

7-14-2017

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## Recommended Citation

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Women's Sexual Initiation: The Impact of Gender Roles and Relationship Type

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A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology with an emphasis in Clinical-Community Psychology

August 2017

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### **Abstract**

Sexual script theory is the theoretical foundation for understanding how sexual interactions are navigated, including sexual initiation. Sexual initiation occurs when an individual conveys interest in sexual activity when sexual behaviors are not yet in progress. Past research has demonstrated that women initiate sex less frequently than men in other-sex relationships, perhaps due to traditional sexual scripts. The current research literature lacks data on sexual initiation among women in same-sex relationships. This study investigated the impact of perceived gender roles on women's sexual initiation, the role of partner sex on women's initiation behaviors, if perceived gender roles account for initiation behaviors over and above the impact of sexual desire, and the associated wellness benefits of sexual initiation. Women's sexual initiation behaviors in their current relationship were investigated in two ways, through retrospective reports (N = 351; 242 with male partners and 109 with female partners) and a two-week daily diary (N = 60; 29 with male partners and 31 with female partners). Results indicated that nonsexual and sexual gender role beliefs had no impact on sexual initiation for women across relationship types. Women reported fairly balanced sexual initiation with their partners, with women in same-sex relationships reporting higher rates of initiation. Women in other-sex relationships used a higher proportion of direct initiation strategies than women in same-sex relationships. Comparisons between the subsample that participated in both portions of the study indicated reporting consistency across methodology. The results are discussed in terms of furthering understanding of how women's sexual initiation looks across relationship types and the impact on current sexual scripts.

### Women's Sexual Initiation: The Impact of Gender Roles and Relationship Type

Traditional gender roles provide powerful messages for how individuals understand and behave within their world. The traditional roles within dominant North American culture dictate the normative way in which each gender should experience emotion, choose a career, and engage in interpersonal relationships (Greene & Faulkner, 2005; Rubin, Peplau, & Dunkel-Schetter, 1980). Additionally, the traditional gender roles inform sexual scripts which, in turn, provide specific guidelines of how individuals should engage in sexual relationships. A critical aspect of the sexual relationship is whether an individual chooses to initiate desired sexual activity. Sexual initiation is defined as conveying, verbally or nonverbally, an interest in or desire for sexual activity, when sexual behaviors are not currently in progress (Simms & Byers, 2013). Currently, the traditional gendered scripts around initiating sexual activity are limiting because they restrict women's sexual options and agency, including the ability to initiate wanted activity. Research has demonstrated that initiating sexual activity is associated with a number of positive benefits, including sexual and relationship satisfaction (Lawrance, Byers, & Cohen, 2011; Montesi, Fauber, & Gordon, 2010).

#### **Gender Roles & Sexual Scripts**

Traditional gender roles proscribe behaviors and personal qualities that men and women should possess to typify the socially-defined masculine or feminine ideal. Gender roles assert proscriptions across varying levels of interaction from individual, relational, and societal context (Ashmore, Del Boca, & Bilder, 1995). Traditional gender roles describe appropriately-gendered men as assertive, career-oriented, serving as head of the household, and lacking emotional capacity. In contrast,

women are stereotypically viewed as the opposite of men—passive, focused on domestic duties and caregiving, and emotional (Greene & Faulkner, 2005; Rubin et al., 1980). The traditional gender roles promote the idea that it is more acceptable for men, as opposed to women, to behave with assertion and confidence. Because traditional gender roles dictate how men and women should function, these assertions impact romantic and sexual relationships (Greene & Faulkner, 2005). Traditional gender roles inform sexual scripts, which further detail how interactions are navigated.

Sexual scripts are “mutually shared conventions that guide actors to enact a sexual situation interdependently” (Dworkin, Beckford, & Ehrhardt, 2007, pg. 269). Simon and Gagnon (1984, 1987) first put forth the sexual script theory and discussed the cultural scenarios in which these scripts are embedded. Sexual script theory asserts that societal norms of behavior describe “the who, what, where, when, why, and how of sexual interactions” (Dworkin et al., 2007, p. 270). Therefore, sexual script theory posits that sexual interactions between heterosexual partners are guided by culture’s imbedded gender role beliefs and impact how sex is navigated. The research on sexual scripts describes three interrelated levels at which sexual scripts manifest—cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic (Gagnon, 1990; Laumann & Gagnon, 1995; Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1987). The levels of scripts describe sexual behaviors across a macro and micro level. The cultural level is shared between all individuals within a given culture. These scripts result from a variety of institutional and social sources that represent longstanding beliefs about what is valued within sexual encounters. The interpersonal level of sexual scripts describes how an individual translates and modifies the general cultural scenarios within a specific interpersonal context. Interpersonal

interactions require the individual to negotiate their own needs and wants, with the needs and wants of their partner. Finally, the intrapsychic elements of sexual scripts are characterized by unique aspects of each person, such as fantasies and desires (Dworkin et al., 2007; Gagnon, 1990; Laumann & Gagnon, 1995; Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1987). All three levels of sexual scripting are involved in sexual conduct; however, each level may not be equally relevant across situations (Sakaluk, Todd, Milhausen, & Lachowsky, 2014).

### **Sexual Scripts & Initiation**

The traditional cultural sexual script as it relates to sexual initiation denotes that men are the initiators of sexual activity, whereas women are the restrictors of sexual activity (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Men are expected to always want or desire sex and, often, their sex drive is characterized as unrestrained. Women are expected to be passive and have limited sexual experience and less sexual drive than men (LaPlante, McCormick, & Brannigan, 1980; Wiederman, 2005). The woman's role is either to meet or limit her partner's sexual needs, often being seen as gatekeepers to keep men's sex drive in check. As a function of being gatekeepers of sexual activity, women are often believed to engage in token resistance, the belief that women initially refuse sex when they actually intend to engage in sex as a way of seeming less sexually willing or eager because sexual eagerness might be viewed as unacceptable for the woman (Muehlenhard & Rodgers, 1998).

Script adherence can shift over time as the cultural zeitgeist changes. Within Western culture, there is some evidence that sexual scripts may be changing for heterosexual women and men. Current widely-held cultural scripts for men hold more

traditionally “female” values, such as a desire for an emotional connection, than scripts in the past; while current widely-held cultural scripts for women hold more traditionally “male” values, such as desired sexual autonomy, than in the past (Ortiz-Torres, Williams, & Ehrhardt, 2003; Segal, 1995). The growing evidence of an emergence of more egalitarian scripts has also included greater instances of women initiating sex (Markle, 2008; Menard & Cabrera, 2011; Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010). Overall, pleasure-seeking and sexual assertiveness have become more common in women (Kamen, 2003; Ortiz-Torres et al., 2003; O’Sullivan & Byers, 1992; Segal, 1995).

Although there is evidence of greater flexibility within sexual initiation behaviors, traditional scripts and roles continue to dominate heterosexual relations (Crawford & Popp, 2003; Hynie, Lydon, Cote, & Wiener, 1998; Masters, Casey, Wells & Morrison, 2013; Ortiz-Torres et al., 2003; Sakaluk et al., 2014; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Simms & Byers, 2013). It is important to continue to conduct research aimed at understanding individual’s scripts around sexual initiation to better understand the current impact of traditional sexual scripts. Additionally, the majority of sexual script data have been collected on White samples. Continued research on sexual scripts and sexual initiation will improve the understanding of similarities and differences within and between cultural groups.

### **Traditional Sexual Scripts are Problematic**

Gender roles and sexual scripts have a purpose within culture; they provide guidelines and a general description of interactions. Sexual scripts can assist in alleviating anxiety around heterosexual behaviors, because individuals have a similar, mutual understanding of how an interaction should occur (Wiederman, 2005). Despite

the adaptive functions of gender roles and sexual scripts, they can also be problematic and harmful at times.

The traditional sexual scripts, which dictate men as sexually assertive and women as sexually passive, promote a sexual double standard. The sexual double standard reinforces different expectations and consequences for the sexual behavior of men and women, with a cultural proscription that it is more acceptable for men to have assertive, active sex lives than it is for women (Greene & Faulkner, 2005; Rubin et al., 1980). If women go against the traditional scripts, they are often subjected to greater scrutiny than men engaging in similar behavior. Women often express a belief in a sexual dichotomy—a “good girl/bad girl” dichotomy—where “good girls” are serially monogamous and “bad girls” are sexually promiscuous (Bowleg, Lucas, & Tschann, 2004, p. 71). There is often a fear of being stigmatized or treated negatively if women demonstrate an interest in sex or express sexual desire (Sanchez et al., 2012a; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomason, 1996). Even when women express a personal belief in egalitarian sexual attitudes, they still report fear of negative evaluation from others if they engage in casual sex (Conley, Ziegler, & Moors, 2011; Milhausen & Herold, 1999). Overall, women perceive less positive social norms around sexual initiation than men (Masters et al., 2013). Women are given clear messages about what it means to be feminine.

The “men initiate, women restrict” script is also problematic because women are not afforded the opportunity to initiate sex, restricting the benefits that can occur from this choice. Some basic benefits of initiation include potentially engaging in sex when and how it is wanted. As initiators, men are provided the more directive role, deciding

when sexual initiation occurs and often orchestrating the sexual interaction (Sanchez, Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Good, 2012b). In contrast, women are often discouraged from making sexual decisions based upon their own desire or interests (Wiederman, 2005).

Lastly, the traditional sexual scripts are problematic as they neglect the existence of any sexual relationship that does not fit in the dyadic-heterosexual framework. These scripts provide no allowance for women in same-sex relationships, among many others, and reinforce a cultural message that non-heterosexual relationships are deviant and do not warrant acceptance.

### **Sexual Initiation**

The sexual scripts research highlights the differences in sexual initiation behaviors for men and women. Sexual initiation occurs when an individual conveys, verbally or nonverbally, an interest for a sexual activity when sex behaviors are not in progress (Simms & Byers, 2013). Sexual initiation is a critical component of overall sexual activity, and is characterized by observed differences between genders. Throughout North American culture, men initiate and lead sexual activities more than women (Byers & Heinlein, 1989; Curtis, Eddy, Ashdown, Feder, & Lower, 2012; O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992; Sanchez et al., 2012b; Seal, Smith, Coley, Perry, & Gamez, 2008;. Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010).

### **Initiation Behaviors**

Initiation of sexual behaviors is broad and can encompass a number of verbal, nonverbal, direct, and indirect means. Examples of some initiation behaviors include taking one's partner to a secluded area, directly asking for sex, removing clothing, and paying one's partner a compliment about their physical attractiveness (Curtis et al., 2012;

Greer & Buss, 1994; Jesser, 1978; O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Initiation is generally understood from a four-quadrant model in which the behavior is described as direct-verbal, indirect-verbal, direct-nonverbal, or indirect-nonverbal (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999; McCormick, 1987). The following initiation strategies provide examples of the varying types of behaviors: direct-verbal (e.g. "I want to have sex with you."), indirect-verbal (e.g. "Do you have a condom?"), direct-nonverbal (e.g. touching partner sexually), indirect-nonverbal (e.g. tickling) (Humphreys & Newby, 2007; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Direct strategies are thought to be straightforward and unambiguous, whereas the intent or goal of indirect strategies may be ambiguous.

### **Measurement of Sexual Initiation**

Researchers have gained information regarding sexual initiation behaviors through various methodologies, including retrospective self-report and self-monitoring methods. Retrospective studies ask participants to report on past sexual initiation behaviors, either through open-ended response or selecting from a list of behaviors (Greer & Buss, 1994; Jesser, 1978; McCormick, 1979). A limitation of these studies is the possibility of hindsight bias and misremembering.

The self-monitoring, or diary, method is a frequently used methodology in current sexual initiation research. Participants are asked to complete daily information related to sexual activity, with a specific focus on what the participants or their partners did to initiate sexual activity. The qualitative information from these studies revealed the presence of verbal direct, verbal indirect, nonverbal direct, and nonverbal indirect initiation strategies (Curtis et al., 2012; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). The self-

monitoring studies contribute to the overall literature on sexual initiation by providing in vivo information about individuals in relationships as well as recent, updated descriptions of initiation behaviors. Previous studies collected detailed information on successful and unsuccessful initiation, which adds nuance to the current understanding of sexual initiation behaviors. However, the method raises a question of whether the data collection itself changes the behavior. Given the limitations of the different forms of data collection, it would be advantageous to combine the two methodologies to increase understanding of sexual initiation.

Overall, these studies are limited by largely White, college student samples, which may impact generalizability. A modern, diverse sample of participants reporting on sexual initiation behaviors would provide additional needed information to the literature. Additionally, sexual initiation studies have yet to be completed with participants in same-sex relationships. It is imperative for researchers to continue to diversify study populations to better understand sexual initiation.

### **Gender differences in methods of initiation**

In addition to the diversity of ways one can initiate sexual activity, research posits that the type of initiation strategies used can look different between genders. Perper and Weis (1987) asked 77 women to write essays describing how they would “seduce ... a man” (pg. 455). Proceptive (pre-initiation) signals, the function of which was presumably to evaluate their partner's level of sexual interest, were described in 87% of the essays. Some of these proceptive signals included offering a drink or paying a compliment. Such a pattern may occur because the costs of unsuccessful initiation are higher for women, due to ascribed negative traits to sexually assertive women, and

therefore women have a higher investment in “testing” how sexual initiation will go. The experience of “what is initiation” may begin earlier in the process for women than men, but caution should be used given this research is nearly 30 years old and it did not directly compare men and women in terms of use of proceptive signals.

In their self-monitoring study of young adults, Vannier and O’Sullivan (2010) found a significant gender difference in the use of nonverbal strategies. Men were more likely than women to use indirect-nonverbal strategies (73% vs. 56%), like kissing and hugging, while women used direct-nonverbal strategies more than men, such as touching a partner’s genitals or removing clothing (56% vs. 43%) (Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2010). Notably, though, both men and women used indirect-nonverbal strategies more than they used direct-nonverbal strategies. Significant gender differences were not identified in the use of verbal strategies. The participants in this study were in committed, romantic relationships with an average relationship length of 2 years. Similarly, in a study of 101 married or cohabitating couples, Gossman, Julien, Mathieu, and Chartrand (2003) found that men were more likely to use indirect initiation strategies relative to their female partners. The couples in this study reported an average relationship duration of ten years. Researchers have posited varying ideas for the differences in initiation strategies used, including the possibility that men may engage in indirect initiation strategies as a way to ‘test’ receptivity as they are the ones who initiate more often (Gossman et al., 2003). Additionally, it is possible that women in long-term relationships perceive their male partner will be receptive to initiating sex and are less threatened by the cost of negative evaluation; thus, they feel comfortable initiating directly. The gender differences in methods of initiation strategies may look different in early dating

relationships and within other relationship contexts. Overall, indirect strategies are the most common form of initiation across genders (Curtis et al., 2012; Gossman et al., 2003; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010).

Future research is needed to understand the initiation strategies within different relational contexts, including same-sex relationships. Men and women likely use different initiation strategies dependent upon the status of the relationship, and therefore the gender differences in methods of initiation may change over time. It is likely that, if the woman's partner is also a woman, there is less potential threat of being viewed as going against the feminine sexual role. There are likely different (non-gender related) factors that impact the methods of sexual initiation behaviors utilized by women in same-sex relationships.

### **Gender differences in frequency of initiation**

Sexual scripts assert that men initiate sexual activity, whereas women are seen as the restrictors and gatekeepers of sexual activity. Research that has specifically collected data on initiation behaviors has supported the adherence to traditional sexual scripts. Across studies on initiation, men initiated sexual behavior more frequently than women (Byers & Heinlein, 1989; Curtis et al., 2012; Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005; O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992; Simms & Byers, 2013; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). In the Vannier and O'Sullivan (2010) self-monitoring study on young adults, men initiated sex 49% of the time and women initiate 32% of the time over the three weeks. Within this sample, 15% of the participants reported that all occasions of sexual activity were initiated solely by men (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010).

**Why gender differences in initiation?**

Although this paper makes the argument that traditional gender roles and sexual scripts are, at least partly, responsible for women's lower rates of sexual initiation compared to men, a number of additional reasons have been postulated to account for the difference, including differential levels of sexual desire between men and women. Not all sexual initiation behaviors require an individual to be experiencing desire, but it likely has an impact on the frequency with which initiation occurs. A plethora of evidence indicates that men and women have different levels and ways of experiencing desire. Men report a higher level of sexual desire than women across a number of domains, including frequency of sexual thoughts, talking about sex, and assigning importance to engaging in sex (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001). In addition to frequency of desire, research has demonstrated that some women may not experience spontaneous desire before engaging in sexual activity, but instead may begin to experience desire after sexual activity has begun and they have reached an adequate state of arousal (Basson et al., 2004). In contrast, men often experience high levels of desire prior to engagement in sexual activity. Considering the increase in desire once foreplay has begun, it is possible that the drive of sexual desire may be a larger component in initiation of sexual activity for men whereas, for women, they sometimes may not feel desire for sex until after their partner has initiated and the sexual act has begun.

Research supports both biological and cultural factors that impact the level of desire and individual experiences (Carvalho & Nobre, 2010; Leiblum, 2002; Tolman & Diamond, 2001). It is likely too simplistic to assume that biological sex differences account for all the variability in level of desire. In part, the gender differences in level of

desire likely reflect the same cultural mechanisms that perpetuate traditional gender scripts. Men are given messages to want and desire sex while women are given the opposite message (Leiblum, 2002; Wood, Koch, & Mansfield, 2006). From this perspective, traditional gender roles are responsible for both women's lower desire as compared to men and women's less frequent initiation compared to men. If this is true, then acceptance of traditional gender roles would be expected to better account for gender differences in initiation than level of desire. In fact, research suggests the frequency with which an individual considers initiating sexual activity is relatively equal across sexes. In self-monitoring studies of initiation behaviors, there were no significant gender differences in the rates of considering initiating sexual activity (Curtis et al., 2012; O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). However, men and women did not initiate with equal frequency. Similarly, studies on women's submissive sexual behavior, which is characterized as being passive in the sexual relationship and not often engaging in initiation, have looked at factors that may influence this behavior. The researchers found that low sexual arousal and sexual desire were not the driving force behind failure to initiate desired sex (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007b; Sanchez et al., 2012a).

The fact that women either considered initiation as often as men or did not initiate solely due to lack of desire, suggests that the barriers to initiation are something more than just biological. These results suggest a greater equitability in interest in sex, highlighting the importance of recognizing other factors that contribute to the differences in initiation frequency. A number of researchers have pointed to the potential drawbacks for women, such as negative evaluation by one's partner and/or social group, if they were

to initiate sexual behavior or be viewed as initiators (Anderson & Aymami, 1993; Sanchez et al., 2012a; Sanchez et al., 2012).

Individuals initiate sexual activity for a potentially endless number of reasons including sexual desire, want for increased intimacy, stress reduction, and to appease one's partner (Byers & Heinlein, 1989; Impett & Peplau, 2003). The reasons an individual decides to initiate sex are likely as numerous and as unique as the individual and partnership. Regardless of the different motivations, there are long-standing, imbedded cultural proscriptions for how initiation should occur within heterosexual relationships.

### **Drawbacks of Traditional View on Initiation**

Some of the drawbacks of the traditional sexual script that have been measured include the negative impact on relationship and sexual satisfaction. The traditional sexual script has been identified as problematic to women because it does not foster autonomy in sexual decision-making. Women's roles in sexual activity are often characterized as lacking agency (Bogle, 2008). As well, agency is inherently tied to power. Women in heterosexual relationships often perceive their role within a sexual relationship as less powerful compared to men (Sanchez et al., 2012b). This perception of a lack of agency or power in the sexual relationship is problematic and can lead to negative consequences, including lower sexual satisfaction for women (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007a; Sanchez et al., 2012b).

As a result of experiencing less power, women may also take on a submissive sexual role within their relationship. A submissive sexual role, characterized in part by a lack of initiation, provides less sexual autonomy, freedom, or choice around sexual

activity (Sanchez et al., 2012a). Consequences associated with an undesired submissive role for women included lower sexual satisfaction and diminished closeness to one's partner (Sanchez et al., 2012b). The negative implications for an unwanted submissive role and/or lack of agency in a sexual relationship highlight the potential importance of women challenging the traditional sexual views, including those surrounding women's initiation. For those women who do not desire a submissive role, significant cultural proscriptions encourage women to continue fulfilling an unsatisfying role.

### **The Benefits of Challenging Traditional Norms about Women's Initiation Sexual Satisfaction & Relationship Satisfaction**

The experience of satisfaction in a sexual relationship is impacted by one's engagement in initiation behaviors. Women who report initiating sexual activity more frequently report greater sexual satisfaction (Gossmann et al., 2003; Lawrance et al., 2011; Simms & Byers, 2013). Additionally, the perception of initiation may also be important. Studies have found that perceptions of how often the individual and their partner engaged in initiation contributed to sexual satisfaction, over and above the report of frequency of sexual activity alone (Lawrance et al., 2011). Thus, if women initiate sexual activity, they are more likely to have the type of sex they want, when they want it.

Couples may also engage in more frequent sexual activity if women and men both initiate sex, which is beneficial given the bidirectional influence of initiation behaviors and sexual satisfaction. Greater sexual satisfaction is a factor that increases instances of initiation (Byers & Heinlein, 1989). Thus, relationships where sex is more frequently

initiated have higher rates of sexual satisfaction, while in turn couples with a high degree of sexual satisfaction frequently initiate sexual activity (Simms & Byers, 2013).

Sexual satisfaction is also intimately tied to relationship satisfaction. For instance, it is associated with more relationship closeness and greater dyadic adjustment (Byers & Heinlein, 1989; Holmberg & Blair, 2009; Montesi et al., 2010). If a couple engages in behaviors that have a positive impact on their sexual satisfaction, such as initiating sex, they will likely also experience positive benefits in the overall well-being of the relationship.

### **Protective health benefits**

Much of the research on sexual scripts and sexual initiation behaviors has been targeted in the areas of health promotion and disease prevention. Studies have demonstrated that women's initiation of sexual activity, including initiation of safe sex practices, can provide protective health benefits. As previously discussed, initiation tactics are varied and can take on a number of different forms. Women providing condoms, asking their partner if he has a condom, or having a conversation about STI/HIV status can initiate sexual activity and provide women important health and wellness benefits (Grose et al., 2014).

An initial qualitative study of women's sexual scripts revealed that safer sex practices were often not included in the narrative for a group of young, diverse women (Ortiz-Torres et al., 2003). However, after completion of a cognitive behavioral group skills training to decrease sexual risk behaviors, significantly more women wanted shared or sole control of sexual decision making regarding condom use, STI/HIV testing prior to engagement in sexual activity, and overall engagement in sex. The outcome of this

intervention study highlights the protective health benefits for women that can arise from incorporating wellness into sexual initiation (Ortiz-Torres et al., 2003).

Currently there is a dearth of research focused on understanding the benefits of women's sexual initiation. Future research should attempt to gain a greater understanding of the benefits to both women and relationships. Increased information around the impact on satisfaction and wellness will be helpful to demonstrate the positives of moving outside the traditional scripts. As well, future research may uncover other outcomes of women's sexual initiation that promote wellness.

### **Who Challenges?**

Despite the potential benefits, it is more common to adhere to traditional standards within a relationship than to challenge them. However, there are individual characteristics of women and their relational contexts that have been shown to increase the likelihood of challenging traditional scripts and roles.

### **Individual Characteristics**

Individuals make a number of unique choices in regards to their own sexual behavior, including how they will or will not adhere to social norms, and to which they will adhere. Although a number of factors contribute to sexual initiation behaviors, the research highlights two particular characteristics of women who more frequently initiate desired sex. Women who self-report more egalitarian beliefs and feminist attitudes describe feeling more confident in pursuing their wants in a sexual relationship (Jesser, 1978; Sanchez et al., 2012b; Schick, Zucker, & Bay-Cheng, 2008). Additionally, younger women have been shown to initiate desired sexual behaviors more often than older women (Byers & Heinlein, 1989; Curtis et al., 2012). Two possible explanations

for this finding could be an increased endorsement of egalitarian beliefs in younger cohorts, or changes in sexual self-confidence or sexual assertiveness that occur with aging. However, it is possible that other factors, such as greater exposure to sexual information, has led younger women to play a more active role in sexual initiation.

### **Partner Characteristics**

Research suggests that the belief system of one's partner may also impact the frequency of sexual initiation behaviors of women. Dworkin and O'Sullivan (2005) asked college-aged men to describe how sexual scenarios typically go with their partner, as well as their ideal for sexual encounters. The men in the survey indicated that their sexual scenarios are often characterized by male-dominated initiation, though men holding more egalitarian beliefs expressed a desire for more egalitarian patterns in sexual activity (Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005). This information is critical to their female partners' initiation behaviors because their egalitarian attitudes would be accepting and affirming of female initiation. Women will likely feel most comfortable initiating sexual activity with a partner who wants equality in initiation. As well, having a partner with feminist or egalitarian beliefs may lead to relaxing of gender role expectations, which can have positive impacts on sexual satisfaction for men and women (Rudman & Phelan, 2007; Sanchez et al., 2012a). Similar egalitarian roles allow both partners to have a discussion around how they would like sexual activity to go, allowing greater space for each individual's interests and desires.

### **Relationship Characteristics**

Sexual initiation occurs within the context of a relationship. The qualities of each relationship are unique and contribute to how a sexual encounter is orchestrated. There

are a number of relationship variables that appear to impact women's sexual initiation behaviors, including the type, duration, and level of satisfaction within the relationship. A greater amount of female-driven sexual initiation behaviors occur in the context of cohabitating, non-married couples compared to married couples (Byers & Heinlein, 1989). These data are likely linked to the individual characteristics—younger age and a greater valuing of egalitarianism—discussed above. The duration of the relationship has also been shown to impact initiation behaviors. Longer-term relationships have been demonstrated to have higher rates of female initiation of sexual behaviors than newer relationships (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). This is likely due to an increased comfort with one's partner and security in the relationship. Women are likely less concerned about what initiating sex would say about their character or morality if they are in a committed relationship. Additionally, long-term relationships allow for men and women to adjust to what works best for them in a sexual relationship, which may mean more egalitarian initiation. The sexual scripts for initiation are often the strongest in early dating relationships because these interactions are more circumscribed and provide larger consequences for non-normative behavior (Eaton & Rose, 2011; Seal et al., 2008; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010; Wiederman, 2005).

Increased relationship satisfaction, or dyadic adjustment, also leads to more female initiation of sexual behaviors. However, this association is likely bidirectional. As previously discussed, women initiating desired sexual activity has been shown to increase relationship satisfaction (Byers & Heinlein, 1989; Gossman et al., 2003). A causal link between initiation and satisfaction has not been established. Relationship satisfaction and initiation are likely closely intertwined and potentially

impact each other differently in unique relationships. Gossman et al. (2003) assert that couples with a higher degree of relationship dissatisfaction, based upon completion of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, initiate sex less often and respond to initiation with less interest.

Currently, there is a paucity of research based upon trying to understand who challenges the traditional norms. More recent self-monitoring studies have been able to gain greater information regarding sexual initiation behaviors. However, information is often not gathered on the characteristics of the participants or the relationship. Inclusion of research questions on characteristics related to challenging traditional roles, such as egalitarian beliefs and relationship satisfaction, could be incorporated to increase understanding of the contexts in which challenging occurs. Future research focused on understanding how these factors impact challenging and the mechanisms for that challenging will be important, and could offer insight to inform educational and intervention programs.

### **Same-Sex Relationships**

In some relationships, partners have no choice but to challenge traditional gender roles because the traditional heterosexual script simply does not apply. Women in same-sex relationships are inherently not part of the traditional gender role (male-female) system. As a result, individuals in these relationships could be a potentially important group to study to identify the ways in which initiation behaviors occur among individuals socialized into the female gender role, but without the option to follow the traditional heterosexual script. Understanding how women initiate in same-sex relationships could provide helpful information and insight that could be generalized to women in

heterosexual relationships. Nichols (2004) asserts that “the behavior of women with other women presents an opportunity to study how women function sexually when there is no male influence” (pg. 363). Further study of same-sex relationships would likely bring about a rich amount of information regarding relationship dynamics, but specifically could possibly shed light on the question of whether traditional gender roles about sexual initiation still play a part in same-sex relationships. In other words, are women's roles prescribed by society or a function of men's presence in a relationship?

Overall, there is limited research on relationship dynamics within same-sex couples and an even greater paucity of research specifically related to sexual initiation. The research literature indicates that the colloquial concept of “lesbian bed death” has limited empirical support (Nichols, 2004, pg. 364). The concept of lesbian bed death asserts that same-sex female relationships are characterized by little to no sexual activity. This concept is inherently tied to the belief that women experience less sexual desire than men, and thus as a result, a relationship that only included women would be experienced as celibate. A belief in lesbian bed death asserts that no one will initiate in a same-sex female relationship. Cohen and Byers (2013) found that in same-sex relationships, regardless of relationship duration, most women reported participating in genital and nongenital sexual behavior with their partner once a week or more. This frequency is similar to the reported frequency of sexual behavior in heterosexual couples (Cohen & Byers, 2013; Holmberg & Blair, 2009; Nichols, 2004). The research suggests that women in same-sex relationships are maintaining a frequency of sexual activity at a high enough rate for initiation to be relevant and important. It is not the case that both female partners fall into traditional gender roles and fail to initiate.

Research has been conducted in the area of how gender roles influence same-sex female relationships. In these relationships there is limited evidence that tasks, such as household chores, are divided into traditional masculine and feminine gender roles (Peplau, Spalding, Conley, & Veniegas, 1999). Similar to the colloquial belief in lesbian bed death, there is a general stereotype of the “butch” and “fem” roles in same-sex relationships. According to this stereotype, one female in the relationship would take on the masculine role and one the feminine role, therefore the traditional script would still dominate. However, the research completed in this area does not support the prevalence of this stereotype in same-sex relationships that is assumed by colloquial knowledge (Marecek, Finn, & Cardell, 1982; Rose & Zand, 2000). One must wonder if the “butch”/“fem” stereotype is assumed because, within a heteronormative sexual framework, one cannot conceptualize otherwise. In fact, research has demonstrated that adherence to traditional gender roles may be less common in same-sex relationships than in other-sex relationships (Cardell, Finn, & Marecek, 1981; Peplau & Amaro, 1982). Women in same-sex relationships have described benefits in being able to exist in a relationship outside the traditional, heterosexual script. Some of these benefits include engaging in a more egalitarian relationship, being less role-bound, and having greater knowledge of each other's sexual needs (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1974; Macklin, 1983; Rose & Zand, 2000). The equality of role taking, often unique to same-sex relationships, allows for actions such as the initiation of sexual activity to be shared by both partners without cultural gender constraints (Rose & Zand, 2000). Individuals in same-sex relationships have constructed scripts that feel authentic to their relationship. These scripts, that at

times parallel and at times reject heterosexual norms, allow for an example of the flexibility of roles in a sexual relationship (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994; Wilson, 2009).

What is currently missing from the body of literature on same-sex relationships are studies looking specifically at initiation within female-female relationships and the potential impact of prescribed gender roles. It is posited that the sexual relationship in same-sex female relationships would operate outside of the traditional gender role system, and, therefore, there would be greater fluidity and exchange within the roles of sexual initiation and passivity. Additionally, it is believed that women would experience less threat in going against traditional female norms, which may allow individuals to initiate sex more frequently and in a more direct manner.

### **The Present Study**

Sexual script theory is the theoretical foundation for understanding how sexual interactions are navigated, and this theory was applied to better understand the factors that impact sexual initiation for women. Past research offers limited understanding of the potential link between perceived gender roles—including both general beliefs about women's social roles and more specific beliefs about appropriate sexual behavior for women—and sexual initiation behaviors. Additionally, the current research literature completely lacks data on sexual initiation in women in same-sex relationships and has primarily been conducted with young adult college students. These limitations in past research were addressed in the present study.

The aim of the present study was to add to the existing research literature by investigating (1) the impact of perceived gender roles on women's sexual initiation, (2) the role of partner's sex on women's initiation behaviors, (3) how perceived gender roles

impact initiation behaviors over and above the impact of sexual desire, and (4) the associated benefits of sexual initiation. Sexual initiation behaviors were investigated in two ways, through retrospective reports and daily self-monitoring. The goal was to further the knowledge of the impact sexual scripts and gender roles have on women's sexual initiation and investigate sexual navigation in same-sex relationships. Specifically, the study investigated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. A woman's belief in traditional gender roles will be negatively associated with the proportion of sexual acts she initiates with her partner; this will be particularly true when women are in sexual relationships with men because traditional sexual scripts apply to heterosexual relationships.

H1a. Belief in traditional gender roles— nonsexual gender stereotypes and sexual double standards — will be negatively correlated with proportion of sexual initiation for women across relationship type.

H1b. Women in relationships with other women will initiate a higher proportion of sexual activity in the relationship than women in relationships with men.

H1c. Sex of the partner will moderate the relationship between belief in traditional gender roles and proportion of initiation, such that the relationship between gender roles and initiation will be stronger for women in other-sex relationships than for women in same-sex relationships.

Hypothesis 2. Although gender differences in initiation are often attributed to gender differences in desire, prior research suggests that women's low rates of initiation are not

driven primarily by desire. Thus, women's belief in traditional gender roles is expected to predict differences in frequency of initiation over and above levels of sexual desire.

H2a. Desire will be correlated with sexual initiation. Women with greater sexual desire will initiate sex more frequently.

H2b. Perceived gender roles will be associated with frequency of initiation over and above the effects of level of sexual desire.

Hypothesis 3. A woman's belief in traditional gender roles will be negatively associated with the use of direct initiation strategies; this will be particularly true when women are in sexual relationships with men in which traditional gender sexual scripts are particularly salient.

H3a. Belief in traditional gender roles— nonsexual stereotypes and sexual double standard — will be negatively correlated with the use of direct initiation strategies.

H3b. Women in relationships with other women will engage in more direct initiation strategies than women in relationships with men.

H3c. Sex of the partner will moderate the relationship between belief in traditional gender roles and initiation strategies, such that the relationship between gender roles and initiation strategies will be stronger for women in other-sex relationships than for women in same-sex relationships.

Hypothesis 4. Women who engage in more sexual initiation will experience associated relationship and wellness benefits.

H4a. Proportion of sex initiated will be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction.

H4b. Proportion of sex initiated will be positively correlated with sexual satisfaction.

H4c. Proportion of sex initiated will be positively correlated with sexual health efficacy.

## Method

### Part 1

**Participants.** Participants ( $N = 351$ ) were recruited from two sources: the undergraduate community at the University of Missouri – St. Louis and advertisements posted on Craigslist. Women were eligible for the study if they were eighteen years or older and were currently “in a sexual relationship.” Efforts were made to recruit individuals across ethnic backgrounds, education levels, and geographic locations. Additionally, there was specific recruitment of women in same-sex relationships.

### Measures.

**Demographics questionnaire.** Participants completed a brief demographics questionnaire which collected relevant personal information such as age, race and ethnicity, education level, sex of current partner, and current relationship duration. Prior to the completion of analyses, the following demographic variables were used to test for potential recruitment sample differences: age, race, years of education, income, relationship status (married/cohabitating/monogamous), employment status, student status, relationship duration. The following provides information on how these demographic variables were coded for the sample comparisons. Age was coded as their total age in years given their reported birth year and year in which the study was completed. Participants' reported racial background was coded as either White (1) or

non-White (0; Black/Asian/Native-American/Other). A second race variable was coded as either Black (1) or non-Black (0; White/Asian/Native American/Other). These two races were used as they were the largest groups represented within the sample. Years of education was coded on a 7-point scale, with 1 = *Less than High School* and 6 = *Academic or Professional Degree (PhD, JD, MD)*. Income was coded on a 9-point scale, with 1 = *Below \$15,000* and 9 = *\$150,000 or more*. Relationship status was investigated as whether the participant was married, cohabitating with their partner, and/or viewed their relationship as monogamous/committed. For each of these relationship status statements, participants indicated whether it applied to their relationship (1 = *Yes*, 0 = *No*). For employment status, participants who indicated working full-time or part-time were coded as 1, while participants who reported that they were unemployed or retired were coded as 0. Student status was coded as a dichotomous variable (1 = *Student*, 0 = *Not a Student*). Lastly, participants were asked to provide their relationship duration (years & months), this information was then coded as total months in the relationship.

***Nonsexual stereotypes.*** The Gender Attitude Inventory (Ashmore, Del Boca, & Bilder, 1995) assesses attitudes towards multiple societal and relational domains in regards to gender roles. The following subscales were selected for the purposes of this study: (acceptance of) traditional stereotypes, (endorsement of) family roles, (belief in) differential work roles. The 30 items are rated on a 7-point scale with 1 = *Agree Strongly* to 7 = *Disagree Strongly*. The GAI primary subscales have demonstrated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .83, .76, .84$  for the three subscales, respectively) and good test-retest reliability ( $r_s = .83, .75, .80$ , respectively) among a sample of college-aged women (Ashmore et al., 1995). Additionally, the primary subscales demonstrated adequate

convergent and discriminant validity within the same sample of college-aged women.

The GAI primary subscales were found to have good internal consistency for this study's sample ( $\alpha$ s = .85, .88, .89 respectively). The overall scale used in this sample (composite of three subscales) was found to have good internal consistency for this study's sample ( $\alpha$  = .92). During data collection, an error was made and an item was missing from the Family Roles subscale ("A woman should have primary responsibility for taking care of the home and children.") This error was identified and fixed during data collection. However, only 126 of the 354 participants responded to all 11 items of the Family Roles subscale. It was decided to remove this item; therefore, the Family Roles subscale includes 10 items and the overall GAI scale includes 29 items. A comparison between the 30-item scale and 29-item scale in the 126 individuals that completed the full scale found that the results for the scale score with and without that single item were highly correlated ( $r = .99, p < .001$ ), and therefore it is very unlikely that the single missing item impacted the results.

*Sexual desire.* The Sexual Desire Inventory (SDI-2; Spector, Carey, & Steinberg, 1996) includes a total of fourteen questions related to the level of sexual desire experienced by an individual. The measure assesses a dyadic sexual desire score, a solitary sexual desire score, and a total sexual desire score. Higher scores indicate higher levels of reported sexual desire. The scale has demonstrated good internal consistency ( $r = .86$  for Dyadic Scale;  $r = .96$  for Solitary scale) among a sample of college-aged students. Test-retest reliability over a month period was adequate ( $r = .76$ ). Factor analysis reveals the dyadic and solitary subscales demonstrate strong factor validity. Additionally, concurrent validity is demonstrated through strong correlation

with solitary and dyadic sexual behaviors among a sample of college-aged students (Carey, 1995; Spector et al., 1996). The measure demonstrated high internal consistency for this study's sample ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

***Sexual double standards.*** The Double Standard Scale (DSS; Caron, Davis, Halteman, & Stickle, 1993) measures the extent to which respondents accept the traditional sexual double standard. The DSS includes 10 items on a 5-point scale, with 1 = *Strongly Agree* and 5 = *Strongly Disagree*. Score can range from 10 to 50 points, with lower scores indicating greater adherence to the traditional double standard. The measure demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = .72$ ) among a sample of undergraduate men and women (Caron et al., 1993). The measure demonstrated high internal consistency for this study's sample ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

***Sexual initiation.*** This series of questions was compiled for the purposes of the current study and include items adapted from Gossman (2003) and Byers (2011). Participants were asked questions regarding the frequency of initiation in their relationship, the pattern of initiation, ideals, and types of initiation strategies used. The categorization of direct and indirect strategies was based upon coding criteria determined in Vannier and O'Sullivan (2010). Information on sexual initiation was collected through retrospective report. If participants identified an initiation strategy that was not provided (e.g. indicated 'Other' and detailed the strategy), guidelines from Vannier and Sullivan (2010) were used to determine whether the strategy should be coded as direct or indirect.

***Sexual satisfaction.*** The Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS; Hudson, 1992) measures the degree of satisfaction individuals have within their sexual relationship. The ISS includes 25 items on a 7-point scale, with 0 = *None of the time* and 7 = *All of the*

*time*. Higher scores indicate a greater level of dissatisfaction within the sexual relationship. The ISS had high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and known groups validity ( $r = .76$ ; troubled vs. untroubled groups) for a sample of adults in committed, heterosexual relationships. The measure demonstrated high internal consistency for this study's sample ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Additionally, the measure demonstrated high internal consistency for the sample of women in other-sex relationships ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and same-sex relationships ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

***Relationship satisfaction.*** The Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998) measures the degree of overall satisfaction within a relationship. This measure includes seven items on a 5-point scale, with 0 = *Never* and 5 = *Very often*. Higher scores indicate a greater degree of satisfaction within the relationship. This scale was found to have high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .88$ ) among a sample of age-diverse heterosexual couples. The measure demonstrated high internal consistency for this study's overall sample ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Additionally, the measure demonstrated high internal consistency for the sample of women in other-sex ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and same-sex relationships ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

***Sexual health self-efficacy.*** The Sexual Health Practices Self-Efficacy Scale (SHPSES; Koch, Colaco, & Porter, 2010) measures participants' confidence to carry out a variety of sexual health practices. The items are reflective of sexuality as a holistic construct that is an integral component of personal well-being. This measure contains 20 items on a 5-point scale, with 1 = *Not at all confident* and 5 = *Extremely confident*. Higher scores indicate greater self-efficacy in performing the varying sexual health practices. This scale was found to have high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .89$ ) on a

large undergraduate sample. Content validity was achieved through examination of content in sexuality textbooks, class syllabi, and with a panel of sex education researchers. Construct validity was examined with a principal components analysis, which indicated six factors within the measure. Lastly, the measure has been shown to appropriately discriminate between students who had received a sexuality education course and intentions to practice safer-sex in a sample of college-aged students (Koch, Colaco, & Porter, 2010). The measure demonstrated high internal consistency for this study's sample ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

**Procedure.** This study was advertised as a study of women's "relationship dynamics." Eligible participants accessed the online survey site and were asked to read an informed consent statement and indicate whether they agreed to participate before completing study measures. Following the informed consent, all participants followed online instructions and completed a series of demographics questions and other corresponding measures. For those recruited from Craigslist, they were then directed to a separate web page and offered the opportunity to submit contact information for entry into a raffle to win a \$50 gift certificate to Amazon. SONA subject pool participants were directed to a page to provide contact information for course credit. Participants' contact information was collected separately from their survey responses so as to maintain strict participant confidentiality.

## **Part 2**

**Participants.** After completion of the Part 1 survey, participants were asked if they were interested in being contacted to complete a paid follow-up study. Participants ( $N = 60$ ) were eligible for the daily diary study if they were eighteen years or older, were

currently “in a sexual relationship,” and their partner had not already participated in Part 2. Efforts were made to include an even sample of women in other-sex and same-sex relationships.

**Measures.**

*Structured daily diaries.* Respondents completed a short questionnaire to assess sexual initiation. Participants received this questionnaire on a daily basis over a two-week period. The items from this form were adapted from similar diary forms used in Byers (2011) and Vannier and O’Sullivan (2010). The daily record collected information on whether sexual initiation occurred, who initiated sex, whether sexual activity occurred, how satisfying the sexual activity was, daily relationship satisfaction, and whether they had considered initiating sexual activity but decided not to do so. The questions completed were determined by participants’ initial responses to the survey, thus limiting the required number of daily responses.

**Procedure.** After completing Study 1, participants were invited to complete a structured daily self-monitoring study designed to “better understand sexual relationships.” Women were offered up to \$52 for their participation (\$3 per daily record completed for 14 days and \$10 bonus if all were completed). If the participant was interested in participating, she reviewed and completed another informed consent. Participants were then provided information on how to complete and submit the daily diary forms. The participants indicated if they would like to receive updates via e-mail, text message, or both. The participant was then given a survey to complete each day over the two-week period through their preferred contact method. The participants were texted and/or emailed a link daily, at the same time each morning, to complete the

form about the events of the prior day. The daily log was only identified by a code number. Participants were contacted by study personnel if three or more forms were not received to address possible concerns or confusion. After completion of the two-week study, participants provided a mailing address to receive their compensation.

Participants' mailing information was collected separately from their survey responses.

### **Data Analysis**

First, descriptive statistics were conducted on age, race/ethnicity, education, income level, employment, sex of partner, relationship status, relationship duration, relationship commitment status, and recruitment source. Such descriptive statistics were conducted on the samples and are portrayed in tabular format (see *Table 1* and *Figure 1* for Part 1; *Table 2* and *Figure 2* for Part 2). Descriptive statistics for the survey measures were conducted on the samples and are portrayed in tabular format in Tables 3 - 11. Correlations between survey measures for both parts are displayed in Tables 12 and 13. Correlations, ANCOVAs, and linear regressions were run to evaluate the hypotheses.

### **Description of sample Part 1**

A total of 617 individuals initiated participation in the study via the Psychology Subjects Pool ( $n = 218$ ) and Craigslist ( $n = 399$ ). A total of 129 individuals were removed due to not meeting eligibility criteria or declining consent (Subject pool  $n = 20$ ; Craigslist  $n = 109$ ). An additional 133 individuals were removed from analysis due to incomplete data after leaving the survey before finishing entire measures (Subject pool  $n = 11$ ; Craigslist  $n = 122$ ). Four individuals were removed due to being multivariate outliers on the sexual desire, relationship satisfaction, and/or nonsexual gender roles measures (Subject pool  $n = 1$ ; Craigslist  $n = 3$ ). Thus, the final total number of

participants in the study sample was 351 women (Subject pool  $n = 186$ ; Craigslist  $n = 165$ ), 56.8% of those who initiated the survey. Of the 351 women, 242 were in other-sex relationships and 109 were in same-sex relationships.

Participants failed to answer a small number of items (0.5%). Data was imputed for the purpose of performing analyses requiring composite scores. The maximum likelihood (ML) approach was used for data imputation. Note that data imputation was only implemented for measures requiring composite scores that did not include information on participants' initiation behaviors (i.e., nonsexual gender stereotypes, sexual double standards, sexual desire, relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual health self-efficacy).

As discussed below, a number of demographics were controlled for due to differences between samples. Therefore, the primary analysis will be an ANCOVA with five covariates. Results from a power analysis indicated that a sample of 225 women would have 80% power to detect medium effect sizes if  $\alpha = .05$  for the analysis. Therefore, I have adequate power with my sample ( $N = 351$ ).

### **Description of sample Part 2**

A total of 80 individuals initiated participation in the two-week daily diary study. Participants needed to complete at least 10 of the 14 daily diary entries to be included in the data analysis. A total of 19 individuals were removed from analysis due to not completing the minimum requirement for entries and one additional individual was removed due to inconsistent data. The total number of participants in Part 2 were 60 women (Subject pool  $n = 20$ ; Craigslist  $n = 41$ ), 75% of those who initiated the study.

Thirty-eight women completed all 14 entries, eleven women completed 13 entries, six women completed 12 entries, and five women completed 11 entries. There was not a significant difference between women in other-sex relationships and same-sex relationships on diary completion rate ( $p = .87$ ).

A sample of 60 women were recruited with half of the participants in same-sex relationships and half in other-sex relationships. As the analyses on the daily diary information are underpowered (due to financial and logistic constraints), I will attend closely to effect sizes. The primary analysis for Part 2 is an ANCOVA with 2 levels and 2 covariates. Results from a power analysis indicated that a sample of 179 women would have 80% power to detect medium effect sizes if  $\alpha = .05$  for our primary analysis. The current sample size of  $N = 60$  has 32% power to detect effect sizes described.

## Results

### Descriptive Data Part 1

**Participant demographics.** The sample consisted of 351 female participants. The participants ranged in age from 19 years old to 66 years old, with an average age of 27 years. Most participants described themselves as White (68.7%). A total of 19.4% was Black, 7.7% described themselves as Hispanic, and 4.0% described themselves as Asian. A small portion (8.7%) of the sample described themselves as biracial/multiracial, and as a result selected multiple primary racial or ethnic groups. The participants included women in current sexual relationships with men (68.9%) and women (31.1%). The majority of the participants (68.1%) were in a committed, monogamous relationship.

The average relationship duration of the sample was approximately three years. Additional demographic data is displayed for the full sample in Table 1.

**Initiation variables.** Overall, the women reported that they and their partner engaged in fairly balanced sexual initiation behaviors. Women in same-sex relationships reported initiating approximately 60% of the time in their relationship overall, while women in other-sex relationships reported initiating 52% of the time. Women across relationship type reported an average of approximately 3.5 sexual initiations within a typical week. Notably, 53% of the sample indicated an ideal 50/50 initiation balance with their partners, regardless of partner sex. Lastly, a paired-samples t-test indicated that there was a significant difference in the reported most common use of indirect strategies ( $M = 1.65$ ,  $SD = .75$ ) versus direct strategies ( $M = 1.35$ ,  $SD = .75$ );  $t(350) = -3.80$ ,  $p < .001$ . Indirect initiation strategies were more common than direct initiation strategies across participants. See Tables 5 and 6.

The following initiation strategies were most frequently endorsed as one of the “3 most common” among the participants: “kiss your partner passionately” (an indirect strategy;  $n = 258$ , 73.5%); “touch your partner’s genitals” (a direct strategy;  $n = 173$ , 49.3%); “snuggle or cuddle” (an indirect strategy;  $n = 144$ , 41.0%). In contrast, the following initiation strategies were least frequently endorsed as one of the “3 most common” among the participants: “ask your partner if they have a condom/dental dam” (an indirect strategy;  $n = 0$ , 0%); “produce a condom/dental dam yourself” (a direct strategy;  $n = 1$ , 0.3%); “used some code words with which partner is familiar” (an indirect strategy;  $n = 9$ , 2.6%).

**Sample differences.** Due to recruitment from different sources (ie: Psychology Human Subjects Pool and Craigslist), the samples were tested on basic demographics for possible differences. Overall, 53% of the sample was recruited from the subject pool while 47% of the sample was recruited from Craigslist. There were significant differences between participants from the Psychology Subjects Pool and Craigslist on the following tested demographic variables: age, cohabitation, relationship duration, education level, and student status. Participants from Craigslist were significantly more likely to be older, living with their partner, have a longer relationship, a higher level of education, and not currently students. There were no significant differences on race (white/non-white; black/non-black), income, marital status, monogamy, and employment status. The demographic differences across recruitment source were unsurprising, and indeed, the two sources were included to ensure a more diverse sample.

Within the overall sample ( $N = 353$ ), 242 women were in sexual relationships with men and 109 women were in sexual relationships with women. Notably, of the women in other-sex relationships, 70.7% were recruited from the Psychology Subjects Pool and 29.3% were recruited from Craigslist. Conversely, of the women in same-sex relationships, approximately 86.2% were recruited from Craigslist, while 13.8% were recruited from the Psychology Subjects Pool. Due to the significant conflation between recruitment source and relationship type, demographic variables were controlled if there were significant differences between groups based upon sex of partner as these were the comparisons analyzed by the hypotheses.

Thus, the groups of women in same-sex relationships and other-sex relationships were tested on basic demographics for possible differences. There were no significant

differences between the two groups on the following demographics: race (white/non-white; black/non-black), income, marital status, employment status, and describing the relationship as 'monogamous.' There were significant differences between the two groups on the following demographic variables: age, cohabitation, relationship duration, years of education, and student status. Women in other-sex relationships were more likely to be younger, not living with their partner, have a shorter relationship duration, have fewer years of education, and currently be a student. The demographics with significant differences between the two groups were controlled for in following comparison analyses.

**Gender role variables.** Two domains of gender role attitudes were measured, traditional nonsexual stereotypes and the sexual double standard. As a result, the data were analyzed to see if a composite index score for gender roles could be formed. The correlations between the gender attitudes and sexual double standard measures were examined. The Gender Attitude Inventory and Double Standard Scale were significantly correlated ( $r = .56, p < .001$ ). However, this correlation was not large enough to warrant the creation of a single self-report gender role variable. As a result, separate linear regressions were run when the gender role variables are tested. The information from the data analysis will be presented first for the Gender Attitude Inventory (nonsexual gender stereotypes) and then the Double Standard Scale (sexual double standards).

## **Descriptive Data Part 2**

**Participant demographics.** The sample consisted of 60 female participants. The participants ranged in age from 19 years old to 64 years old, with an average age of 26

years. The group described themselves as predominantly White (80.0%). A total of 13.3% was Black, 3.3% was Asian, and 6.7% described themselves as Hispanic. The participants included women in current sexual relationships with men (48.3%) and women (51.7%). The majority of the participants (71.1%) described their relationship as committed, monogamous. The average relationship duration of the sample was approximately 2.5 years. Additional demographic data is displayed for the full sample in Table 2.

**Initiation variables.** During the two-week daily diary study, women in other-sex relationships reported being involved in sexual initiation (initiator as “self” or “both”) an average of 67% of the time, while women in same-sex relationships reported an average of 73%. Women in other-sex relationships reported being involved in initiation (self or both) an average of four initiations, while women in same-sex relationships reported being involved in (self or both) an average of 5.65 initiations. These results are displayed in Table 7.

Women in other-sex relationships and women in same-sex relationships reported initiating sex (self only) an average of 39% of the time. Women in other-sex relationships reported initiating sex (self only) an average of 2.3 times, while women in same-sex relationships reported an average of 2.9 sexual initiations during the two-week study (*Table 8*).

The use of direct and indirect strategies was similar across relationship type, and indirect strategies were more commonly utilized by individuals than direct strategies. A paired-samples t-test indicated that there was a significant difference in the proportion of indirect strategies utilized ( $M = 55.37$ ,  $SD = 17.98$ ) versus direct strategies ( $M = 44.63$ ,

$SD = 17.98$ ) over the two-week period;  $t(54) = -2.21, p = .031, d = 0.30$ . See Table 9 for results on sexual initiation strategies. Two women reported that no sexual initiations occurred, and therefore no sexual encounters, during the two weeks. Both of these women were in other-sex relationships. Overall, women in other-sex relationships reported an average of 5.45 sexual encounters across the two-week period, while women in same-sex relationships reported an average of 6.42 encounters.

The following initiation strategies were utilized most frequently when participants initiated sex ('self' only) across the two-week period: "kiss partner passionately" (an indirect strategy;  $n = 38$ ); "touch partner's genitals" (a direct strategy;  $n = 25$ ); "snuggle or cuddle" (an indirect strategy;  $n = 25$ ). It is of note that the most frequently used strategies were consistent between Part 1 and Part 2. In contrast, the following initiation strategies were least frequently utilized when participant's initiated sex ('self' only): "ask your partner if they have a condom/dental dam" (an indirect strategy;  $n = 0$ ); "produce a condom/dental dam yourself" (a direct strategy;  $n = 1$ ); "suggest that you and your partner look at sexual material or show your partner sexual material" (an indirect strategy;  $n = 2$ ). There was a total of 157 'self' initiations reported across participants for the two-week period. Watching sexual material together was only endorsed on 3 occasions in Part 2 and was one of the least frequent in Part 1. Again, the least common strategies were similar for Part 1 and Part 2.

**Sample differences.** Of the sixty women in Part 2, forty (66.7%) were originally recruited from Craigslist and twenty (33.3%) were originally recruited from the Psychology Subjects Pool. There were significant differences between participants from the Psychology Subjects Pool and Craigslist on the following tested demographic

variables: age, education level, marital status, and student status. Participants from Craigslist were significantly more likely to be older, have a higher level of education, be married, and not currently a student. There were no significant differences on the following demographic variables: race (white/non-white; black/non-black), cohabitation, monogamy, relationship duration, employment status, and income. Within the overall sample ( $N = 60$ ), 29 women were in sexual relationships with men and 31 women were in sexual relationships with women. It is important to note that, of the women in other-sex relationships, 55.2% were recruited from the Psychology Subjects Pool and 44.8% were recruited from Craigslist. Of the women in same-sex relationships, approximately 87.1% were recruited from Craigslist, while 12.9% were recruited from the Psychology Subject Pool. As discussed previously, demographic variables will be controlled in the analyses if there are significant differences based upon groups by relationship type.

The groups of women in same-sex relationships and other-sex relationships were tested on basic demographics for possible differences. There were no significant differences between the two groups on the following demographics: race (white/non-white; black/non-black), education level, marital status, cohabitation, describing the relationship as 'monogamous,' relationship duration, employment status, and income. There were significant differences between the two groups on the following demographic variables: age and student status. Women in other-sex relationships were more likely to be younger and currently be a student. The demographics with significant differences between same-sex and other-sex relationships were controlled for in following comparison analyses.

## Study Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1a.** *Belief in traditional gender roles— nonsexual gender stereotypes and sexual double standards — will be negatively correlated with proportion of sexual initiation for women across relationship type.*

**Part 1.** Proportion of sexual initiation was measured as the percentage of times the participants reported initiating sex (i.e., “what percentage of the total number of sexual initiations, regardless of whether sex occurs, do you make in your relationship with your current partner”) over the past month; possible responses ranged from 0% to 100%. Hypothesis 1a was not supported, as nonsexual gender stereotypes were not significantly correlated with proportion of sexual initiation ( $r = .03, p = .54$ ). Additionally, there was not a significant correlation between sexual double standards and the proportion of sexual initiation ( $r = .04, p = .41$ ).

**Part 2.** For Part 2, proportion of sexual initiation was measured as the percentage of times the participants were involved in sexual initiation (e.g. identified “self” or “both” for initiator) in relation to the total sexual initiations that occurred over the two-week period. Hypothesis 1a was not supported, as nonsexual gender stereotypes were not significantly correlated with proportion of sexual initiation ( $r = -.046, p = .73$ ). Additionally, there was not a significant correlation between sexual double standards and the proportion of sexual initiations ( $r = -.055, p = .68$ ). Further analysis of the total number of initiations by the participant (e.g. identified “self” or “both” for initiator) over the course of the two weeks indicates that there was not a significant correlation with the gender role variables (nonsexual:  $r = -.17, p = .19$ ; sexual:  $r = -.050, p = .71$ ). All effect sizes were small to near zero.

**Hypothesis 1b.** *Women in relationships with other women will initiate a higher proportion of sexual activity in the relationship than women in relationships with men.*

**Part 1.** Analysis of the data indicated support for Hypothesis 1b. A one-way between-subjects ANCOVA was performed to assess for differences in reported proportion of sexual initiation over the past month by partner sex. Several demographics were used as covariates due to significant differences between groups by relationship type for Part 1 (age, cohabitation, relationship duration, education level, student status). Assumptions for an ANCOVA were met, including equality of variances and homogeneity of regression. The assumption of equality of variances between groups was tested with *Levene's Test of Equality of Variances* and the required parameters were met ( $p > .05$ ). The covariate effects were not statistically significant. A statistically significant effect of partner sex was obtained,  $F(1, 315) = 5.38, p = .021$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .017$ . Women in same-sex relationships (adjusted  $M = 54.72, SE = 2.67, 95\% CI = 49.46 - 59.98$ ) reported a significantly higher proportion of sexual initiation over the past month when corrected for demographic covariates than women in other-sex relationships (adjusted  $M = 46.99, SE = 1.76, 95\% CI = 43.54 - 50.45$ );  $d = 0.31$ . See Table 14. This model was also run without the nonsignificant covariates and the results were similar.

Similarly, a one-way between-subjects ANCOVA was performed to assess for differences in reported proportion of sexual initiation within the overall relationship by partner sex. The demographics described above were again used as covariates. Assumptions for an ANCOVA were met, including equality of variances and homogeneity of regression. The assumption of equality of variances between groups was tested with *Levene's Test of Equality of Variances* and the required parameters were met

( $p > .05$ ). The covariate effects were not statistically significant. A statistically significant effect of partner sex was obtained,  $F(1, 317) = 4.39, p = .037$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .014$ . Women in same-sex relationships (adjusted  $M = 59.23, SE = 2.34, 95\% CI = 54.63 - 63.83$ ) reported a significantly higher proportion of sexual initiation within the overall relationship when corrected for demographic covariates than women in other-sex relationships (adjusted  $M = 53.12, SE = 1.54, 95\% CI = 50.09 - 56.15$ );  $d = 0.28$ . See Table 15. This model was also run without the nonsignificant covariates and the results were similar. Hypothesis 1b is fully supported for Part 1, women in relationships with other women report initiating a higher proportion of sexual activity.

**Part 2.** A one-way between-subjects ANCOVA was performed to assess for differences in proportion of sexual initiation over the two-week period by partner sex. Age and student status were used as covariates due to significant differences between the same-sex and other-sex groups for Part 2 on these demographics. Assumptions for an ANCOVA were met, including equality of variances and homogeneity of regression. The assumption of equality of variances between groups was tested with *Levene's Test of Equality of Variances* and the required parameters were met ( $p > .05$ ). The covariate effects were not statistically significant. Additionally, there was not a significant effect for partner sex,  $F(1, 47) = .16, p = .69$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .004$ , and the effect size was near zero. See Table 16. This model was also run without the nonsignificant covariates and the results were similar. Hypothesis 1b is not supported for Part 2; there was not a significant difference in proportion of initiated sexual activity over the two-week period for women in same-sex relationships (adjusted  $M = 72.78, SE = 5.01$ ) versus women in other-sex relationships (adjusted  $M = 69.60, SE = 5.36$ ),  $d = .13$ .

**Hypothesis 1c.** *Sex of the partner will moderate the relationship between belief in traditional gender roles and proportion of initiation, such that the relationship between gender roles and initiation will be stronger for women in other-sex relationships than for women in same-sex relationships.*

**Part 1.** Sex of the partner was examined as a moderator of the relationship between gender roles (nonsexual gender stereotypes and sexual double standards) and reported proportion of initiation in the past month. Two separate moderation analyses were completed for each gender role variable. A linear regression was used to evaluate the moderation. Assumptions for the regression were met, including acceptable rates of tolerance ( $> .40$ ) and acceptable rates of VIF ( $< 2.5$ ). The criterion variable for the regression was the reported proportion of initiation in the past month. Block 1 of the regression included the main effects for gender roles and relationship type. Block 2 included the interaction variable (nonsexual gender stereotypes x relationship type; sexual double standards x relationship type). The variables were centered for the moderation analyses. Note that for both gender role measures, lower scores indicate greater adherence to traditional beliefs.

Sex of partner was not a significant moderator of the relationship between nonsexual gender stereotypes and reported proportion of initiation in the past month (interaction  $\beta = .027$ ,  $t = .49$ ,  $p = .62$ ,  $R^2 = .034$ ,  $R^2$  change = .001). Similarly, sex of the partner was not a significant moderator of the relationship between sexual double standards and proportion of initiation reported in the past month (interaction  $\beta = .002$ ,  $t = .041$ ,  $p = .97$ ,  $R^2 = .033$ ,  $R^2$  change = .00). Hypothesis 1c was not supported for Part 1.

**Part 2.** Sex of the partner was examined as a moderator of the relationship between gender roles (nonsexual gender stereotypes and sexual double standards) and proportion of initiation over the two-week daily diary study. Two separate moderation analyses were completed for each gender role variable. A linear regression was used to evaluate the moderation. All necessary assumptions for multiple regression were met, including acceptable rates of tolerance ( $> .40$ ) and acceptable rates of VIF ( $< 2.5$ ). The criterion variable for the regression was the reported proportion of initiation over the two-week period. Block 1 of the regression included the main effects for gender roles and relationship type. Block 2 included the interaction variable (nonsexual gender stereotypes x relationship type; sexual double standards x relationship type). The variables were centered for the moderation analyses. Sex of the partner was not a significant moderator of the relationship between nonsexual gender stereotypes and proportion of initiation (interaction  $\beta = .029$ ,  $t = .21$ ,  $p = .83$ ,  $R^2 = .025$ ,  $R^2$  change =  $.001$ ,  $f^2 = 0.03$ ). Similarly, sex of the partner was not a significant moderator of the relationship between sexual double standards and proportion of initiation (interaction  $\beta = .10$ ,  $t = .69$ ,  $p = .49$ ,  $R^2 = .039$ ,  $R^2$  change =  $.009$ ,  $f^2 = 0.04$ ). All effect sizes were small. Hypothesis 1c was not supported for Part 2.

**Hypothesis 2a.** *Desire will be correlated with sexual initiation. Women with greater sexual desire will initiate sex more frequently.*

**Part 1.** Hypothesis 2a was supported as sexual desire was significantly correlated with reported frequency of sexual initiation within a typical week ( $r = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Sexual desire was also significantly correlated with the proportion of sexual initiation within the past month ( $r = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Part 2.** Hypothesis 2a was supported for Part 2 as sexual desire was significantly correlated with total initiations over the two weeks ( $r = .26, p = .042$ ). Women who reported a higher level of sexual desire initiated sex more frequently over the course of the daily diary study.

**Hypothesis 2b.** *Perceived gender roles will be associated with frequency of initiation over and above the effects of level of sexual desire.*

**Part 1.** A hierarchical linear regression was used to evaluate the hypothesis. All necessary assumptions for regression were met, including acceptable rates of tolerance ( $> .40$ ) and acceptable rates of VIF ( $< 2.5$ ). The criterion variable for the regression was the reported typical number of initiations per week. Block 1 of the regression included the sexual desire total score. Block 2 included the gender roles measure (nonsexual gender stereotypes/sexual double standards). After controlling for sexual desire, nonsexual gender stereotypes do not significantly predict frequency of initiation ( $\beta = -.036, t = -.70, p = .48, R^2 = .072, R^2 \text{ change} = .001$ ). Additionally, sexual double standards do not significantly predict frequency of initiation after controlling for sexual desire ( $\beta = -0.022, t = -.43, p = .67, R^2 = .071, R^2 \text{ change} = .001$ ). Hypothesis 2b was not supported for Part 1.

**Part 2.** A hierarchical linear regression was used to evaluate the hypothesis. All necessary assumptions for regression were met, including acceptable rates of tolerance ( $> .40$ ) and acceptable rates of VIF ( $< 2.5$ ). The criterion variable for the regression was the frequency of sexual initiation over the two-week period. Block 1 of the regression included the sexual desire total score. Block 2 included the gender roles measure (nonsexual gender stereotypes/sexual double standards). After controlling for sexual

desire, nonsexual gender stereotypes do not significantly predict frequency of initiation ( $\beta = -0.14$ ,  $t = -1.17$ ,  $p = .25$ ,  $R^2 = .091$ ,  $R^2$  change = .022,  $f^2 = 0.10$ ). Additionally, sexual double standards do not significantly predict frequency of initiation after controlling for sexual desire ( $\beta = -0.01$ ,  $t = -0.074$ ,  $p = .94$ ,  $R^2 = .069$ ,  $R^2$  change = .00,  $f^2 = .074$ ). All effect sizes were small to small-medium. Hypothesis 2b was not supported for the daily diary study.

**Hypothesis 3a.** *Belief in traditional gender roles— nonsexual stereotypes and sexual double standard — will be negatively correlated with the use of direct initiation strategies.*

**Part 1.** Participants were asked to indicate their three most commonly used initiation strategies. The measure provided a list of common initiation strategies and women were also allowed to identify 'Other' and then detail the strategy. Determinations between direct and indirect strategy were made using guidelines from Vannier and O'Sullivan (2010). The initiation strategies were quantified as the number of direct or indirect strategies reported within the top three most frequently used; therefore, the scores range from 0 to 3. Hypothesis 3a was not supported as belief in traditional gender roles was not associated with direct initiation strategies. Nonsexual gender stereotypes were not significantly correlated with the use of direction initiation strategies ( $r = -.017$ ,  $p = .75$ ). Additionally, the sexual double standard was not significantly correlated with the use of direct initiation strategies ( $r = .092$ ,  $p = .086$ ).

**Part 2.** Throughout the daily diary study, participants were asked to identify all the strategies used for a sexual initiation. The data analyzed to test Hypothesis 3a are the reported proportion of direct strategies used over the total initiation strategies across the

two weeks (e.g. direct/ (direct + indirect)). The data is only from when the participants alone initiated sexual activity. This distinction was made as it would not be possible to know who utilized which strategy when participants noted that the sexual activity was initiated by “both” (partner and self). Similar to Part 1 of the study, the measure provided a list of common initiation strategies as well as an option to identify ‘Other.’ Guidelines from Vannier and O’Sullivan (2010) were used to determinate direct strategies, indirect strategies, and categorize the ‘Other’ strategies detailed. The initiation strategies were quantified as the proportion of direct strategies compared to total initiation strategies reportedly used by the participant within the two-week period.

Hypothesis 3a was not supported as belief in traditional gender roles was not associated with proportion of direct initiation strategies. Nonsexual gender stereotypes were not significantly correlated with the proportion of direct initiation strategies utilized ( $r = .02, p = .87$ ). The sexual double standard was not significantly correlated with the use of direction initiation strategies ( $r = -.067, p = .63$ ). All effect sizes were small.

**Hypothesis 3b.** *Women in relationships with other women will engage in more direct initiation strategies than women in relationships with men.*

**Part 1.** For Part 1, women were asked to report their top three most commonly used strategies. This information is used for the following analyses. A one-way between-subjects ANCOVA was performed to assess for differences in reported use of direct strategies by partner sex. The demographics with significant differences between groups by relationship type were again used as covariates (age, cohabitation, relationship duration, education level, student status). Assumptions for an ANCOVA were met, including equality of variances and homogeneity of regression. The assumption of

equality of variances between groups was tested with *Levene's Test of Equality of Variances* and the required parameters were met ( $p > .05$ ).

For the ANCOVA for direct initiation strategies, the covariate effects were not statistically significant. A statistically significant effect of partner sex was obtained,  $F(1, 318) = 5.49, p = .020$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .017$ . Women in other-sex relationships (adjusted  $M = 1.41$ ,  $SE = .051$ , 95%  $CI = 1.31 - 1.51$ ) reported significantly more direct initiation strategies as most frequently used when corrected for demographic covariates than women in same-sex relationships (adjusted  $M = 1.18$ ,  $SE = .078$ , 95%  $CI = 1.025 - 1.33$ );  $d = 0.31$ . See Table 17. This model was also run without the nonsignificant covariates and the results were similar.

Hypothesis 3b is not supported; the data indicate that women in same-sex relationships actually engaged in fewer direct initiation strategies than women in other-sex relationships. Further data on types of initiation strategies reported as most common across relationship type can be seen in Table 6.

**Part 2.** The data analyzed to test Hypothesis 3b are the reported proportion of direct strategies used over the total initiation strategies across the two weeks (e.g. direct/(direct + indirect)). A one-way between-subjects ANCOVA was performed to assess for differences in proportion of direct initiation strategies used over the two-week period by partner sex. Age and student status were used as covariates due to significant differences between the same-sex and other-sex groups for Part 2 on these demographics. Assumptions for an ANCOVA were met, including equality of variances and homogeneity of regression. The assumption of equality of variances between groups was tested with *Levene's Test of Equality of Variances* and the required parameters were met

( $p > .05$ ). The covariate effects were not statistically significant. Additionally, there was no significant effect of partner sex,  $F(1, 45) = .13, p = .72$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .003$  and the effect size was near zero. See Table 18. There was not a significant difference in proportion of direct initiation strategies for women in same-sex relationships (adjusted  $M = 44.91, SE = 3.93$ ) and women in other-sex relationships (adjusted  $M = 42.69, SE = 4.21$ );  $d = .12$ . This model was also run without the nonsignificant covariates and the results were similar.

Hypothesis 3b was not supported for Part 2. There was not a significant difference in the proportion of direct initiation strategies utilized by partner sex. Data on types of initiation strategies reported as most common across relationship type can be seen in Table 9.

**Hypothesis 3c.** *Sex of the partner will moderate the relationship between belief in traditional gender roles and initiation strategies, such that the relationship between gender roles and initiation strategies will be stronger for women in other-sex relationships than for women in same-sex relationships.*

**Part 1.** Sex of the partner was examined as a moderator of the relationship between traditional gender roles (nonsexual gender stereotypes and sexual double standards) and initiation strategies. Two separate moderation analyses were completed for each gender role variable. Initiation strategy is quantified as the number of direct strategies reported within the top three most frequently used. A linear regression was used to evaluate the moderation. All necessary assumptions for regression were met, including acceptable rates of tolerance ( $> .40$ ) and acceptable rates of VIF ( $< 2.5$ ). The criterion variable for the regression was number of direct initiation strategies. Block 1 of

the regression included the main effects for gender roles and partner sex. Block 2 included the interaction variable (nonsexual gender stereotypes x partner sex; sexual double standards x partner sex). The variables were centered for the moderation analyses. Sex of the partner was not a significant moderator of the relationship between nonsexual gender stereotypes and initiation strategies (interaction  $\beta = .027$ ,  $t = .51$ ,  $p = .61$ ,  $R^2 = .022$ ,  $R^2$  change = .001). Similarly, sex of the partner was not a significant moderator of the relationship between sexual double standards and initiation strategies ( $\beta = -.014$ ,  $t = -.27$ ,  $p = .78$ ,  $R^2 = .035$ ,  $R^2$  change = .00). Hypothesis 3c was not supported for Part 1.

**Part 2.** Sex of the partner was examined as a moderator of the relationship between traditional gender roles (nonsexual gender stereotypes and sexual double standards) and initiation strategies. Two separate moderation analyses were completed for each gender role variable. For part 2 of the study, initiation strategy is quantified as the proportion of direct strategies used across the two weeks. A linear regression was used to evaluate the moderation. All necessary assumptions for regression were met, including acceptable rates of tolerance ( $> .40$ ) and acceptable rates of VIF ( $< 2.5$ ). The criterion variable for the regression was proportion of direct initiation strategies used in the two-week period. Block 1 of the regression included the main effects for gender roles and partner sex. Block 2 included the interaction variable (nonsexual gender stereotypes x partner sex; sexual double standards x partner sex). The variables were centered for the moderation analyses. Sex of the partner was not a significant moderator of the relationship between nonsexual gender stereotypes and initiation strategies (interaction  $\beta = -.061$ ,  $t = -.42$ ,  $p = .67$ ,  $R^2 = .018$ ,  $R^2$  change = .003,  $f^2 = 0.02$ ). Similarly, sex of the

partner was not a significant moderator of the relationship between sexual double standards and initiation strategies ( $\beta = .049$ ,  $t = .33$ ,  $p = .74$ ,  $R^2 = .024$ ,  $R^2$  change = .002,  $f^2 = 0.02$ ). All effect sizes were small. Hypothesis 3c was not supported for Part 2.

**Hypothesis 4a.** *Proportion of sex initiated will be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction.*

**Part 1.** Participants' scores on the Relationship Assessment Scale were used to analyze Hypothesis 4a for Part 1. Note that higher scores denote greater satisfaction. Hypothesis 4a was not supported as proportion of sex initiated in the past month was not significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = .074$ ,  $p = .17$ ). Additionally, there was not a significant correlation between proportion of sex initiated overall and relationship satisfaction ( $r = .066$ ,  $p = .22$ ). Examination of the scatterplot did not indicate the presence of a curvilinear relationship between variables.

**Part 2.** For the daily diary study, participants reported their daily relationship satisfaction on a 7-point Likert scale over the two-week period. This relationship satisfaction average score was used to analyze Hypothesis 4a for Part 2. Higher scores indicate greater relationship satisfaction. Hypothesis 4a was not supported as proportion of sex initiated in the two weeks was not significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction during this time ( $r = -.13$ ,  $p = .31$ ). Examination of the scatterplot did not indicate the presence of a curvilinear relationship between variables.

**Hypothesis 4b.** *Proportion of sex initiated will be positively correlated with sexual satisfaction.*

**Part 1.** Participants' scores on the Index of Sexual Satisfaction were used to analyze Hypothesis 4b for Part 1. Note that higher scores on the Index of Sexual

Satisfaction denote greater distress. Hypothesis 4b was not supported as proportion of sex initiated in the past month was not significantly correlated with sexual satisfaction ( $r = -.053, p = .32$ ). Additionally, there was not a significant correlation between proportion of sex initiated overall and sexual satisfaction ( $r = -.036, p = .51$ ). Examination of the scatterplot did not indicate the presence of a curvilinear relationship between variables.

**Part 2.** Participants reported their sexual satisfaction with a sexual encounter when it occurred, on a 7-point Likert scale, over the two-week period of time. The sexual satisfaction average score was used to analyze Hypothesis 4b for Part 2. Higher scores indicate greater sexual satisfaction. Hypothesis 4b was not supported as proportion of sex initiated in the two weeks was not significantly correlated with sexual satisfaction during this time ( $r = -.055, p = .68$ ). Examination of the scatterplot did not indicate the presence of a curvilinear relationship between variables.

**Hypothesis 4c.** *Proportion of sex initiated will be positively correlated with sexual health efficacy.*

Hypothesis 4c was tested for Part 1 of the study. Participants scores from the Sexual Health Practices Self-Efficacy Scale were used to analyze Hypothesis 4c for Part 1. The proportion of sex initiated in the past month was not significantly correlated with sexual health efficacy ( $r = .015, p = .78$ ). However, there was a significant positive correlation between proportion of sex initiated overall and sexual health efficacy ( $r = .15, p = .005$ ). Women who report higher proportions of sexual initiation within their relationship endorse greater confidence in addressing their sexual health. Examination of the scatterplots did not indicate the presence of a curvilinear relationship between variables. Therefore, Hypothesis 4c is partially supported for Part 1.

**Part 2.** Participants scores from the Sexual Health Practices Self-Efficacy Scale in Part 1 were used to analyze Hypothesis 4c for Part 2. Hypothesis 4c was not supported as proportion of sex initiated in the two weeks was not significantly correlated with sexual health self-efficacy during this time ( $r = .12, p = .37$ ). Examination of the scatterplot did not indicate the presence of a curvilinear relationship between variables. Hypothesis 4c was not supported for Part 2.

### **Exploratory Analysis**

#### **Sexual satisfaction.**

**Part 1.** Continued analysis of Part 1 data reveals further information regarding sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and frequency of sexual initiations. Scores from the Index of Sexual Satisfaction and Relationship Assessment Scale, completed in Part 1, were used for these continued analyses. There was a significant correlation between the typical number of times a participant initiates sex within a week and sexual satisfaction ( $r = -.19, p < .001$ ). Note that higher scores on the Index of Sexual Satisfaction denote greater distress. Therefore, women who initiate sex more frequently report greater sexual satisfaction. Frequency of initiation within a typical week was not significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = .09, p = .085$ ).

**Part 2.** For the daily diary study, participants reported their daily relationship satisfaction on a 7-point Likert scale. This relationship satisfaction average score was used for the continued analyses. Similarly, participants reported their sexual satisfaction with a sexual encounter when it occurred on a 7-point Likert scale. The sexual satisfaction average over the two-week period of time was used for the continued analyses. For the relationship and sexual satisfaction scores, higher scores indicate

greater satisfaction. Continued analysis of Part 2 data reveals further information regarding sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and frequency of sex. There was a significant correlation between the total initiations an individual made over the two-week period and sexual satisfaction during that period ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ). There was not a significant correlation between total initiations and relationship satisfaction; however, there was a small to medium positive correlation which is noteworthy given the small sample size ( $r = .23, p = .073$ ), suggesting that greater initiation might be associated with relationship satisfaction if I had had a larger sample to detect the association. With regard to overall frequency of sex, there were significant correlations between total sexual encounters and sexual satisfaction ( $r = .39, p = .002$ ), as well as relationship satisfaction ( $r = .28, p = .030$ ). See Table 19 for correlations between total sexual encounters, total initiations, and proportion of initiations.

**Part 1 and Part 2 comparisons.** Comparisons in reports of initiation frequency, proportion, and strategies were tested for the sixty women who completed Part 1 and Part 2. Weak correlations would indicate that retrospective reports of initiation frequency, proportion, and strategies might be influenced by recall biases.

Paired-samples t-tests were used to determine if there were mean differences across the retrospective and daily diary reports in regards to initiation strategies, frequency of initiation, and proportion of initiation within the relationship. Comparisons were explored for the entire sample (see Table 20), as well as the smaller samples of women in other-sex and same-sex relationships (see Tables 21 & 22). As there were no differences in results from the overall sample and the smaller groups by relationship type, this additional information is presented only in tabular format.

***Initiation Strategies.*** A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare proportion of direct strategies reportedly used in Part 1 and Part 2. For Part 1, participants were asked to identify their top 3 most commonly used initiation strategies. The strategies were then determined to be indirect or direct using guidelines from Vannier & O'Sullivan (2010). For the purposes of the paired-samples t-test, the participants' responses were coded as the proportion of direct strategies out of the three most commonly endorsed. For Part 2, the variable is the proportion of direct strategies used compared to total strategies over the two weeks. There was not a significant difference in the scores for Part 1 ( $M = 43.04$ ,  $SD = 26.19$ ) and Part 2 ( $M = 44.63$ ,  $SD = 17.98$ );  $t(54) = -4.07$ ,  $p = .69$ ,  $d = .05$ . This suggests that the participants were accurate in their retrospective reporting (Part 1) of their utilization of direct initiation strategies.

***Frequency of Initiation.*** Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the frequency of reported sexual initiation by participants in Part 1 and Part 2. For Part 1, participants were asked to indicate the number of times they initiated sex on a weekly basis. For the purposes of completing the analyses, that value was doubled to account for the comparison to the two-week daily diary. For Part 2, information regarding the total initiations the participants were involved in ('self' and 'both') was used.

For frequency of initiation, there was not a significant difference in the scores for Part 1 ( $M = 6.47$ ,  $SD = 7.15$ ) and Part 2 ( $M = 4.76$ ,  $SD = 3.51$ );  $t(58) = 1.95$ ,  $p = .056$ ,  $d = 0.25$ . These results again suggest that women appropriately assessed their frequency of initiation in Part 1.

***Proportion of Sexual Initiation.*** A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the reported proportion of sexual initiation in their relationship over the past 4

weeks (Part 1) and the proportion of sexual initiation ('self') across the daily diary period (Part 2). There was not a significant difference in the proportion of sexual initiation for Part 1 ( $M = 48.62$ ,  $SD = 25.58$ ) and Part 2 ( $M = 39.72$ ,  $SD = 30.27$ );  $t(57) = 1.83$ ,  $p = 0.073$ ,  $d = 0.24$ .

### Discussion

The present study investigated women's sexual initiation behaviors to gain a greater understanding of the factors that impact initiation, what initiation looks like within women's relationships, and the potential wellness benefits. This study contributes to the literature as it explores sexual initiation through two different methodologies, includes women in other-sex and same-sex relationships, and provides current information on the sexual scripts of initiation.

Sexual script theory asserts that societal norms of behavior describe "the who, what, where, when, why, and how of sexual interactions" (Dworkin et al., 2007, p. 270). In regards to sexual initiation, the traditional cultural sexual script states that men are the initiators of sexual activity, whereas women are the restrictors of sexual activity (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). As societal norms have changed, past research has demonstrated that views on gender role beliefs and sexual scripts have become more egalitarian (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Ortiz-Torres, Williams, & Ehrhardt, 2003; Segal, 1995). These changes have resulted in increased sexual initiation among women (Markle, 2008; Menard & Cabrera, 2011; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Despite changing societal norms, researchers continued to find men initiating sex at a higher rate than women in heterosexual relationships (Masters et al., 2013; Ortiz-Torres et al., 2003, Simms & Byers, 2013). However, in contrast to this, results of the present study indicate that

gender role beliefs did not impact sexual initiation behaviors and the traditional sexual script was not followed, as women in other-sex relationships reported fairly balanced initiation with their partner.

One possibility for limited adherence to the traditional sexual script is that individuals often report the presence of the sexual double standard—which reinforces traditional sexual scripts—within their culture (i.e., they believe that *others* possess a sexual double standard); however, based on self-report measures, individuals increasingly indicate that they do not *personally* endorse this double standard (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Milhausen & Herold, 1999; Milhausen & Herold, 2002). It has been theorized that a confirmation bias may play a role in the continued cultural belief in the traditional sexual double standard as individual endorsement has minimized (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Marks & Fraley, 2005; Marks & Fraley, 2006). These cultural changes may explain the increasingly balanced sexual initiation reported for women with male partners in this study. Despite fairly balanced initiation in other-sex relationships, women in same-sex relationships reported higher rates of sexual initiation on some measures. These results indicate that there is a meaningful difference depending on the sex of one's partner, and that sexual scripts across relationship types may differ. As personal belief in traditional nonsexual and sexual gender roles is not accounting for the discrepancy in this sample, it will be important for future studies to continue to investigate sexual initiation across relationship type.

The current study investigated beliefs for nonsexual and sexual gender roles. This definition allowed for information to be gathered regarding participants' beliefs about women's cultural roles broadly and specific to sexual relationships. Analyses indicated

that nonsexual gender roles and sexual gender roles were not correlated highly enough to warrant the creation of a composite gender role variable. These results suggest that beliefs in these gender roles are different from one another. Women may hold differing beliefs about acceptable behaviors for women within nonsexual versus sexual domains. In general, women in this sample reported limited endorsement of traditional nonsexual and sexual gender role beliefs.

Across the studies, results indicated limited impact of gender role beliefs on sexual initiation. Although past research has demonstrated significant gender differences in sexual initiation, information from this study suggests that belief in gender roles is not a significant predictor of sexual initiation. There are likely a number of reasons why nonsexual gender roles and sexual gender role beliefs had limited utility in predicting sexual initiation behaviors. Overall, there was a limited range within the gender role variables as the sample held more egalitarian nonsexual and sexual gender role beliefs. This data supports the idea that gender role beliefs have changed over time to become more egalitarian (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Ortiz-Torres, Williams, & Ehrhardt, 2003; Segal, 1995). A limited range on the measures may have impacted the outcome in regards to finding a relationship with sexual initiation.

Additionally, the changing zeitgeist around gender roles may indicate that the measures themselves are out of date for what beliefs are held now. More nuanced and updated measures may be needed to accurately assess gender role beliefs and the potential impact on sexual initiation. Research has suggested that there has been a change in the endorsement of sexual double standards, such that most people no longer endorse the sexual double standard on face-valid measures but continue to use derogatory

terms to discuss sexually experienced women in qualitative studies (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Milhausen & Herold, 2002). Additionally, due to changing cultural norms around sexual behaviors, actions that were foundational to the sexual double standard, such as engagement in pre-marital sex, are no longer viewed from the same traditional lens (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Jonason & Marks, 2009). However, a sexual double standard does appear for women engaging in atypical sexual behaviors, such as group sex (Jonason & Marks, 2009). It is likely that new measures, with increased subtlety and adaption for modern cultural norms, are needed to better understand current gender role beliefs.

Lastly, research has posited that gendered sexual scripts likely hold different weight at the beginning of heterosexual relationships when the costs of breaking social norms are at their highest (Seal et al., 2008; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). The sample included women mostly in established relationships, and therefore gender role beliefs may have held less relevance to their sexual behaviors with current partners.

Overall, participants generally reported balanced initiation with their partners and noted that their ideal was for equal sexual initiation within their relationship. The gender role variables were not shown to have an impact on the proportion of sexual initiations that occurred within women's relationships. After controlling for a number of significant demographic differences between groups, women in same-sex relationships reported a higher proportion of sexual initiations, over the past month and overall, than women in other-sex relationships. There was no significant difference in the reported proportion of sexual initiation in Part 2. It is unlikely that the lack of a difference seen in Part 2 is a result of retrospective over-estimating or under-estimating by either group, as

comparisons between Part 1 and Part 2 did not detect significant differences in reported proportion. Rather, it is possible that the women who volunteered to participate in Part 2 were more similar in their sexual initiation behaviors, regardless of partner sex, and therefore limited differences were seen. Additionally, Part 2 was underpowered and therefore may have been unable to detect significant differences. Sample means across frequency and proportion of initiations for same-sex relationships were higher than for other-sex relationships in Part 2 even though the difference did not reach the level of significance. This new information on women in same-sex relationships has important implications for both the frequency of sex within these relationships and the equal sexual initiation. This study supports past research that the frequency of sexual activity within same-sex relationships is similar to that of other-sex relationships (Cohen & Byers, 2013). Further research should be aimed at increasing understanding of sexual navigation within same-sex relationships and the associated benefits of seemingly egalitarian sexual initiation.

Sexual desire was found to relate to sexual initiation in this study, confirming past research (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001). Women who reported experiencing more sexual desire engaged in greater amounts of sexual initiation. Again, gender role beliefs were not associated with sexual initiation beyond sexual desire. It is obvious why sexual desire would relate to initiation; however, past daily diary research has found that there were no significant gender differences in the rates of *considering* initiating sexual activity even as there were differences in rates of initiation (Curtis et al., 2012; O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Thus, differences in desire cannot fully account for gender differences in initiation; future research is needed to

better understand individual differences in rates of sexual initiation beyond just sexual desire.

Women reported engaging in both direct and indirect strategies to initiate sexual activity. Across Part 1 and Part 2, the participants reported using indirect initiation strategies more frequently than direct initiation strategies. These findings support previous literature that indirect strategies are the most common form of initiation. Indirect initiation strategies have been shown to be most frequently used by both women and men (Curtis et al., 2012; Gossman et al., 2003; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010).

For this study, there was no relationship between gender role beliefs and use of direct initiation strategies. Part 1 demonstrated that women in same-sex relationships reported fewer direct strategies than women in other-sex relationships. It is possible that women in same-sex relationships believe they do not need to communicate as directly because their sexual interest will be more easily understood by their female partner. It is also plausible that our culture places an increased emphasis on the need for clear communication in other-sex relationships due to concerns about sexual consent.

Although women across relationship type reported greater use of indirect initiation strategies, Part 1 demonstrated that women in other-sex relationships reported more direct strategies than women in same-sex relationships. Another explanation for the higher rates of direct initiation strategies in other-sex relationships could be the impact of longer-term relationships on the traditional sexual scripts. Prior research has shown that adherence to traditional sexual scripts is not as strong within long-term relationships (Vannier & O'Sullivan 2010). Further, previous initiation research on other-sex couples in long-term relationships found that women used more direct messages to initiate sex

than their male counterparts (Gossman et al., 2003; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). As a majority of the women in this study were in long-term relationships, the women with male partners may feel confident that their partners will be receptive to direct sexual initiation and are less threatened by the cost of negative evaluation that can result from going against sexual scripts early in relationships (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010).

The final hypotheses in this study investigated the relationship between sexual initiation and wellness benefits (sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, sexual health self-efficacy). Past research has established a link between sexual initiation and relational benefits, including sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction (Lawrance, Byers, & Cohen, 2011; Montesi, Fauber, & Gordon, 2010). In these past studies, sexual initiation was measured as frequency of initiating sex and sexual communication about initiation. Results of the current study indicated that proportion of sexual initiations was not significantly correlated with relationship or sexual satisfaction. However, the number of actual sexual initiations that a woman engaged in was significantly correlated with sexual satisfaction, supporting past research (Gossmann et al., 2003; Lawrance et al., 2011; Simms & Byers, 2013). These results suggest that the frequency of sexual initiation itself is linked to sexual satisfaction, rather than the proportion compared to one's partner. Women who initiated sex more frequently across the two-week daily diary also engaged in more sexual encounters, so the relationship between frequency of sexual initiation and sexual satisfaction may, in part, reflect that more initiation leads to more sex. Lastly, there was a significant correlation between reported proportion of initiation within the overall relationship and sexual health self-efficacy. Women who reported higher proportions of sexual initiation within their relationship endorsed greater

confidence in addressing their sexual health. This may reflect the fact that women who are confident in initiating sex are also confident in communicating with their partner about sexual health-related decisions (e.g., condom and contraceptive use; STI testing). This finding has important implications for women's sexual health and further efforts should be placed in understanding the wellness benefits of sexual initiation.

Sixty women completed Part 1 and Part 2 of the study. Comparisons between Part 1 and Part 2 show similar endorsement of proportion of direct and indirect initiation strategies utilized, frequency of sexual initiation, and proportion of sexual initiation across both reporting methods. As Part 1 entailed retrospective reporting and Part 2 was a daily diary method, the comparisons indicated consistency in participants' reporting of sexual initiation behaviors. For this study, retrospective reports appeared to be an accurate way to measure varying aspects of sexual initiation. Although the frequency of sexual initiations was not significantly different across Part 1 and Part 2, a paired-samples t-test was approaching significance ( $p = .056$ ,  $d = 0.25$ ). The mean frequency of initiations was lower across the daily diary period. A number of factors potentially play a role in the difference in frequency of initiation, including varying reasons that appeared in qualitative daily diary statements (e.g. conflict with partner, fatigue from day, menstruation); nevertheless, given that these barriers to sexual activity could occur during any two-week period, there may be a slight tendency for women to over-report their initiation behavior on retrospective self-reports. A possible limitation to daily diary methodology is the potential for the self-monitoring system itself to increase women's sexual initiation behaviors over the two weeks. However, the comparison results demonstrate that the daily diary methodology did not inflate sexual initiation behaviors

beyond what participants reported as typical. Future daily diary studies will be helpful in continuing to understand navigations of sexual behaviors within relationships.

### **Limitations**

Although the results of this study have important implications for understanding women's sexual initiation, some limitations must be noted. First, this study included a sample population that is not fully representative of the overall U.S. population. The sample was relatively well-educated and had a limited number of women identifying as Hispanic/Latino compared to the national population. While Part 1 had moderate sample diversity, Part 2 was a more homogenous sample. Therefore, these results may not be generalizable to women of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, the study sample was skewed towards younger adult women.

There is a limitation regarding the measurement of the proportion of sexual initiation. In Part 1, women were asked to provide the proportion of initiations they made from 0% to 100% across several questions. The question only included the percentage the participant initiated sex and the remaining percentage that her partner initiated. However, in Part 2, women were given the option to identify 'self', 'partner', or 'both' as the initiator. Participants frequently indicated that both they and their partner initiated a sexual encounter. As Part 1 did not inquire about times when both parties initiated, it was not possible to compare the proportion of 'self' and 'both' initiations across parts of the study. Additionally, the frequent endorsement of 'both' in Part 2 indicates that women perceive a joint interaction occurring around sexual initiation. It will be important for future studies to better understand situations in which both parties initiate sex, including the potential role of proceptive (pre-initiation) cues to signal initial interest or possible

agreed upon scripts within the relationship (e.g. having sex on a Friday night; Perper & Weis, 1987).

Another limitation of this study is the use of self-report measures that are only from the perspective of one partner in the relationship. It is possible that a participant's partner would have differing ratings of the participant's frequency and proportion of initiation. In other words, partners may not agree on their perception of who initiated sex. Therefore, the results of this study are limited to only one partner's perspective. The inclusion of data from both partners would allow for a greater understanding of initiation within the relationship. Given that women in same-sex relationships reported initiating a majority of the time within the relationship, it would be interesting for future studies to include both same-sex partners to understand initiation patterns. The report of women in same-sex relationships initiating over 50% of the time provides a potential inconsistency. In a representative sample of same-sex relationships, one would expect that the women would report, on average, a 50% initiate rate. Given that this study found a higher initiation rate in this sample, it suggests either a volunteer bias, such that women who initiate sex more frequently were more likely to volunteer to participate in the study, or that the women in same-sex relationships are over-reporting their proportion of initiation.

Additional limitations arise from the diversity of relationship factors within the sample. The inclusion criteria for the study were broad so as to recruit an ample, diverse sample. However, this resulted in an assortment of relationship factors that have been demonstrated to impact sexual initiation, including relationship duration and level of commitment. It is possible that some results may have differed if there was similarity across relationship variables. Although notably, several relationship variables were non-

significant covariates in the study analyses. Future studies may benefit from increased recruitment across relationship variables to assess for potential cohort differences.

### **Conclusions**

Despite current limitations of the study, results suggest that women engage in fairly balanced sexual initiation with their partners and women report higher initiation within same-sex relationships than other-sex relationships. Indirect initiation strategies were most common across relationship types. Women in other-sex relationships more commonly utilize direct initiation strategies than women in same-sex relationships in the retrospective study. Gender role beliefs were not a significant factor in women's sexual initiation. However, as sexual initiation continues to be an important factor for sexual satisfaction, researchers should strive to better understand how sex is navigated within different types of relationships. Additionally, in the current study, sexual initiation was shown to have an important connection to women's sexual health self-efficacy. Future research should continue to examine predictors of sexual initiation, along with continued inspection of same-sex relationships. A focus on better understanding sexual navigations within relationships, particularly sexual initiation, will have important implications for women's sexual wellness.

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Table 1.

*Part 1: Participant Demographics (N = 351)*


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<b>Age (Years)</b>	<i>M</i> = 27.68 <i>SD</i> = 9.31	<b>Annual Income</b>	
		< \$25,000	144 (41.0%)
		\$25,000 - \$70,000	133 (38.1%)
		> \$70,000	72 (20.6%)
<b>Sex of Partner</b>		<b>Recruitment Source</b>	
<i>Male</i>	242 (68.9%)	<i>UMSL</i>	186 (53.0%)
<i>Female</i>	109 (31.1%)	<i>Craigslist</i>	165 (47.0%)
<b>Race</b>		<b>Relationship Status</b>	
<i>White</i>	241 (68.7%)	<i>Married</i>	47 (13.4%)
<i>Black</i>	68 (19.4%)	<i>Cohabitate</i>	132 (37.6%)
<i>Asian</i>	14 (4.0%)	<i>Committed/Monogamous</i>	239 (68.1%)
<i>Native American</i>	5 (1.4%)		
<i>Other</i>	4 (1.1%)		
<i>Biracial/Multiracial</i>	11 (8.7%)		
<b>Ethnicity</b>		<b>Employment</b>	
<i>Non-Hispanic/Latino</i>	324 (92.3%)	<i>Work full-time</i>	125 (35.6%)
<i>Hispanic/Latino</i>	27 (7.7%)	<i>Work part-time</i>	136 (38.7%)
		<i>Student</i>	181 (51.6%)
		<i>Unemployed</i>	29 (8.3%)
<b>Years of Education</b>		<b>Relationship Duration (Years)</b>	<i>M</i> = 3.39 <i>SD</i> = 4.28
<i>Less than HS</i>	1 (0.3%)		
<i>HS/GED</i>	3 (10.8%)		
<i>Some College</i>	47 (41.9%)		
<i>College Degree (Assoc./Bachelors)</i>	135 (38.5%)		
<i>Masters Degree</i>	27 (7.7%)		
<i>Academic or Professional Degree</i>	2 (0.6%)		

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Table 2.

*Part 2: Participant Demographics (N = 60)*


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<b>Age (Years)</b>	<i>M</i> = 26.48 <i>SD</i> = 8.63	<b>Annual Income</b>	
		< \$25,000	30 (50.0%)
		\$25,000 - \$70,000	22 (36.7%)
		> \$70,000	8 (13.3%)
<b>Sex of Partner</b>		<b>Recruitment Source</b>	
<i>Male</i>	29 (48.3%)	<i>UMSL</i>	20 (33.3%)
<i>Female</i>	31 (51.7%)	<i>Craigslist</i>	40 (66.7%)
<b>Race</b>		<b>Relationship Status</b>	
<i>White</i>	48 (80.0%)	<i>Married</i>	4 (6.7%)
<i>Black</i>	7 (11.7%)	<i>Cohabitate</i>	24 (40.0%)
<i>Asian</i>	2 (3.3%)	<i>Committed/Monogamous</i>	43 (71.7%)
<i>Other</i>	1 (1.7%)		
<b>Ethnicity</b>		<b>Employment</b>	
<i>Non-Hispanic/Latino</i>	57 (95.0%)	<i>Work full-time</i>	20 (33.3%)
<i>Hispanic/Latino</i>	3 (5.0%)	<i>Work part-time</i>	21 (35.0%)
		<i>Student</i>	32 (53.3%)
		<i>Unemployed</i>	7 (11.7%)
<b>Years of Education</b>		<b>Relationship Duration (Years)</b>	<i>M</i> = 2.47 <i>SD</i> = 2.53
<i>HS/GED</i>	6 (10.0%)		
<i>Some College</i>	29 (48.3%)		
<i>College Degree</i> ( <i>Assoc./Bachelors</i> )	22 (36.7%)		
<i>Masters Degree</i>	2 (3.3%)		
<i>Academic or</i> <i>Professional Degree</i>	1 (1.7%)		

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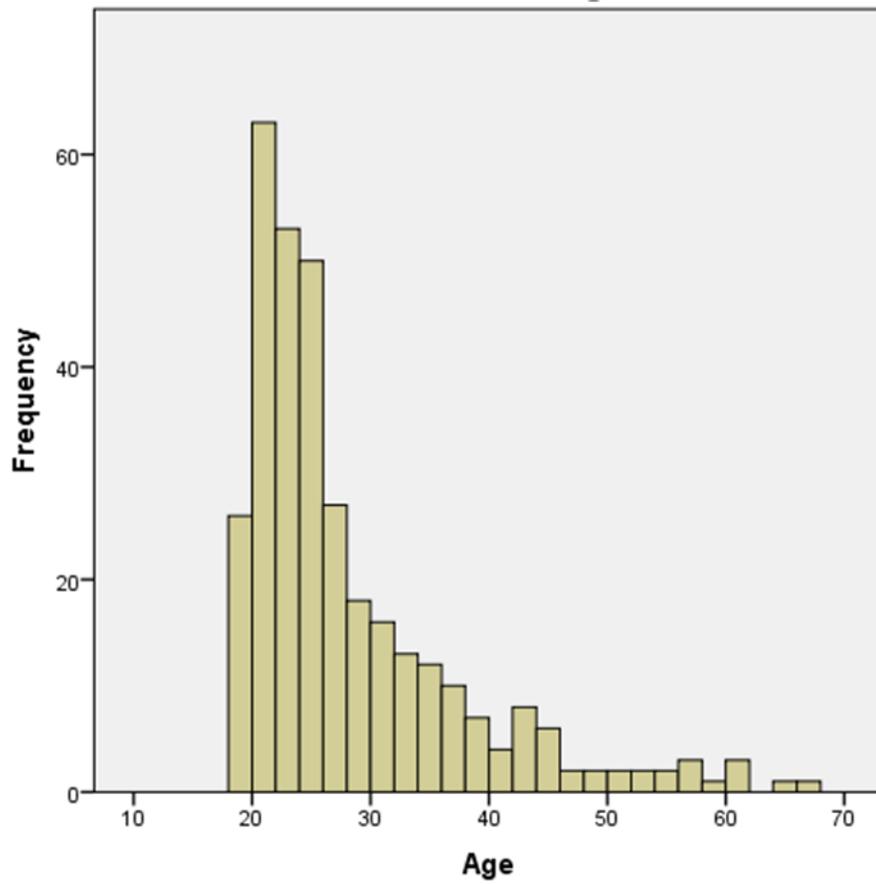


Figure 1. Part 1: Age distribution of participants.

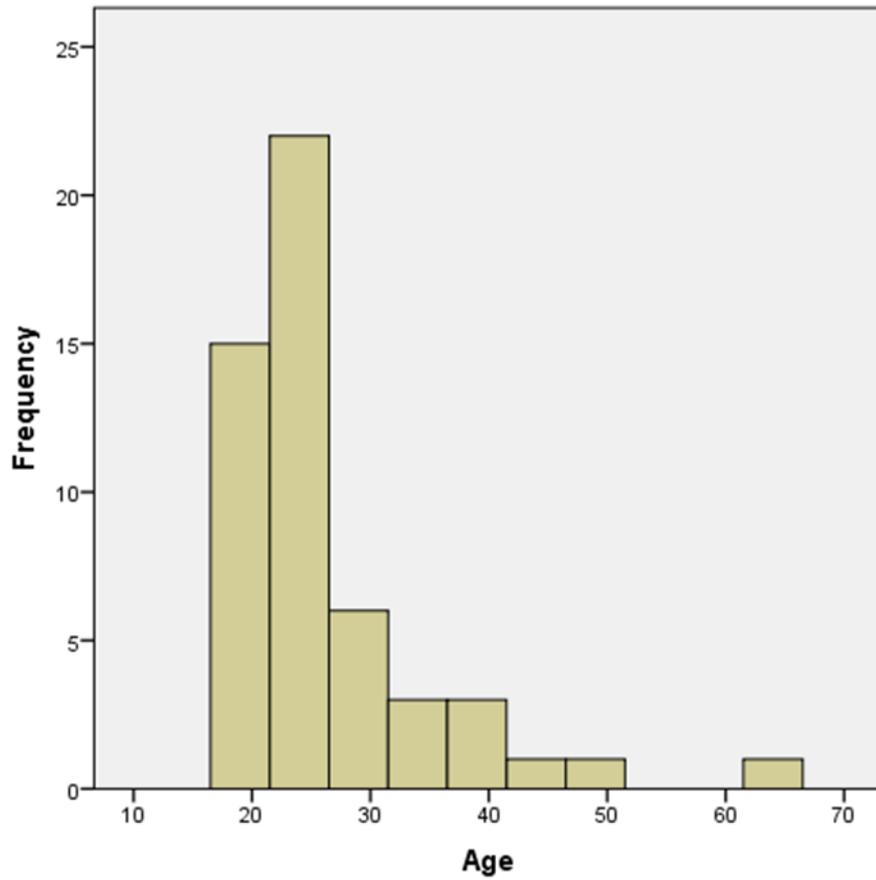


Figure 2. Part 2: Age distribution of participants.

Table 3.

*Part 1: Statistics for Gender Role Variables (N = 351)*

	Nonsexual Stereotypes	Sexual Double Standard
<b>Mean (SD)</b>	145.83 (27.87)	40.19 (7.83)
<b>Sample Range</b>		
<b>Min</b>	58 (0.3%)	13 (0.3%)
<b>Max</b>	203 (0.9%)	50 (12.5%)
<b>Possible Range</b>		
<b>Min</b>	29	10
<b>Max</b>	203	50
<b>Skewness (SE)</b>	-.25 (.13)	-.72 (.13)
<b>Kurtosis (SE)</b>	-.23 (.26)	.18 (.26)

*Note.* Higher scores indicate less adherence to traditional beliefs

Table 4.

*Part 2: Statistics for Gender Role Variables (N = 60)*

	Nonsexual Stereotypes	Sexual Double Standard
<b>Mean (SD)</b>	157.93 (25.05)	42.90 (7.88)
<b>Sample Range</b>		
<b>Min</b>	95 (1.7%)	16 (1.7%)
<b>Max</b>	203 (1.7%)	50 (21.7%)
<b>Possible Range</b>		
<b>Min</b>	29	10
<b>Max</b>	203	50
<b>Skewness (SE)</b>	-.46 (.31)	-.97 (.31)
<b>Kurtosis (SE)</b>	-.30 (.61)	-.14 (.61)

*Note.* Higher scores indicate less adherence to traditional beliefs

Table 5.

*Part 1: Statistics for Sexual Initiation*

<b>Women in other-sex relationships (n = 242)</b>				
	% Overall in relationship	% In last month	Typical initiations per week	Ideal Initiation %
<b>Mean</b>	52.0%	45.8%	3.44	52.2%
<b>Stand. Dev.</b>	11.59%	14.09%	3.66	7.62%
<b>Sample Range</b>				
<b>Min</b>	0% (1.2%)	0% (5.4%)	0 (5.8%)	0% (1.2%)
<b>Max</b>	100% (4.5%)	100%(4.5%)	20 (2.1%)	100% (3.3%)
<b>Skewness (SE)</b>	.19 (.16)	.22 (.16)	2.80 (.16)	.33 (.16)
<b>Kurtosis (SE)</b>	.11 (.31)	.11 (.31)	8.99 (.31)	1.56 (.31)
<b>Women in same-sex relationships (n = 109)</b>				
	% Overall in relationship	% In last month	Typical initiations per week	Ideal Initiation %
<b>Mean</b>	60.50%	55.60%	3.51	57.90%
<b>Stand. Dev.</b>	12.29%	16.31%	3.37	11.10%
<b>Sample Range</b>				
<b>Min</b>	0% (2.8%)	0% (6.4%)	0 (8.3%)	0% (1.8%)
<b>Max</b>	100% (5.5%)	100%(9.2%)	20 (0.9%)	100% (9.2%)
<b>Skewness (SE)</b>	-.36 (.23)	-.22 (.23)	2.03 (.23)	.18 (.23)
<b>Kurtosis (SE)</b>	.21 (.46)	-.24 (.46)	5.59 (.46)	.61 (.46)

Table 6.

*Part 1: Statistics for Sexual Initiation Strategies*

	<b>Other-sex relationships (n = 242)</b>		<b>Same-sex relationships (n = 109)</b>	
	Direct strategies	Indirect strategies	Direct strategies	Indirect strategies
<b>Mean</b>	1.42	1.58	1.18	1.82
<b>Stand. Dev.</b>	0.75	0.75	0.72	0.72
<b>Sample Range</b>				
<b>Min</b>	0 (9.9%)	0 (6.2%)	0 (16.5%)	0 (1.8%)
<b>Max</b>	3 (6.2%)	3 (9.9%)	3 (1.8%)	3 (16.5%)
<b>Skewness (SE)</b>	.006 (.16)	-.006 (.16)	.008 (.23)	-.008 (.23)
<b>Kurtosis (SE)</b>	-.34 (.31)	-.34 (.31)	-.49 (.46)	-.49 (.46)

Table 7.

*Part 2: Statistics for Sexual Initiation; 'Self' & 'Both' as Initiator*

	<b>Other-sex relationships (n = 29)</b>		<b>Same-sex relationships (n = 31)</b>	
	Total initiations	% in 2 weeks	Total Initiations	% in 2 weeks
<b>Mean</b>	4.00	67.09%	5.65	73.73%
<b>Stand. Dev.</b>	2.94	28.83%	3.91	19.58%
<b>Sample Range</b>				
<b>Min</b>	0 (6.9%)	11.7% (3.4%)	1 (19.4%)	33.33% (3.2%)
<b>Max</b>	12 (3.4%)	100% (24.1%)	16 (3.2%)	100% (25.8%)
<b>Skewness (SE)</b>	.73 (.43)	-.39 (.45)	.71 (.42)	-.11 (.42)
<b>Kurtosis (SE)</b>	.21 (.85)	-1.14 (.87)	.012 (.82)	-.75 (.82)

Table 8.

*Part 2: Statistics for Sexual Initiation; 'Self' Only as Initiator*

	<b>Other-sex relationships (n = 29)</b>		<b>Same-sex relationships (n = 31)</b>	
	Total initiations	% in 2 weeks	Total Initiations	% in 2 weeks
<b>Mean</b>	2.31	39.67%	2.90	39.77%
<b>Stand. Dev.</b>	2.09	29.65%	2.55	31.30%
<b>Sample Range</b>				
<b>Min</b>	0 (17.2%)	0% (10.3%)	0 (16.1%)	0% (16.1%)
<b>Max</b>	7 (6.9%)	100% (6.9%)	10 (3.2%)	100% (12.9%)
<b>Skewness (SE)</b>	1.02 (.43)	.40 (.45)	1.01 (.42)	.66 (.42)
<b>Kurtosis (SE)</b>	.20 (.85)	-.35 (.87)	.71 (.82)	-.39 (.82)

Table 9.

*Part 2: Statistics for Sexual Initiation Strategies*

	<b>Other-sex relationships (n = 29)</b>		<b>Same-sex relationships (n = 31)</b>	
	Direct strategies	Indirect strategies	Direct strategies	Indirect strategies
<b>Mean</b>	8.55	8.52	13.16	13.87
<b>Stand. Dev.</b>	8.46	7.37	15.4	11.84
<b>Sample Range</b>				
<b>Min</b>	0 (20.7%)	0 (10.3%)	0 (6.5%)	0 (6.5%)
<b>Max</b>	30 (3.4%)	27 (3.4%)	72 (3.2%)	49 (3.2%)
<b>Skewness (SE)</b>	.72 (.43)	.82 (.43)	2.34 (.42)	1.13 (.42)
<b>Kurtosis (SE)</b>	-.46 (.85)	-.14 (.85)	6.65 (.82)	1.27 (.82)
	Proportion Direct	Proportion Indirect	Proportion Direct	Proportion Indirect
<b>Mean</b>	42.67	57.33	46.39	53.61
<b>Stand. Dev.</b>	20.43	20.43	15.62	15.62
<b>Sample Range</b>				
<b>Min</b>	0 (10.3%)	32 (3.4%)	15 (3.2%)	30 (3.2%)
<b>Max</b>	68 (3.4%)	100 (10.3%)	70 (3.2%)	85 (3.2%)
<b>Skewness (SE)</b>	-1.06 (.46)	1.06 (.20)	-.11 (.43)	.11 (.43)
<b>Kurtosis (SE)</b>	.20 (.89)	.20 (.89)	-.99 (.85)	-.99 (.85)

Table 10.

*Part 1: Statistics for Satisfaction & Wellness Variables (N = 351)*

	Relationship Satisfaction	Sexual Satisfaction	Sexual Health Self-Efficacy
<b>Mean (SD)</b>	28.31 (5.55)	55.57 (22.01)	78.35 (13.55)
<b>Sample Range</b>			
<b>Min</b>	9 (0.3%)	25 (1.7%)	36 (0.3%)
<b>Max</b>	35 (10%)	124 (0.3%)	100 (4.8%)
<b>Possible Range</b>			
<b>Min</b>	7	0	20
<b>Max</b>	35	175	100
<b>Skewness (SE)</b>	-.89 (.13)	.82 (.13)	-.37 (.13)
<b>Kurtosis (SE)</b>	.30 (.26)	-.07 (.26)	-.34 (.26)

*Note.* Higher sexual satisfaction scores indicate greater distress

Table 11.

*Part 2: Statistics for Satisfaction Variables (N = 60)*

	Relationship Satisfaction	Sexual Satisfaction	Sexual Health Self-Efficacy
<b>Mean (SD)</b>	5.47 (1.18)	5.42 (1.83)	77.29 (12.82)
<b>Sample Range</b>			
<b>Min</b>	2.36 (1.7%)	0 (6.7%)	50
<b>Max</b>	7.00 (10%)	7.00 (11.7%)	100
<b>Possible Range</b>			
<b>Min</b>	1.00	0	20
<b>Max</b>	7.00	7.00	100
<b>Skewness (SE)</b>	-.73 (.31)	-1.98 (.31)	-.089 (.31)
<b>Kurtosis (SE)</b>	-.08 (.61)	3.47 (.61)	-.99 (.61)

Table 12.

*Part 1: Correlations Between Gender Role Variables, Proportion of Initiation, Satisfaction and Wellness Variables, and Partner Sex*

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Nonsexual Stereotypes	--									
2. Sexual Double Standard	.56**	---								
3. Sexual Desire	-.01	-.01	---							
4. Initiation, Overall	-.03	.02	.16**	---						
5. Initiation, Past Month	.03	.04	.20**	.67**	---					
6. Direct Strategies	-.02	.09	.13*	.04	.08	---				
7. Relationship Satisfaction	.12*	.12*	-.04	.07	.07	-.10	---			
8. Sexual Satisfaction	-.11*	-.17**	-.11*	-.04	-.05	.06	-.59**	---		
9. Sexual Health Self-Efficacy	.07	.11*	.03	.15**	-.02	-.02	.19**	-.28**	---	
10. Partner Sex	.20**	.16**	.09	.18**	.18**	-.15**	-.02	.06	-.03	---

*Note.* Higher gender role scores indicate less adherence to traditional beliefs; higher sexual satisfaction scores indicate greater distress; for partner sex 1 = Male, 2 = Female  
 \*\* $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

Table 13.

*Part 2: Correlations Between Gender Role Variables, Proportion of Initiation, Satisfaction and Wellness Variables, and Partner Sex*

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Nonsexual Stereotypes	--									
2. Sexual Double Standard	.49**	---								
3. Sexual Desire	-.09	-.15	---							
4. Initiation, Self Only	-.16	-.24	.04	---						
5. Initiation, Self & Both	-.05	-.06	-.15	.48**	---					
6. Proportion Direct Strategies	.26	-.07	.15	-.08	-.12	---				
7. Relationship Satisfaction	-.16	.12*	-.02	-.19	-.14	-.09	---			
8. Sexual Satisfaction	-.18	-.09	.42**	-.18	-.06	.06	.44**	---		
9. Sexual Health Self-Efficacy	-.17	-.02	.06	.18	.12	-.09	.21		---	
10. Partner Sex	.16	.29*	.17	-.04	.14	.10	.09	.19	.01	---

*Note.* Higher gender role scores indicate less adherence to traditional beliefs; for partner sex 1 = Male, 2 = Female

\*\* $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

Table 14.

*Part 1: ANCOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Proportion of Initiation in Past Month by Partner Sex*

	Proportion of Initiation Past Month			
	Observed Mean	Adjusted Mean	SD	<i>n</i>
Male	46.59	46.99	24.32	220
Female	55.59	54.72	26.98	102
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Partial $\eta^2$
Age	1	212.30	.34	.001
Cohabitate	1	467.03	.74	.002
Rel. Duration	1	1257.54	1.98	.006
Education	1	1074.93	1.69	.005
Student	1	1.92	.003	.000
Partner Sex	1	3416.05	5.38*	.017
Error	315	634.59		

*Note.*  $R^2 = .042$ ,  $*p = .021$ , covariates = 5

Table 15.

*Part 1: ANCOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Proportion of Initiation in Overall Relationship by Partner Sex*

		Proportion of Initiation Overall			
		Observed Mean	Adjusted Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Male		52.76	53.12	21.76	221
Female		60.00	59.23	22.62	103
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Partial $\eta^2$	
Age	1	59.11	.12	.000	
Cohabitate	1	77.95	.16	.001	
Rel. Duration	1	999.34	2.05	.006	
Education	1	172.57	.35	.001	
Student	1	65.38	.13	.000	
Partner Sex	1	2142.40	4.39*	.014	
Error	317	488.01			

*Note.*  $R^2 = .034$ ,  $*p = .037$ , covariates = 5

Table 16.

*Part 2: ANCOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Proportion of Initiation by Partner Sex*

		Proportion of Initiation			
		Observed Mean	Adjusted Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Male		69.09	69.60	27.25	24
Female		73.23	72.78	20.29	27
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Partial $\eta^2$	
Age	1	32.45	.055	.001	
Student	1	109.71	.19	.004	
Partner Sex	1	97.38	.16	.004	
Error	47	588.49			

*Note.*  $R^2 = .012$ , covariates = 2

Table 17.

*Part 1: ANCOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Direct Initiation Strategies by Partner Sex*

Direct Initiation Strategies					
		Observed Mean	Adjusted Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Male		1.41	1.41	.75	222
Female		1.17	1.18	.72	103
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Partial $\eta^2$	
Age	1	.71	1.28	.004	
Cohabitate	1	.77	1.39	.004	
Rel. Duration	1	1.23	2.24	.007	
Education	1	1.08	1.96	.006	
Student	1	.59	1.08	.003	
Partner Sex	1	3.02	5.49*	.017	
Error	318	.55			

*Note.*  $R^2 = .042$ ,  $*p = .02$ , covariates = 5

Table 18.

*Part 2: ANCOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Proportion of Direct Initiation Strategies by Partner Sex*

Proportion Direct Initiation Strategies					
		Observed Mean	Adjusted Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Male		42.58	42.70	20.86	23
Female		45.01	44.91	15.77	26
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	Partial $\eta^2$	
Age	1	21.74	.062	.001	
Student	1	1.87	.005	.000	
Partner Sex	1	45.54	.13	.003	
Error	45	350.26			

*Note.*  $R^2 = .042$ , covariates = 2

Table 19.

*Part 2: Correlations Between Total Sexual Encounters, Total Initiations by Participants, Proportion of Initiations*

Variable	1.	2.	3.
1. Total Sexual Encounters	--		
2. Total Initiations (self & both)	.79**	---	
3. Proportion of Initiations	-.22	.21	--

\*\* $p < .01$

Table 20.

*Descriptive Statistics and t-test Results for Initiation Strategies, Frequency of Initiation, Proportion of Initiation for Overall Sample in Part 1 & Part 2*

Outcome	Part 1		Part 2		<i>n</i>	95% CI for Mean Difference	<i>r</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>					
Direct	43.03	26.19	44.63	17.98	55	-9.50, 6.30	.17	-.41	54
Indirect	56.97	26.19	55.37	17.98	55	-6.30, 9.50	.17	.41	54
Frequency	6.47	7.15	4.76	3.51	59	-.04, 3.47	.40*	1.95	58
Proportion	48.62	25.57	39.73	30.27	58	-.85, 18.64	.13	1.83	57

\*  $p < .05$

Table 21.

*Descriptive Statistics and t-test Results for Initiation Strategies, Frequency of Initiation, Proportion of Initiation for Other-Sex Sample in Part 1 & Part 2*

Outcome	Part 1		Part 2		<i>n</i>	95% CI for Mean Difference	<i>r</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>					
Direct	42.31	25.92	42.67	20.43	26	-12.96, 12.23	.11	-.06	25
Indirect	57.69	25.92	57.33	20.43	26	-12.23, 12.96	.11	.06	25
Frequency	5.93	6.06	4.00	2.94	29	-.165, 4.027	.42*	1.89	28
Proportion	42.22	25.01	39.67	29.65	27	-9.37, 14.47	.40*	.44	26

\*  $p < .05$

Table 22.

*Descriptive Statistics and t-test Results for Initiation Strategies, Frequency of Initiation, Proportion of Initiation for Same-Sex Sample in Part 1 & Part 2*

Outcome	Part 1		Part 2		<i>n</i>	95% CI for Mean Difference	<i>r</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>					
Direct	43.68	26.88	46.39	15.62	29	-13.32, 7.89	.23	-.52	28
Indirect	56.32	26.88	53.61	15.62	29	-7.89, 13.32	.23	.52	28
Frequency	7.00	8.13	5.50	3.90	30	-1.425, 4.425	.32	1.05	29
Proportion	54.19	25.14	39.77	31.30	31	-.953, 29.79	-.09	1.92	30

\*  $p < .05$ .