

# Doctoral Dissertation Defense



Presented by  
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*“Correlates of Young Adults’ Sexual  
Behavior and its Consequences”*

**Monday, May 22, 2023**  
**10:00 a.m. via [WebEx](#)**



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**Advisory Committee**

Major Advisor: Eva Lefkowitz, HDFS

Associate Advisor: Shannon Weaver, HDFS

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## Abstract

Parental communication about sex and young adults' sexual attitudes are correlates of sexual behavior and consequences, but most research has focused on communication during adolescence generally, first sex, and negative consequences. To increase young adults' safer sexual behavior and positive consequences, it is important to understand the messages caregivers communicate before their children initiate sex, and the positive and negative consequences of subsequent sex. In this dissertation, I examined caregivers' sex-related messages and young adults' sexual attitudes as correlates of young adults' sexual behavior, and how consequences changed across college.

In Paper 1, I collected qualitative data to examine the sex-related messages caregivers communicated *before* young adults initiated sex, and the association of these messages with young adults' sexual behavior initiation and timing. I identified six categories of messages—sex-positive, safety and consequences, informational, sex-restrictive, negative, and no messages—and demonstrated that these messages differed by young adults' sexual orientation and gender identity. However, caregivers' messages were largely unrelated to young adults' sexual behavior.

In Paper 2, I used data from the University Life Study to identify patterns of sex-related consequences for recent vaginal sex and explored how college students transitioned between patterns over time. I identified two classes of positive and one of mixed consequences. Over time, the status with mixed consequences became less prevalent and the status with only intimacy and physical satisfaction became more prevalent.

In Paper 3, I used quantitative data from a subset of Paper 1 participants who completed an additional online survey and examined associations of caregivers' sex-related messages, young adults' sexual attitudes, and young adults' sex-related consequences. Results

demonstrated multiple associations between caregivers' sex-related messages, young adults' sexual attitudes, and young adults' sex-related consequences, as well as one indirect association between sex-related messages and consequences through sexual attitudes.

Overall, my results provide insight into young adults' early sexual socialization, sexuality development, and sexual experiences. The papers' limitations demonstrate the need for additional research and suggest future research directions. Despite these limitations, findings suggest that both caregivers and youth may benefit from sexual health interventions and educational resources.