothetical thinking, and a constructed reality, which in turn makes them relate better to others with more empathy and understanding and this can heighten ones emotions associated with interacting on a deeper level. This is why, teens start focusing more on peer relations over family relations and this is most noticeably expressed through sexual intimacy. This makes sense because although risky decisions and casual sex are staples of this time, most sexual activity takes place in the context of relationships during adolescence (Jones & Furman, 2010). A good thing in the sense that many men in intimate relationships, do not carry as much pressure from peers, don't feel as much anxiety about performance, and most importantly don't feel the need to exert masculine dominance upon their partner. Yet, this scenario is not always the case, even in intimate relationships people have reported feeling obligated or pressured into having sex for the first time (Holland et al., 2010).

One of the biggest and most momentous aspects of an adolescent's sexual awakening is experiencing one's first sexual intercourse. But there are a wide number of definitions of “losing your virginity” and what that means to a person, for “different sexual activities may vary in their meaning and significance in adolescent romantic relationships” (Jones & Furman, 2010, p, 159). For example, Thatcher in Austen says that-“to *awaken* means

“to be aroused, to be excited from a torpid or inactive state, to come to life ... awakening involves hesitant movements, slowly becoming more purposeful; a vague awareness growing into an effort to be fully present” (p.71). In a sense one's first sexual experience is the ultimate in physical, biological and sexual awakening; it is the embodiment of desire, acceptance, and acknowledgement of a connection, where you pass through the threshold of sexual discovery.

In light of people viewing “virginity” in many different ways, this in turn may shape their feelings of how they interpret this 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience, and thus its overall impact. In Laura Carpenter's book *Virginity Lost*, “She theorizes that there are four distinct metaphors that encapsulate most experiences with virginity loss” (Walker et al., 2007, p. 1). First, she says there are people (historically women) who view “Virginity as a gift,” where to them virginity represents a valuable and precious aspect of the self and thus should only be shared with someone they deem worthy. These people value having a partner who is also a virgin, thus reciprocating the gift. They frequently use contraceptives and STI prevention and tended to be in more long-term, committed relationships, especially because women usually want to be in a relationship before having sex for the first time. This is in contrast to those that see “Virginity as a stigma,” (historically men) where they view virginity as embarrassing or shameful and they want to get ride of it immediately. This group separates this act from romance/relationships and instead focuses solely on the physical sexual pleasure, and thus they engage in more casual sex, and are less regimented in risk-reduction behaviors. However, “those who endorsed a stigma metaphor tended to shift their views of virginity after they were no longer virgins, later seeing virginity loss as a step in the process of increasing understanding of sexuality and sexual behavior,” (Walker et al., 2007, p.2) which highlights Austen's point that the awakening of sexual urges can sometimes be at odds with our desire for security, which puts us in a precarious position and raises our anxieties surrounding one's first sexual experiences; this speaks to the

impact of this experience as more than just physical and the influence it can have after the fact. People who think of “Virginity as a process of learning and becoming an adult,” are those who see virginity as a normal transition in growing up, and so take a rational and logical approach. They engage in sexual activities in a gradual way, increasing in intensity and frequency until intercourse is the next obvious step, and are usually more prepared overall. Lastly, the group that feel that “Virginity is an act of worship,” viewed sex in an abstinence-only mentality, based on those who view virginity under religious conventions. Here as with the stigmatizers, there are many questions about the extent of how much virginity-ending results in a reinterpretation of their overall beliefs surrounding virginity.

The issue is that these categories are not mutually exclusive and lack fluidity; for a person could have more than one view surrounding such a momentous decision, or not subscribe to the concept of “loosing one’s virginity,” as it is laid out here. Like for a male “loosing one’s virginity” is not about loosing something important or valuable, it is about having gotten ride of their inexperience when all is said and done. They feel that they have crossed a threshold into masculinity and manhood and this sets the platform for their bragging rights. Thus, this makes women a vehicle to reach this achievement, meaning the girl is just a means to an end (Holland et al., 2010). Overall, first sex is such an intense experience because it merges societal opinions on sexuality and the reputations and stigmas that come with that with one’s own personal desire for sexual intimacy (Holland et al., 2010). Therefore, first intercourse has the power to influence later sexual experiences/intimate relationships, by establishing expectations or as Carpenter would say the chosen metaphor shapes one’s “sexual trajectories” throughout life. But, regardless of the discrepancies in the reasons for deciding to engage in first intercourse, all will agree it is a consciously serious occasion for adolescents.



So far the discussion has centered around the cognitive factors affecting sexual decision making as opposed to the emotional motivating factors. Research is now starting to show that emotional affect is not just a side effect of decision making, but that it can play a legitimate role in one's choices. Emotions are a key piece to sexual awakening, because they help us establish priorities, goals for our actions and aid in starting and cultivating relationships. It is known that positive emotions bring about heuristic thinking, based on intuition, expectations, generalizations, and are used for quicker/better decision-making. They show lower amounts of negative outcome predictions; thus, by having more positively anticipated emotions about sex might increase the chances of transitioning from virgin to non-virgin status. On the other hand, negative emotions bring on a more self-conscious awareness that leads to inefficient information processing, and trigger methodical thinking, which is more critical, skeptical, and intentioned. So these factors can play a huge role in choosing to engage in one's first sexual experience (O'Sullivan & Hearn, 2008).

Specifically the O'Sullivan & Hearn, 2008 study looked at what role emotions play in adolescent girls' early sexual experiences? The results showed that girls said they had negative emotions in anticipation of sex. But the girls who had already experienced first sex, reported positive emotions after the fact (except for nervousness). Most described the act as "generally positive, emotionally positive, physically painful, awkward, and negative." But overall, they found that girls' emotion scores were more powerful in predicting transitions to intercourse, than intentions, perceived readiness, and pre-intercourse sexual experiences combined.

Another study in 2010, by Jones & Furman examined the connection between romantic representations, based on either avoidant or anxious type romantic perspectives and how they impact sexual activity, including frequency, rapidity (after how many dates), onset (when first done), and risky sexual behaviors. As a result, the accepted idea is that romantic

representations influence how people approach sexual behaviors including their first sexual experience. However, little exploration has been done on the inverse relationship: that one's past sexual experiences can affect one's current romantic representations and take on relationships. This is one of the main things I am trying to uncover in this study.

One of the major focuses of this inquiry is to look at the gender distinctions in terms of one's 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience. According to the Walsh et al. 2011 study, they found that experience differs based on gender in four main ways. First, women describe it as less positive and more negative than men. Women tended to report fear, anxiety, tension, guilt, embarrassment, sadness, and disgust, and men reported first it as "satisfying, pleasurable, exciting, and relaxing," (Walsh et al., 2011, p.60). In addition, adolescent boys usually say their "first time" was a good thing, although they commonly admit to nerves about performance anxiety (Holland et al., 2010). Also, women more often regretted their first sexual experience as compared to men. Holland et al. thinks that the reason so many women report negative feelings after the fact, is because of the male putting his priority on himself and the reaction of his peers, so he doesn't necessarily focus on pleasing his partner during his 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience.

Next, women are less likely to report physical pleasure and report more pain than men. Walsh et al. says that according to Sprechter et al. (1995) one of the main discrepancies between gender and subjective pleasure comes down to orgasm, and women have notoriously low rates, only 7-12% of orgasm during 1st intercourse. Men also focus a lot on "embodiment, which is explicit in anxieties about getting and maintaining an erection and reaching orgasm during penetration, especially when nervous and unsure of themselves" (Holland et al., 2010, p.355), whereas women do not. Additionally, women more often experience both physical and psychological pressure to engage in first intercourse than their male partners do. Walsh et al. surmises that this may be related to historical and cultural perspectives where men over-

sexualize women, and women downplay their sexuality, which is in direct proportion with Martin (1996), who argues that when girls first start to become sexual creatures they feel embarrassed and uncomfortable and retreat, whereas men feel proud of their sexual development. Lastly, there is typically a difference in terms of the meaning of their first sexual experience and the reason “why” they decided to engage in it. For example, Men more than women said arousal, and women more than men said emotional connection, feeling ready, partner pressure, and nature of the relationship. “Feeling Ready” in this case may be somewhat linked to what Walker was referencing in Gunn and Paikoff (1997) who say that sexual decision making for adolescents is based on the amount of perceived control (p.2).

However, men and women do agree on some things, for example both were found to complain about the disappointment they had based on the reality of their first experience not measuring up to their expectations. Walsh et al. (2011), also took an interest in the findings from Laura Carpenter’s book *Virginity Loss* (mentioned above), saying that both men and women adopt the same metaphors and Carpenter herself even says that men and women “who invoke the same metaphor took strikingly similar approaches to virginity loss, sharing distinctive sets of expectations, preferences, and practices” (p.61). Also, since first-intercourse is indeed desirable and pleasurable for some girls, it speaks to the fact that there are some gender similarities after all. These overall gender differences may be related to the differences in socialization of girls and boys from a young age, or the normative gender roles that frame one’s expectations which may perpetuate the divide based on gender even further (Holland et al., 2010).

In terms of age, there are different developmental contexts for both early and late adolescents surrounding first intercourse, even though physically the act is the same. Based on Erikson’s life stage theory for younger adolescents (ages 13-16), identity discovery is the major developmental task, and so things like intimacy, relationships and procreation are not yet a

priority; in contrast, for older adolescents (ages 18-25) attaining intimacy and romantic interpersonal relationships with others is the major focus. When focusing on older adolescents the Walsh et al. 2010 data shows that older adolescents have a more positive experience, because they find it more pleasurable, they show increased emotional connection, and have much less guilt, anxiety and regret after their 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience overall. Findings have also suggested, that men and women share more similarities in opinions about sex, as they get older. The study showed that only two main gender differences persisted from younger to older adolescents. They are that women always expressed emotional connection and pain more than men did. As we learned in class from Martin (1996), as girls age they have more agency and confidence about their sexual activity. Clearly there are intense changes in the nature of romantic relationships as a function of age and maturity across genders, and this may effect the reasons for choosing to engage in first sex, how one interprets the experience, and how it impacts future sexual relations.

### **Method**

***Participants:*** This study consisted of a small sample of 20 random Columbia University undergraduate upperclassmen (juniors and seniors). There were 7 boys and 13 girls, all heterosexual, but one girl did admit that she was curious about the female sex as well. These participants represented students of multiple races, ethnicities, places of origin, and socio-economic statuses etc. They participated in this study anonymously, voluntarily, and with no incentives, but were aware that the study would help out an Adolescent Psychology Project.

***Materials:*** The only material needed was the 1<sup>st</sup> Sexual Experience Survey. This questionnaire, asked questions about some of the circumstances surrounding the subject's first intercourse, and its further impact. This survey was made specifically for this study, but did incorporate questions from previously made, similar surveys like the "Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors Survey" made for the Maret School students in Washington D.C., in 2004, of which many of the questions in

that particular survey were taken directly from the "National Health and Social Life Survey," which is a large-scale study of health and behavior conducted in the U.S.

***Design/ Procedure:*** The subjects simply had to fill out the one 1<sup>st</sup> Sexual Experience Survey, on their own time. From this the answers were coded using numbers to represent each answer systematically, and were then entered into an excel spreadsheet, tallied and the interesting results were put into frequency tables, to then be analyzed. All information is completely confidential.

### **Results**

In analyzing the results, we found that there were no participants who were still virgins. The current mean age of these students was 22 years old. This experience was most often occurring between their junior and senior year of high school. The ages at first-intercourse ranged from 15-21 years old with a mean age of loss at 17.4 years, which means that most people were giving a retrospective account, dating back about five years. Twelve subjects shared this experience with a significant other, 7 with a friend/acquaintance, and only 1 with a stranger (see Table 1). Eleven knew the person from the same school, 1 from their neighborhood, 5 through people that they already knew, 2 through the Internet and 1 at a random party. For 8 subjects it was a mutual 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience for both them and their partner. All but one participant said that they were intimate with this person again; 5 people said it was within one day, 9 said within one week, 2 said within one month, and 2 said within the year. Only 25% of the participants said they didn't feel closer to the person after the act, 1 reported feeling neutral, and the rest reported that they felt closer for a variety of reasons (see Table 2). In terms of staying in touch, 7 said not at all, and the rest said they did, ranging anywhere from a casual friend (8 people), to still having been intimate with them from time to time (2), to still in a relationship with them (3). Every participant reported using protection; notably, 17 said they used condoms, 7 said they used birth control pills (all of which were in combination with condom use). Seven subjects did not tell

there parents about the incident, and 5 more on top of that didn't tell their parents, but they found out anyway, 4 told their mom, 1 told their dad, and 1 told both. This is in contrast to 4 who had told siblings, 17 told friends, 2 told their doctors, and only 1 person told no one at all.

When it came to the circumstances surrounding the event, all said it was intentional, but 14 said spontaneous vs. 5 who said planned. The reasons people gave for initiating first sex were: 9 ready/curious, 3 in love, 3 felt pressured for some reason, 3 were under the influence of drugs/alcohol, and 1 thought they wanted to, but didn't after all. In rating their emotions immediately after the act, approximately 11 people reported positive feelings, almost everyone else reported mixed (both positive, negative, and unsure) feelings, and only 1 subject reported solely negative feelings. When asked how they felt sometime later, 8 felt the same, 7 now felt more positive feelings, 3 felt mixed, and again only 1 person still reported negative emotions (see table/figure 3). All but 20% admitted to reminiscing about the person, but with scattered feelings. Ninety percent of the subjects are currently sexually active (within the past 3 months). Twenty-five percent, all of which were girls, reported having been sexually assaulted (see table 4). When asked if they felt more strongly about this partner than ones since: 8 said no, 2 said yes, and 9 said they did but not anymore. When asked if this first sex was more "special" than other times since: 75% said no and the other 25% said yes for various reasons. Lastly, when asked if their views on sex had changed since their 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience, 6 said no, and the other 14 said yes for many different reasons.

### **Discussion**

This study found many notable overall trends about people's 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experiences, and interesting differences based on gender; however, there were no differences seen in terms of age of onset, since most people seemed to be in the same range and thus there is no basis for comparison. Some of the results were in line with the hypothesis and some were not what was

expected, and will be discussed further. First, there were more similarities between boys and girls than I had originally expected, and this result is probably due to the fact that there was a fairly consistent age of onset around middle adolescence, and this fits with findings of Walsh et al.'s 2010 study, that men and women share more and more similarities, as they age, and had the ages of onset been more varied I would have expected more pronounced differences between the sexes. There were some notable differences however, for example, boys tended to lose their virginity with a less significant person, as compared to most girls who shared this experience with a significant other. In addition, girls tended to report feeling closer to their partner after the fact than boys did, which probably depends on who the partner is. Boys most often reported feeling proud even over happy, since boys usually feel that this is the barrier to manhood, and most girls felt more confused and conflicted, possibly due to double standards and different gender socialization that was talked about in the Holland et al. study above. Only boys reported not being fully in control of the situation, due to seduction, alcohol, or not being able to control their urges. Girls also admitted to reminiscing about their first partner much more than boy. With these factors combined, it highlights the trend that boys overall tend to be less attached or invested in the person and experience, whether or not it was an important person or not. The biggest distinction between the boys and the girls, were that no boys had been sexually assaulted and 5 girls (25%) had been (see figure 4). I think this is an important finding because, that number seems unfortunately high but it does back up the recent data that sexual harassment/assault is becoming more and more common and that is sad especially considering most of these girls are only 22. I think part of the reason that this is on the rise is due in part to oversexualization in the media, this earlier onset of first-sex initiation, and an overall lacksidical view of sex in today's society.

The first overall noteworthy finding was that none of the 20 heterosexual participants were virgins and that everyone had used protection, usually condoms and birth control pills; this may be due to the current culture where the stigma of sex is practically gone and instead sex is being promoted and expected, which makes contraceptives more accessible. Next, the average age of onset in this study was 17.4 yrs, much in line with the current, nationwide statistic that the average first age is 17.4 years for women and 16.9 for men (Walsh et al., 2011, p.59). Next, all but one shared this experience with someone they knew, and more than half of those were with a significant other, which is also in line with adolescents experiencing most sexual activity while in a relationship. Most people either went to the same school with the person, or had mutual friends, which fits into the social psychology mold where the familiarity and frequency effects come into play; but, 2 people reported meeting this person on the internet, which shows how today's society is interacting more and more digitally, and this is something to keep in mind for future generations. All but one said that they were sexually intimate with this person again, and this is most likely due in combination to the fact that most were already in relationships, or that most knew the person prior and continued to see them on a regular basis. Then many reported that they were intimate with this person fairly quickly after the first time. But what was interesting about this particular finding, was that the amount of time between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> times was not related to how positively or negatively the person felt about the experience, for even the people who were confused, ambivalent, nervous etc. still were intimate with this person soon after, typically within a week or so. Practically, 75% of the participants reported feeling closer to the person after the fact (see figure 2), which was in line with my hypothesis. This may be because many that were in a relationship felt that it took the relationship to the next level; in fact, 3 people are still in that same relationship. It also may be because many felt they had shared a momentous occasion together, but this was usually only for people who were both virgins at



the time; yet this still points to the magnitude of importance that people placed on this experience. Only 20% of the participants told their parents, usually only after some time had passed, and this seems normal for adolescents since the familial relationship is usually strained and more emphasis is put on the approval from peers instead. This would make sense because interestingly all but one participant told a friend of some kind, regardless of their feelings.

Another notable finding was that every subject reported the event as being intentional whether it was spontaneous or not, even if they felt pressured, were doing it for the wrong reasons, or under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This is good in the sense that all took responsibility for their actions, regardless of how they felt about the outcome, and it seemed to be something that people generally wanted to do, typical of adolescence. In terms of Carpenter's virginity scripts, half the subjects said they were ready and curious, and so they would be classified as those who think of "Virginity as a process of learning and becoming an adult," while, a few said they were in love, and would thus be adopting her "Virginity as a gift" theme. In addition, the rest who either said they felt pressured mostly by societal expectations, or used alcohol to mask their anxiety to go through with it were adopting the "Virginity as a stigma" motif. It is extremely important that only one person reported purely negative feelings after the fact, where 65% had fully positive feelings, and the rest were confused (see figure 3). This is to be expected after such an intense experience, or in thinking about all the possible ramifications of this act, and these mixed feelings tended to become positive soon after having time to process the incident; yet, although this was what I had expected in my hypothesis, I am nevertheless personally happy for the larger weight that these results hold. Another robust finding was that 90% of the subjects are currently sexually active, which proves that this was not a traumatic experience, and that even if there were negative feelings or factors surrounding this

incident that it did not deter them from future sexual activity, and that one's first sexual experience is a necessary milestone to be crossed in one's path of sexual exploration.

In the end however, when it came down to the culmination of these questions that directly answer the inquiry of the hypothesis, in many ways the results did not support it. When asked if they participants felt more strongly about this 1<sup>st</sup> partner than others since 90% said no or not anymore. In addition, when asked if this act was more "special" than other times since 75% said no and the 25% who did say yes, all of which were girls, most were either still with the person, hadn't been with anyone else, or had extenuating circumstances like sexual assault. So, it seems as though whether or not someone had positive or negative emotions (most had positive) as a result of losing their virginity, this had no bearing on how much they valued the partner and the experience in their current lives. On a final note, in terms of the impact that this 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience had on current ideas of sex, by asking them if their views had changed or not since that first time, only 25% said that their view had not changed. The other 75% said that their view had changed for a number of difference reasons, including: sex is not what they had expected, they now understand it better and have more experience, they know who they do and don't want to have sex with based on how comfortable they feel with the person, that even though the first time was great after being raped one is much more anxious/cautious and thus take sex more seriously, they realize that chemistry does not mean love, and lastly that they now realize sex isn't such a big deal and that it feels good, so have fun. This last point was so poignantly summarized when a boy said, "Sex is a pastime, not an event. Live it up!"

However, there were many limitations in this study. The Sullivan & Hearn 2008 study had similar ones including, "Forced choice series of emotions in survey, small sample, reporting may have been in a "socially desirable fashion, an issue that must be taken into account for all self-report studies of highly sensitive topics" (p.177). In addition, there were not equal numbers

of girls and boys, with boys being specifically under-represented. As well as the fact that all participants in this study were heterosexual, so we do not know if these trends apply to same-sex situations; we also did not control for race, ethnicity, SES etc, and this is also highlighted by that fact that the sample was made up of only Columbia students. This was also a retrospective study, so people could of had memory biases etc., or just may have been so removed from the situation or that they weren't confident in their answers, and a before and after study of this topic would be a great way to update it, because then you could take into account emotions before and how they changed after. Plus, I am not a trained professional in the field of sex and relationship counseling, and I did not do a full blown statistical analysis to check for significance factors, and thus was only drawing on my limited knowledge and overall large-scale patterns and trends, to draw these conclusions, and checking more thoroughly for significance scores would be the next step in the process, were someone to try to replicate this study in the future.

### **Conclusions**

In sum, when reviewing the data there seems to be a common trend that those whose 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience was a positive thing, with someone they were comfortable with, and one was comfortable with the reasons for doing it, currently have a more positive and relaxed/less anxious view about sex today. Additionally, they utilize the many good things it has to offer like pleasure, and learning experiences, such as physically becoming more advanced and having a greater understanding of your and your partner's body. This, is in contrast to, those who had a more confusing, tumultuous or negative experience, and felt that they did it for the wrong reasons, who now tend to view sex in a more cautious and self respecting way, which is manifested in them being much more picky about partners, and only being able to enjoy it when it is with someone they actually like and feel comfortable with. However, it is important to note also, that in some cases, as with sexual assault, even if the person's 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience was

positive, it can be tainted by later ones, which has a huge effect on one's current views, understandably so. With all this being said, in my opinion, although there are some trends that seem to be loosely followed, overall it is a totally individual and personal experience and everyone interprets it differently; but it does show how this momentous occasion does subtly influence later views and attitudes towards sex overall, even if people don't think that specific person or incident was that impactful, and I think that is not something to be taken lightly. In future, I would be interested to see if you tracked how someone felt in anticipation of one's 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience and compared it to how they felt after, and then used that information to see if it affected the trends we found on impact and how people view sex since that first experience.

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**Appendix Part One: Questionnaire****First Sexual Experience Survey**

This survey is for my Adolescent Psychology Seminar. All responses will be anonymous and confidential. In this survey, the questions are based on the first person with whom you had an intimate relationship. Thank you so much for participating.

Note: For this survey the definition of 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience or intimate relationship refers to intercourse, both for heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

1. **Your Age:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Your School Year:** \_\_\_\_\_
2. **Your Gender: Male or female (circle answer)**
3. **Your Sexual Orientation:** \_\_\_\_\_
4. **Was the person with whom you had your first sexual experience:  
the same sex or opposite sex (circle one).**
5. **Who was your 1st sexual experience with? Check one.**
  - I am still a virgin
  - Spouse
  - Significant other (boyfriend/girlfriend)
  - Best friend
  - Friend
  - Acquaintance
  - Stranger
  - Someone you paid to have sex with
  - Someone who paid you to have sex with them
  - Other-explain: \_\_\_\_\_
6. **How did you know the person with whom you had your 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience?**
  - They went to my same school
  - They lived in my neighborhood
  - Through a family friend
  - Friend of a friend
  - I went to camp with this person
  - A coworker
  - I met them on the internet
  - I met them out (bar/club etc).
  - Other-explain: \_\_\_\_\_
7. **Was it your partner's first time also?**
  - No
  - Yes
  - I don't know

8. Were you ever sexually intimate with this same person after your 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience with him/her?
- yes
  - no
9. If you answered yes to the above question, approximately how soon after the 1<sup>st</sup> time? \_\_\_\_\_ If you answered no, how soon after that 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience did you have sex again? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Was your relationship with this person closer after your 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience? If so why?
- No, not really
  - Yes, because
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
11. Do you still keep in touch with that person? If yes, in what capacity?
- No
  - Yes, because
- \_\_\_\_\_
12. How old (age and grade level) were you when you had your 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience?
- \_\_\_\_\_
13. Did you use protection? What kind? Mark all that apply?
- I did not use protection
  - Birth control pill
  - Condoms
  - Diaphragm
  - Pulling out
  - Other-explain: \_\_\_\_\_
14. Did you tell your parent(s)? If so who/when? Mark all that apply
- No-no one
  - Yes- mom only-right after
  - Yes-mom only-a while after
  - Yes-dad only-right after
  - Yes-dad only-a while later
  - Yes-both-right after
  - Yes-both-a while after
  - No but they found out anyway

15. Who else did you tell? Mark all that apply.

- No one
- Legal guardian
- Sibling-one
- Siblings-multiple
- Best friend
- Other friend-one
- Other friends-multiple
- Doctor/gynecologist
- Other-explain: \_\_\_\_\_

16. If you are still a virgin, why is that the case? Mark the most important reason.

- I am in a profession that doesn't allow me to engage in sex (nun, priest etc.)
- I am waiting for marriage
- I have pledged abstinence
- I am not interested
- I haven't found the right person
- I am scared
- I'm afraid of getting STD's
- I'm afraid of getting pregnant
- I don't want people to think I'm promiscuous or ruin my image
- I don't want people to judge me
- I have tried many times and all have been unsuccessful
- If my parents ever found out, I would be in big trouble
- Performance anxiety
- I think sex outside of a committed relationship is unacceptable and I have yet to have such a relationship
- Other-explain: \_\_\_\_\_

17. What were the circumstances surrounding your 1st sexual experience? Mark the most important one.

- Was it intentional and planned/scheduled
- Was it intentional but spontaneous
- Was it accidental
- Was it unintentional in that you didn't want it to happen
- I was seduced by the person
- I seduced the person
- Other-explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**18. Why did you decide to engage in this 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience with this person? Mark the most important reason.**

- **Wedding night**
  - **Wanted to get pregnant**
  - **I was in love with the person**
  - **I felt I was ready/curious**
  - **My hormones were raging and I couldn't control myself/physical pleasure**
  - **I wanted to have sex before a specific age or date**
  - **I wanted to impress my peers/felt pressure by society**
  - **I felt pressure from the person**
  - **I didn't want to seem like a prude/or a sissy**
  - **I was embarrassed about being a virgin and didn't want to be one anymore**
  - **I was forced/coerced**
  - **I didn't realizing it was happening until it was too late**
  - **I thought I wanted to at the time, but I actually didn't**
  - **It had a been a long time coming with this person**
  - **Was under the influence of drugs or alcohol; so my inhibitions were down, and this made me less nervous (good thing)**
  - **Was under the influence of drugs or alcohol; but I didn't know what I was doing, and wasn't able to make an informed decision (bad thing)**
  - **Don't know/don't remember**
  - **Other-explain:**
- 

**19. How did you feel immediately after this 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience? Mark the most important ONE.**

- **Happy**
- **Relieved**
- **Proud**
- **Sad/upset**
- **Mad**
- **Confused**
- **Nervous**
- **Anxious**
- **Frustrated**
- **Overwhelmed**
- **Regretful**
- **Guilty/ashamed**
- **Other-explain:** \_\_\_\_\_



**20. Did you feel the same after you had time to process the experience? If no how did you feel? Mark the most important ONE.**

- Same as right after
- Happy
- Relieved
- Proud
- Sad
- Mad
- Confused
- Nervous
- Anxious
- Frustrated
- Overwhelmed
- Regretful
- Guilty/ashamed
- Over-explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**21. Today do you ever think back or reminisce about this person/experience?**

- Yes
- No

**22. If you answered yes to the above question, what feeling do you feel when you think about it?**

- Bad
- Good
- Nostalgia
- Mixed
- Other-explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**23. Are you currently sexually active (within the past 3 months).**

- Yes
- No

**24. Have you ever been sexually assaulted?**

- No
- Yes

**25. If you answered yes to question above, was it before or after your 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience?**

- before
- after

**26. Do you feel more strongly about this person with whom you had your 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience than your other sexual partners since?**

- No
- Yes
- I did for a long time, but not anymore
- Other-explain:

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**27. Do you feel that 1st sexual experience with this person was more special than any other time since? If yes, why?**

- No
- Yes, because

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**28. How have your views on sex changed since your 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience.**

- They haven't changed at all.
- Yes, they have changed (please explain how on the lines below).

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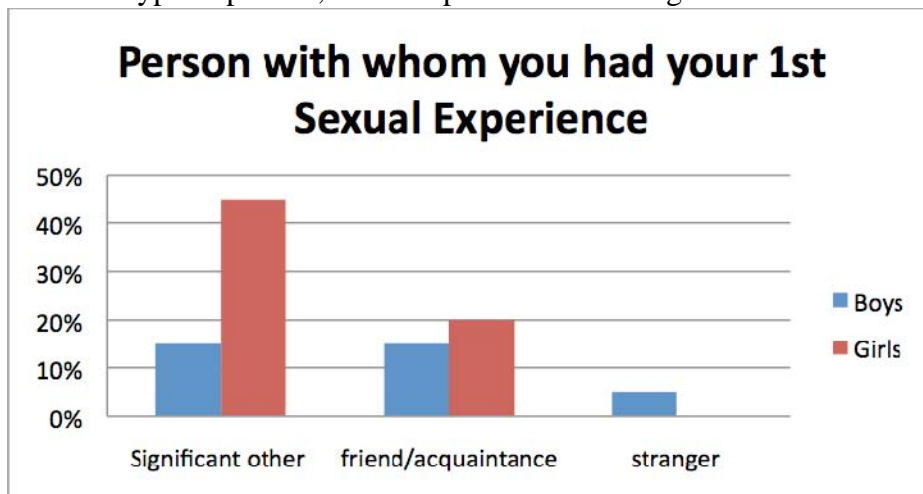
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**Appendix Part Two: Tables and Charts**

Person with whom you shared your 1 <sup>st</sup> sexual experience	Boys	Girls
Significant other	3/20 (15%)	9/20 (45%)
Friend/acquaintance	3/20 (15%)	4/20 (20%)
Stranger	1/20 (5%)	0/20

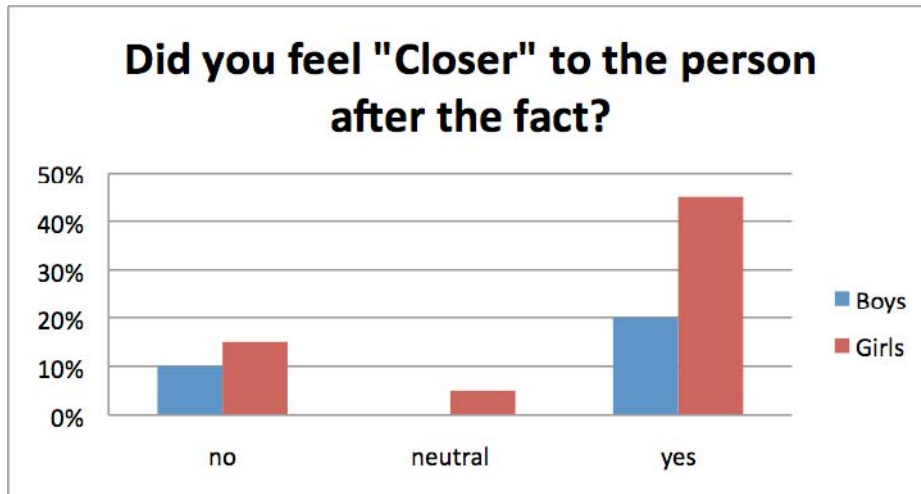
**Table # 1:** This Table shows the breakdown of the number of people who shared their 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience with what type of partner, and is separated based on gender.



**Figure #1:** This Chart shows the breakdown of the percentages of people who shared their 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience with what type of partner, and is separated by gender.

Did you feel "Closer" to the person after the fact?	Boys	Girls
no	2/20 (10%)	3/20 (15%)
neutral	0/20	1/20 (5%)
yes	4/20 (20%)	9/20 (45%)

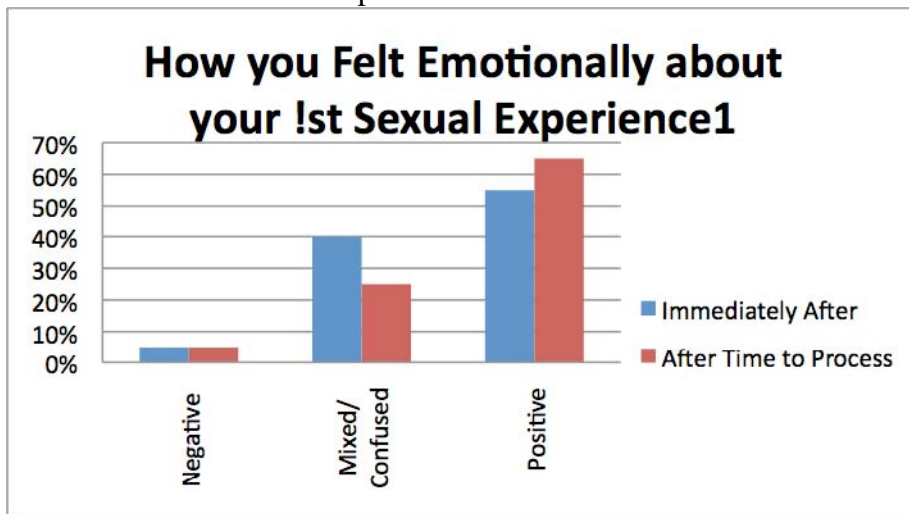
**Table # 2:** This Table shows the breakdown of the number of people and how they felt about the closeness to their partner after the fact, and is separated by gender.



**Figure # 2:** This Chart shows the breakdown of the percentages of people and how they felt about the closeness to their partner after the fact, and is separated based on gender.

How you felt emotionally about your 1 <sup>st</sup> sexual experience	Negative	Mixed/Confused	Positive
Immediately after	1/20 (5%)	8/20 (40%)	11/20 (55%)
After time to process	1/20 (5%)	5/20 (25%)	13/20 (65%)

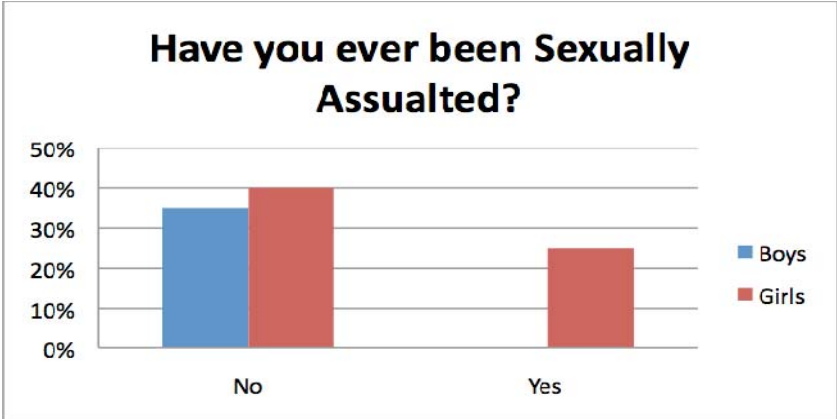
**Table # 3:** This Table shows the breakdown of the number of people and how they felt emotionally about their 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience, and is separated based on how they felt immediately after vs. after some time to process it.



**Figure # 3:** This Chart shows the breakdown of the percentages of people and how they felt emotionally about their 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience, and is separated based on how they felt immediately after vs. after some time to process it.

Have you ever been Sexually Assaulted?	Boys	Girls
No	7/20 (35%)	8/20 (40%)
Yes	0/20	5/20 (25%)

**Table # 4:** This Table shows the breakdown of the number of people who have ever been sexually assaulted either before or after their 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience, and is separated based on gender.



**Figure # 4:** This Chart shows the breakdown of the number of people who have ever been sexually assaulted either before or after their 1<sup>st</sup> sexual experience, and is separated based on gender.