

**ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENT AND PEER RESPONSES  
TO ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY**

**A Senior Honors Thesis**

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**By**

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## **Abstract**

**Adolescents' sexuality is not well understood in society today. Little research has explored the relationship between adolescents' sexual behavior and their perception of their parents' and peers' attitudes toward sexuality. Therefore, exploring the association between adolescents' sexual behavior and the influences parent and peer attitudes have on adolescents' sexual behavior is important. Further understanding adolescents' sexual behavior decisions and perceptions as related to sexuality can give society a larger understanding of this sensitive issue. Research oriented to this age group can therefore affect sexual education policies in schools and impact general societal knowledge and understanding.**

**The current study examined adolescents' sexual behavior and their perceptions of their parents' and peers' approval or disapproval of their involvement in sexual intercourse. Participants included 50 Ohio State psychology students between the ages of 17 and 19. This study looked at the relationship and differences between virgin and non-virgin perceptions of punishment and disappointment relating to sexual intercourse involvement. Hypothetical and actual perceptions that adolescents' hold about their sexual behaviors was further studied and compared between virgin and non-virgin adolescents.**

**Whether the adolescents had a talk with their parent(s) about contraception methods was also compared between participants.**

**The results confirmed the hypothesis that both parents and peers affect adolescents' sexual behaviors. Additionally, it was discovered that adolescents' perceptions of their friends' sexual behaviors influence individual behavior. Moreover, expected punishment and disappointment from parents influenced adolescent sexual behavior; if an adolescent expects that their parents will be disappointed, the adolescent is less likely to engage in sexual behavior.**

**Further hypotheses were confirmed. If adolescents perceive their closest friends to be sexually active, the adolescent is more likely to be sexually active as well. Additionally, if the adolescent has spoken with their parents about sexual contraception, the adolescent perceives their parent to be less disappointed in sexual behaviors.**

## **Adolescents' Perceptions of Peer and Parent Responses to Adolescent Sexuality**

**A relationship exists between an adolescent's sexual activity and their perception of their parents' and peers' responses about their involvement in sexual intercourse. Most of this past research focuses on the influence that both parents and peers have on the adolescent's sexual behavior. The current study looks at adolescents' beliefs about their parents' and peers' responses to their sexuality based off their perceptions of approval, disappointment, and punishment given from their parents/peers.**

**Numerous studies have been conducted concerning adolescents' perceptions of their friends' sexual behaviors and the affects this has on adolescents' sexual behavior. The common belief is that during the time of adolescence, an important shift of influence occurs and peers begin to become increasingly more influential than parents (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006). Thus, the peers of an adolescent become important and start to act as guides to various types of behavior, and in this case, sexual activity (Whitbeck, 1999).**

**Adolescents start to accept their friends' attitudes about sexual permissiveness or lack thereof, and use these attitudes as a guide to their own sexual behaviors (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006). This trend can be seen through a study conducted by Moore and Rosenthal; 69**

**percent of the sexually active young people reported that they felt comfortable discussing sexual concerns with their friends, while only 15 to 30 percent felt comfortable discussing these same concerns with their parents (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006). Furthermore, this influential shift might occur in terms of a teen's sexual behavior because it has been seen that 61 percent of sexually active young people report that a large amount of their sexual education came from discussions with friends only, with no mention of either parent (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006). Thus, these teens could be persuaded by their friends' discussions and usually inaccurate teachings about sexual behavior.**

**Spanier (1977) was also able to reaffirm the peer influence on sexual initiation. For males especially, their other male friends are reported to be their main source of sex information. Therefore, due to the peer pressure to engage in and talk about sex, males will expectantly have a much lower age of sexual initiation. This idea is parallel to the theory of reasoned action. The theory argues that perceived attitudes and perceived values/expectations of others have an important effect on an individual's own actions (Gillmore et al., 2002).**

**Additionally, there exists a strong link between young girls' sexual attitudes, number of sexual partners, and their perceived attitudes and activity of their friends (Daugherty & Burger, 1984).**

**Thus, beliefs about what an adolescent's peers are doing sexually are strongly associated with earlier sexual initiation among the adolescent due to the perception that sex is the normative behavior (Kinsman et al., 1999). Though much research has focused on the fact that many adolescents perceive their peers to be more sexually active than they actually are (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006), the perception that a peer is having sex could serve as a model or lay the ground for a liberal attitude for sexual behavior. This perception could therefore proselytize the adolescent into sexually active behaviors.**

**The current study will measure adolescents' beliefs about their friends' sexual activity and how certain the adolescent is about their beliefs. This will give more of an idea of whether these beliefs are warranted to be true or if they are more of perceptions and presumptions that further guide the adolescent's behavior.**

**Furthermore, as seen by previous research, communication between parents and adolescents concerning sexual behaviors is scant. However, parents can influence their adolescents' sexual activity in different, subtler ways. It is well known that parental approval of adolescent sexuality is on average, very low. Inazu and Fox (1980), found that when background factors were controlled, indirect forms of "sexual socialization" had a greater impact on the adolescents' sexual experience than did the direct forms. A parent's**

**attitudes and own behaviors can be transmitted to an adolescent and thus indirectly influence the teen's sexual life (Thornton & Camburn, 1987). The adolescent is socialized by family life and the learned appropriate norms and values that the family provides on standards of sexual conduct (Somers & Paulson, 2000). Adolescents with parents who hold restrictive attitudes toward their adolescent's sexuality are more likely have adolescents that are sexually restrictive as well. In addition, the attitudes presented to the teen about sexuality can influence behavior of the adolescent (Thornton & Camburn, 1987). A lack of discussion about sex and negative attitudes about sexual behavior in adolescence can give teens the perception that their parent(s) will be disappointed in them if they engage in sexual behavior (Thornton & Camburn, 1987). Thus, it is hypothesized in this study that the perception of disappointment will reduce or eliminate the adolescents' sexual behavior. Moreover, it is also hypothesized that this perception of disappointment will give the adolescent an increased attitude that if their parent or guardian found out that their adolescent was engaging in sexual intercourse, they would be punished to various degrees.**

**Indirect aspects of parental influence can be much more powerful than direct influences on teenage sexual behavior (Inazu and Fox, 1980). Thus, the type of relationship that a parent and an adolescent hold is one of the major factors leading to earlier, or later**

**sexual initiation. In this study, we ask the adolescents to tell us which parent they consider themselves to be closest with; we then ask them to answer questions about that parent pertaining to their sexual communication about contraception use and sexual activity (See Appendix A for questionnaire). Relationship strength between the parent and adolescent in the current study's hypothesis is essential; the adolescent might not want to disappoint the parent they perceive to be closest with.**

**Additionally, what must be noted is the gender difference between parents' attitudes toward sexual initiation. This gender difference is notable because daughters are more likely to hear cautionary and reproofing messages about sex. The female adolescents are less likely to hear the positive messages that their male counterparts hear (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006). This therefore contributes to the idea that male adolescents perceive their parents to be more liberal about sexual permissiveness than female adolescents (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006).**

**Furthermore, a study by McNeely et al. (2002) has shown that timing of first sexual intercourse based off parental psychosocial variables cannot be easily predicted for boys. Thus, the social pressures of delaying sex have more of an effect on female than male adolescents. In the present study, it is expected that the boys will predict less punishment if their sexual intercourse involvement is**

**discovered. Additionally, it is expected that the boys will hold the perception that their parent(s) would be less disappointed if their sexual involvement was discovered.**

**Overall, parental perception, punishment, and disappointment research play a large role in the hypotheses. A developmental study on early adolescent sexual activity by Whitbeck et al. (1999) indicates that there is a significant decrease in parental monitoring (for mothers specifically) by the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Mother monitoring is the extent to which the parent knows where their child is, whom their child is with, and how their child spends their free time. The study found that both monitoring and harsh discipline affect deviant behaviors associated with sexual intercourse (Somers & Paulson, 2000). Mother monitoring decreased early intercourse for younger adolescents in grades eight and nine but increased intercourse in grades ten and higher. This is best explained by the adolescent's need for autonomy. This literature is important to the current study because it helps to explain the perceptions adolescents hold about their parents' attitudes about disappointment and punishment.**

**Maternal monitoring has also been associated with few sexual partners and a greater likelihood of condom use among adolescents (Miller et al., 1999). While condom use and monitoring have been linked in past research, there is no clear explanation for why this link might occur. It is hypothesized that condom use could be affected by**

**parental monitoring because parents who are high in monitoring could also be more diligent about communicating with their adolescent about safe sex practices (Miller et al, 1999).**

**Mothers tend to underestimate the sexual activity of their adolescent, and adolescents tend to misunderstand the level of disapproval their mother holds about their own sexual activity (Jaccard et al., 1998). Jaccard et al. (1998) also found that teens that reported engaging in less parent-teen communication about sex were more likely to misinterpret their mother's disapproval of them engaging in sexual intercourse. This finding could also explain increased condom use among teens that have engaged in conversation about safe sex with their parent. Studies have shown that if a teen's perception of their parents' level of disappointment about them engaging in sexual intercourse is high, the teen will have lower levels of sexual activity (Jaccard et al., 1998). Meschke et al. (2000) further found that parental disapproval of adolescent sexual intercourse was related to later onset of first sexual experience, few sex partners, and less frequent sexual activity in general. Another study has shown that fathers play a vital role in delaying first sexual intercourse for adolescents. Adolescents hold a perception that fathers who live in the home appear to be more disapproving of adolescent sexual intercourse than fathers who live outside the home (Dittus, Jaccard, & Gordon, 1996). Whether the father is as**

**disapproving no matter what his living status is, it was hypothesized that the teen's perception of disapproval is more clearly conveyed when the father lives in the home. The study pointed out that there is a moderate correspondence between mother and father's disapproval of adolescent sexual intercourse. Thus, when both the mother and the father were perceived by the adolescent as having a high level of disapproval of sexual intercourse, only 11 percent of the teens had engaged in intercourse. When both the mother and father were perceived by the adolescent to have a low disapproval rating of teenage sexual intercourse, 80 percent of the teens had engaged. Thus, parental disapproval of sex and the teen's perception of this disapproval tend to delay sexual intercourse in adolescents.**

**Adolescent sexuality is affected by the perceived amount of punishment and dissatisfaction the parent conveys to the teen about sexual behavior. Teens hold preconceived notions of whether their parents would be disapproving of their engagement in sexual intercourse. As a result, this perception could have an affect on adolescents' behaviors. Additionally, messages conveyed through talking about sexual contraception could cause the adolescent to perceive their parent as more approving of sexual behavior. Miller et al. (1986) discovered that sexual permissiveness and intercourse experience were highest among adolescents who viewed their parents as more approving of sexual behavior. Further, adolescent sexual**

**permissiveness and intercourse experience were lowest among those who reported that their parents were moderately or more disapproving. Adolescent perceptions of both peer and parent responses to sexual intercourse involvement can guide sexual behaviors, with disapproving perceptions as being shown to delay adolescents' sexual intercourse involvement.**

### **Hypotheses**

**The purpose of this study is to explain in more detail the relationship between adolescent peers and parents in terms of approval and responses to adolescents' engagement in sexual intercourse. It will discover the relationship between adolescent's perceptions of parents' and peers' responses to adolescent sexual behavior and how these perceptions affect adolescents' sexual behavior. Therefore, scenarios such as expected punishment and disappointment from adolescents' parents (when discovering the adolescents' sexual involvement) will be used.**

**This study also discovers how parents' discussion of sexual intercourse contraception changes the adolescents' sexual behaviors. The sex (female vs. male) of the participants' responses and overall findings will also be noted. The study will examine both virgin and non-virgin adolescents. Specifically, we are looking to see if parent and peer disappointment or approval affects adolescent sexual activity (for virgins or non-virgins alike).**

**For this study, participants are 17-19 years and are first-term college freshmen in late adolescence. Virgin adolescents are those who have not engaged in sexual intercourse. Non-virgin adolescents are those who have engaged in sexual intercourse.**

**It is hypothesized that the virgin adolescents will believe their friends have not had sexual intercourse. Furthermore, these adolescents might also believe their friends would not approve of them having sexual intercourse. We hypothesize that the non-virgin adolescents will have friends who have engaged in sexual intercourse, and these adolescents will hold the perception that their friends would approve of them having sexual intercourse as well.**

**In terms of the adolescents' parents, we hypothesize that virgin adolescents will believe their parent(s) would not only find out about their sexual activity, but they would be very disappointed in them if they were to have sexual intercourse. We will also be looking at the adolescents' perceptions of how harshly they would be punished if their parents found out. In addition, for those parents who did find out about their adolescent's sexual behavior, we are interested in seeing how the parent discovered this behavior. We hypothesize that the non-virgin adolescents hold a perception that their parents would not find out about their sexual activity, and would not be disappointed or punished for their sexual behavior.**

**Additionally, we will look to see if a contraception talk with parents will affect adolescents' sexual activity. We hypothesize that adolescents who have spoken with their parent(s) about the use of contraception during sexual intercourse will be among those who have had sexual intercourse. These adolescents might assume their parents do not disapprove of their involvement in sexual intercourse due to their talk about contraception methods.**

### **Methods**

#### **Participants**

**Participants in the study consist of 50 male and female students from The Ohio State University. The students will be those enrolled in the university's Psychology 100 classes and will be participating in the study to receive credit for a classroom research experience requirement. The students will be required to fall within the age range of 17-19 years and be first-term freshmen. This requirement is vital due to the fact that the study is based on adolescent sexuality. The students will be of different ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and from different areas of residence.**

#### **Identification of Participants/ Participation Incentives**

**The study will be posted on the REP (Research Experience Program) website. Psychology 100 students who are involved in the**

**program will be given the opportunity to be involved in the study as long as they fill the age requirements (17-19 years of age and first-term freshmen). The participants will log into the website and read the information posted. The information about the study will be as follows, “Join a study concerning college student sexuality, a topic that requires more research and attention in the field of psychology. Come into the psychology computer lab and answer an online questionnaire about yourself, your peers, and your relationship with your parents. Names will not be matched to surveys. The study will consist of one online questionnaire and will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. In order to participate in this study you must be a first term freshman between the ages of 17 and 19 years.” This information will give the students an idea of what we are studying and what they will be asked to do if they agree to participate in the study. The Co-PI will be given the names of the students that signed up for the study and will use the students’ names for purposes of attendance check and to give REP credit only. Once a student signs up on the website to be enrolled in the study they will be given a time and place to meet in order to fill out the research questionnaire. The participants will meet in the psychology computer lab at The Ohio State University.**

**The incentive that the participants will be given to sign up for the study is a half-credit for their REP requirement. Furthermore, the**

**participants will be given the chance to add to the existing body of knowledge in the field of adolescent sexuality.**

### **Procedure/Materials**

**Participants will fill out a questionnaire pertaining to adolescent sexuality. Specifically, the questionnaire will pertain to questions about their sexual experiences, their friends' sexual experiences, and their relationship with their parents. Questions about the participants' sexual experiences will ask the participant if they consider themselves to be involved in a romantic relationship, if they have had sexual intercourse, how enjoyable the activity was, how many partners they have had sexual intercourse with, if their friends knew about their sexual involvement (or not), if their parents found out (either by getting caught or the adolescent divulging the information), and whether their parents have spoken to them about using sexual contraception.**

**The questions regarding the participants' peers will include questions about their knowledge of their three closest friends' sexual activity. Specifically, these questions will ask the participant if their friends have had sexual intercourse and how many partners their friends have had as sexual partners. There will also include questions pertaining to how certain the participant is that their friend**

**has had sexual intercourse and how certain the participant is about the number of partners their friend has been with.**

**The questions relating to the participants' relationships with their parents will ask about their communication about their sexual activity with their closest parent, their actual experiences with their parents (if the parent found out about the adolescent's sexual intercourse involvement), and punishment expectations they expect to receive if their parent finds out about their sexual activity.**

**Additionally, some questions will ask the students to think hypothetically about their expectations of their parents' punishment and if their parents would be likely to catch them involved in sexual activity. For instance, there will be questions about the perceived disappointment the adolescent's parents would have if they were to discover the participant's non-virgin status. Other questions will ask the adolescent to predict the chance of getting caught and the chance of harsh punishment if the parent discovered the adolescents' non-virgin status.**

**The questions will be in an online format and will all be multiple-choice, with the exception of one section where the student fills in their closest three friends' initials. Another questionnaire will pertain to the students' demographics such as sex and age.**

## **Design**

**Of all participants, 50 participants' data were used. Data were discarded due to incomplete answers and skipped questions. Correlation analyses and T-tests were used to test the hypotheses. Each hypothetical scenario (i.e. if the participant believed they would be punished for engaging in sexual intercourse, etc.) was compared for both the virgin and the non-virgin groups. These hypothetical scenarios (expected punishment, etc.) were further evaluated based off the sex of the participant. Descriptive statistics were used to explain trends in the data in order to further explain adolescent sexuality and behavior.**

## **Results**

### **Participants' Self Reports: Non-Virgins**

**Overall, 41 of the 50 participants reported that they have had sexual intercourse (82% have had sexual intercourse, 18% had not). The males and females reported close to equal amounts of sexual intercourse (21 males and 20 females).**

### **Insert Figure 1 Here**

**Participants reported having had 3 to 4 partners most (29%).**

### **Insert Table 1 Here**

**Adolescents in the study were having sex outside relationships (64% of the participants were not in a relationship,  $r=.24$ ).**

**Of the 41 participants who reported having sex, 56% reported that intercourse was extremely enjoyable (43% were males and 13% were females). From a 1-4 scale on how enjoyable sex was, 3.3 was the average response for all participants. For male adolescents, the average was 3.5 (between very and extremely enjoyable). For females, the average was 2.9 (between somewhat enjoyable and very). Number of partners and how enjoyable participants believed sex was were not significant (T value .41). One participant reported that sex was not at all enjoyable.**

**Insert Figure 2 Here**

**Participants reported talking to their friends about their involvement in sexual intercourse more than their parents. One participant who reported having had sex has friends who do not know of their sexual involvement (98% of participants reported that their friends know that they have had sex). Friends were approving of adolescent sexual behavior. No participant reported his or her friends as not at all approving of their sexual behavior. Eighty eight percent of participants reported their friends as being extremely approving or very approving.**

**Insert Figures 3 and 4 Here**

**Over half of the participants' parents knew of their adolescents' sexual involvement (54%). More than half the participants reported**

**that their mother and father both know (57%). Only two participants reported that only their fathers know.**

**For the non-virgin adolescents who reported that their parents knew of their involvement in sexual intercourse 45% were not at all disappointed and 36% were a little disappointed. No participants reported that their parents were extremely disappointed. No significant difference existed between male and female reports ( $T = .18$ ).**

**Insert Tables 2 and 3 Here**

**Participants also reported that they were not punished for their sexual behavior once their parents found out (77% were not at all punished), whereas 9% and 14% were punished a little or somewhat. No participants reported they were punished “very harsh” or “extremely harsh.”**

**Participants’ Self Reports: Virgins**

**The virgin adolescents reported they had never engaged in sexual intercourse. Eighteen percent of the participants had not had sexual intercourse. Of these adolescents, 89% of their closest three friends knew they have not had sex; one virgin adolescent’s friends did not know.**

**Insert Figure 5 Here**

**Three participants had parents who did not know their adolescent was a virgin. Of the participants whose parents know of their adolescent's virgin status, 100% of the participants reported that both their mother and father knew.**

#### **Parent-Adolescent Contraception Talks: Virgins and Non-Virgins**

**Of all participants, 72% had a contraception talk with their parents. Of this, 50% had a talk with both of their parents. Of the participants who had a contraception talk with their parents, 97% were non-virgins. One participant who had a contraception talk with their parents was a virgin.**

#### **Insert Figure 6 Here**

**Adolescent males received a contraception talk 16% more than females; 58% of participants who had a talk were males and 42% were females. If participants' parents had a contraception talk, the participant perceived that their parent would not be disappointed in their sexual behavior ( $r = -.29$ ).**

**Parents had a contraception talk with some participants more than once. Of the participants whose parents found out about their teens' sexual intercourse involvement, 17% had a talk before sex only, 21% had a talk after the participant had sex, and 54% of parents had a talk before and after the adolescent had sex.**

#### **Insert Figure 7 Here**

## **Perception of Friends' Sexual Intercourse Involvement**

**Of the non-virgin participants, 78% believed that their closest three friends have had sexual intercourse as well (P value 4.737 E - 26, significant at <.01 level).**

**The participants were certain in their responses with 82% saying they were extremely certain their friend(s) have had sexual intercourse.**

### **Insert Figures 8 & 9 Here**

**The participants were also certain of the number of sexual partners their friends have had (64% extremely certain and 33% very or somewhat certain). Only 3% of participants reported they were not certain or a little certain. Furthermore, participants who reported their friends as having 3 or more partners were more certain in their responses.**

**As friends' reported partner number increased, their certainty increased as well ( $r=.25$ ). Twenty-two participants, (of the 39 that reported their friends have had sex) reported their friends as having 3 plus partners. Of these 22 participants, 19 were "extremely certain" in their responses. Thus, 86% of the extremely certain responders reported their friends as having been with 3 plus partners. If the participant's friend was more likely to have had sex, the more certain the participant was in their responses. Participant partner number**

**and participants' friends' partner numbers were not highly correlated (r .163).**

### **Insert Tables 4 & 5 Here**

**Of the virgin participants, 89% believed their friends were virgins as well. All participants (100%) who reported their friends as virgins as well said they were “extremely certain” or “very certain.”**

### **Hypothetical Parent Responses**

**Participants in the study chose which parent they were going to answer the hypothetical questions for, this was the parent they considered themselves to be closest with (66% chose their mother, 34% chose their father).**

**For virgin and non-virgin participants alike, 34 of 50 (68%) believed there was any chance of their parents finding out about their sexual involvement (without the participant telling them). This therefore influenced the participants' belief that they would be punished.**

**Generally, participants did not believe they would be punished, 62% believed there was no chance of punishment. Of the participants who believed they would be punished, 42% believed it is a small chance they would be punished harsh. However, when looking at the virgin and non-virgin responses, virgins believed they would be**

**punished almost two times the amount of non-virgins. The female participants believed they would be punished four times the amount of males (on average).**

**Insert Figure 10 Here**

**Participants' reports of the disappointment they would expect from their parents if they found out about their sexual intercourse involvement varied, 36% believed there was a very small chance of disappointment and 20% reported a very high chance of disappointment.**

**Insert Figure 11 Here**

**Males reported lower levels of expected disappointment with the average between the response of "no chance of disappointment" and a "very small chance" (average .9). Females reported three times as much expected disappointment with the average response of "high average at 2.7 (a high expected disappointment).**

**Insert Figures 12 & 13 Here**

**For non-virgins, the average response was "very small disappointment." For virgins, the average response was between "medium and high expected disappointment." The virgin adolescents believed their parents would be disappointed in their involvement in sexual intercourse (T value 2.156 E -05, significant at the >.01 level).**

**Insert Figures 14 & 15 Here**

## **Discussion**

**Many important findings were discovered. The participants in the study were mainly non-virgins. This finding is not surprising because the average age of sexual intercourse for adolescents in America today is 15. By the end of high school, 35 to 40 per cent of adolescents are non-virgins (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006). The adolescents in the current study were aged 17-19 years. As first term college freshmen, the participants were composed of 82% non-virgins. Male and female participants had equal amounts of intercourse involvement. This finding is notable because a reporting bias between the sexes did not exist (males did not report inflated involvement and females did not report less involvement based of social expectations). Though, a notable difference did exist between the sexes in their report of how enjoyable sexual intercourse was. Males, on average, reported intercourse as being extremely enjoyable. Females, on average, reported intercourse as being somewhat enjoyable. Future research in the area of adolescent sexuality could help explain this notable finding. The number of partners the adolescent had and how enjoyable sex was were not related as predicted.**

**As hypothesized, virgin adolescents reported their three closest friends as virgins as well. Therefore, adolescents perceive their friends to be similar to them in their sexual behaviors. This could**

**lend to the conception that adolescents allow their friends to guide their behaviors. As Moore and Rosenthal (2006) found as well, these virgin adolescents might be assimilating their beliefs to match their friends' lack of sexual permissiveness. This therefore supports the hypothesis that virgin adolescents would report their friends to be virgins as well.**

**The non-virgin adolescents who have engaged in sexual intercourse reported their closest friends as having had sexual intercourse as well. They, like the virgin adolescents, perceived their friends to match their own behaviors. This finding could explain the influential shift that Moore and Rosenthal (2006) noted, peers become moral guides and therefore become more influential in their sexual behaviors. It was found that adolescents' partner numbers were not related within the peer group.**

**Though, for sexual involvement in general, the adolescents could be mimicking their friends' behaviors. Studies have found that adolescents receive majority to all of their sexual information from their peers (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006). This puts adolescents' peers in a powerful position to persuade and guide their friends' sexual behaviors. Moreover, this finding supports the theory of reasoned action, that perceived attitudes and values/expectations of others have a large effect on an individual's own actions.**

**What should also be noted is that the participants reported their friends' sexual involvement with certainty. In fact, majority of the adolescents believed they knew their friends' sexual behavior with absolute certainty. Thus, it can be said that sexual behavior is something adolescents speak about often. This idea can lend to the finding that adolescents' sexual involvement is similar throughout the peer group. Additionally, it was found that as participants believed their friends had more partners, the more certain the adolescents were about their responses.**

**Much research has focused on the fact that adolescents' perceptions of their friends' sexual behavior is false. However, even if adolescents' perceptions or certainty of friends' sexual behavior is false, the perceived involvement can still guide adolescents' own behaviors.**

**Both the virgin and non-virgin participants reported that their friends knew about their own sexual activity (from either the participant volunteering the information or from the participant's friend asking and the participant telling the truth). Only one virgin and one non-virgin participant reported that their friends did not know about their virgin or non-virgin status. This lends support to the idea that the participants were certain about their closest friends' sexual activity as well. Additionally, this finding is important because it sheds light on the friends' approval of sexuality. For the**

**non-virgin participants, zero participants reported that their friends were “not at all approving.” Friends were either very approving or extremely approving. This supports the hypothesis that friends of a non-virgin participant would be approving of sexual intercourse involvement. This can be explained by the idea that the adolescents are spending time with friends who they perceive to be similar to them, and therefore mutually agreeing that their behaviors are acceptable.**

**The parental findings and responses found in the current study were also important. Perhaps the most important discovery was the idea that virgin adolescents responded that their parents would be more disappointed in them if they were to have sexual intercourse. Other studies have found that if a teen’s perception of their parents’ level of disappointment about them engaging in sexual intercourse is high, the teen will have lower levels of sexual activity (Jaccard et al., 1998). This finding was supported in the current study’s results. On the other hand, the non-virgin adolescents reported that they did not believe their parents would be disappointed in them if they engaged in sexual activity. This supports past research by Miller et al. (1986) who discovered that sexual permissiveness and intercourse experience were highest among adolescents who viewed their parents as more approving of sexual behavior.**

**These perceptual findings give parents information about their adolescents. The direct and indirect messages parents give to their adolescents could be a factor that influences their sexual behavior. Additionally, the attitudes conveyed to these teens affects their sexual behavior.**

**Over half the non-virgin participants had parents who knew about their engagement in sexual intercourse. Three participants had parents who asked about their sexual intercourse experience and lied, 85% of participants had parents who did not ask so they kept their non-virgin status a secret.**

**The non-virgin adolescents whose parents discovered their sexual activity had parents who were not disappointed in general. Almost half the adolescents reported their parents as not at all disappointed. No gender differences existed between female or male reports. Though, the female adolescents predicted that their parents would be disappointed (in the hypothetical reports), the parents were not disappointed in actuality. These female adolescents are most likely hearing the reprovng messages from society about their sexuality and therefore perceiving that their parents would be disappointed in them for engaging in sex. The male adolescents did not predict disappointment from their parents because they tend to hear positive messages about engaging in sexual intercourse from society. Therefore, contributing further to the idea that male adolescents**

**perceive their parents to be more liberal about sexual permissiveness than female adolescents (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006).**

**The adolescent who engaged in sexual intercourse and did not predict their parents to be disappointed might have known their parents had a liberal approach to their ideas about adolescent sexuality. The adolescents might have been given the conception that their parents have liberal attitudes about sexual intercourse through indirect messages. Or, the adolescents and parents might have had a talk about sexual intercourse and the parents gave the adolescent direct messages about their opinions. This idea could help to explain the next finding as well; 77% of the adolescents reported that their parents punished them “none” after they found out about their adolescent’s non-virgin status. Again, the adolescents might have known their parents would not be disappointed in their engagement, and they would therefore not be punished either.**

**Talking about sexual contraception with parents was vastly different between virgin and non-virgin participants. One participant who had a contraception talk was a virgin. Therefore, perhaps the non-virgin adolescents were given the idea that because their parents spoke to them about contraception, they would not be disappointed in their sexual engagement. A lack of discussion about sex has been shown in past research to give adolescents the perception that their parent(s) will be disappointed in them if they engage in sexual**

**behavior (Thornton & Camburn, 1987). This same finding resulted in the current study.**

**However, this finding cannot be confirmed due to other factors that influence adolescent sexuality. Therefore, future research looking at the sexual attitude differences between the adolescents who had a contraception talk and did not is important. One major factor that could affect a contraception talk is the demographics of the adolescent and the parents, with religiosity being paramount. Additionally, it should also be noted that the adolescents who received a contraception talk might have been more comfortable with their sexual advances because they were given a talk about the benefits and health purposes of contraception. Future studies looking at contraception talks and the affects this has on adolescent sexuality and sexual health are of vital importance.**

**One other important finding about contraception talks taken from this study is the timing in which the parents had the talk with their adolescents. For the non-virgin participants, majority (54%) of their parents had the talk with them both before and after the adolescent's involvement in sexual intercourse, with only 8% of non-virgin participants not having a talk at all. Therefore, it could be said that these parents are more open about sexual topics with their adolescents and are constantly reminding them of the importance of contraception.**

**Though many important and telling findings resulted from this study, it is important to repeat and extend the study in order to learn more about the under researched field of adolescent sexuality.**

### **Methodological Concerns**

**Limitations to this study should be noted. First, the age of the adolescents is older than typical high school student. Due to the fact that the participants ranged from 17 to 19 years of age, participants were more experienced sexually than the average high school student population. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized across all high school students. A future study in high schools would be useful.**

**Other demographical concerns should be noted. The participants consisted of first terms college freshmen. Therefore, they were from a specific socioeconomic class. Additionally, they consisted of students enrolled in a university psychology class, minimizing a random sample to a specific group of students.**

**Another limitation could have been the sample size of 50. Numerous participants' data was discarded due to incomplete information. An extension of this study should be completed with a larger sample size and with more of a random sample.**

**Participation in this study was voluntary. Questions were omitted and because sexuality is a sensitive topic and reporting bias could have existed. A future study should be conducted with a bogus**

**pipeline to ensure that questions are answered truthfully. The self-made questionnaire is another limitation in this study. The questionnaire should be used in more studies to ensure its accuracy.**

**In the future, the current study should be repeated with the limitations taken into account in order to further understand adolescent sexuality.**

**Table 1.**

**Participants' Partner Numbers**

<b>1 Partner</b>	<b>2 Partners</b>	<b>3-4 Partners</b>	<b>5 Partners</b>	<b>6+ Partners</b>
<b>17%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>24%</b>

**Tables 2 and 3.**

**How Participants' Parents Found Out**

<b>Parent asked &amp; participant told the truth</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Parent didn't ask, participant told anyway</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Someone else told participants' Parent</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Participant got caught</b>	<b>33%</b>

**How Disappointed Participants' Parents Were (Actual)**

<b>All Participants</b>	<b>Males*</b>	<b>Females*</b>
<b>Not at all</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>A little</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Very</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>4.5%</b>
<b>Extremely</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>

**\*P=.18, no significance between male and females reports of actual disappointment**

**Tables 4 & 5.**

**Participants' Certainty of Friends' Partner Number**

<b>Extremely Certain</b>	<b>64%**</b>
<b>Very Certain</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Somewhat Certain</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Little Certainty</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>No Certainty</b>	<b>3%</b>

\*P value .032, significant at the <.05 level: as friends' reported partner number increased, their certainty increased as well

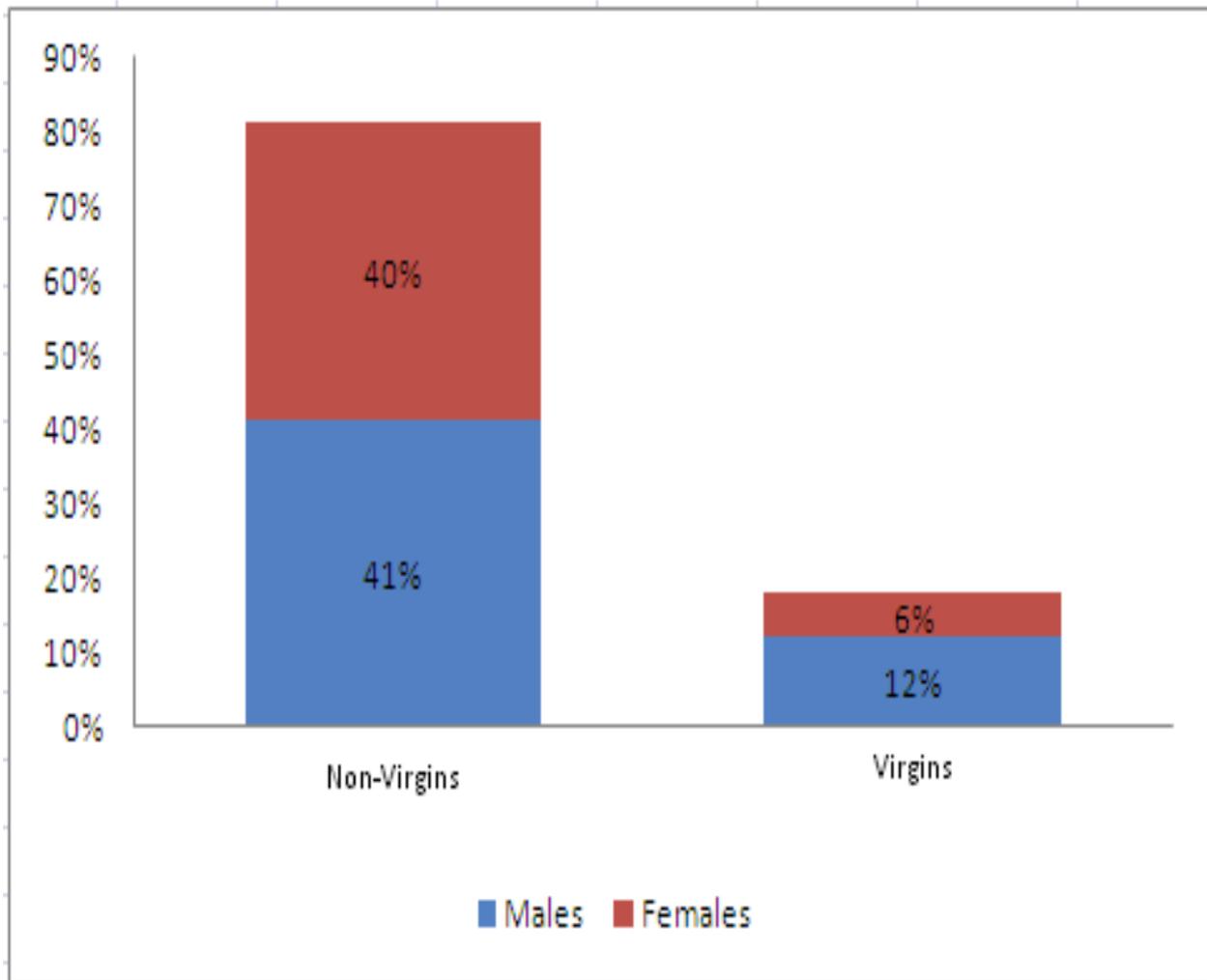
\*\*86% of the extremely certain responders reported their friends as having been with 3 plus partners

**Participants' Reports of Friends' Partner Number**

<b>1 Partner</b>	<b>2 Partners</b>	<b>3-4 *Partners</b>	<b>5 *Partners</b>	<b>6+ *Partners</b>
<b>26%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>16%</b>

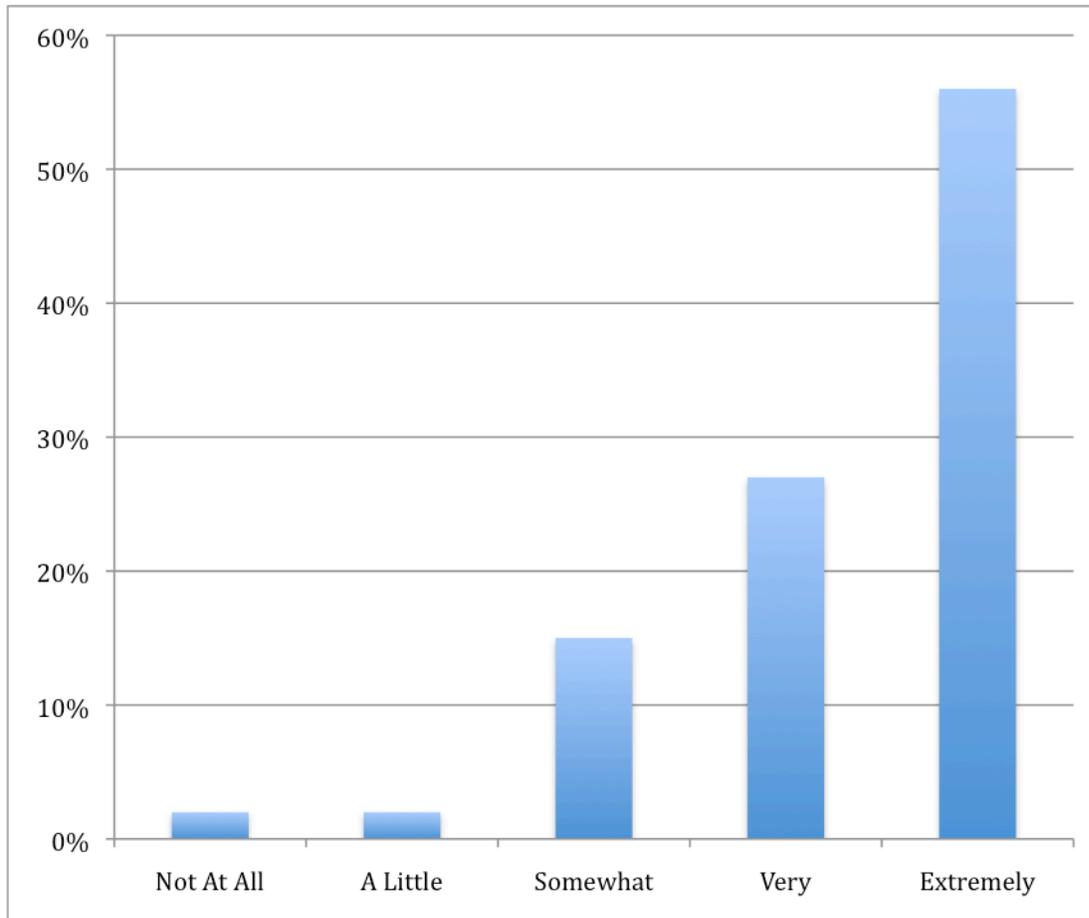
**Figure 1.**

**Participant Sexual Intercourse Involvement**



**Figure 2.**

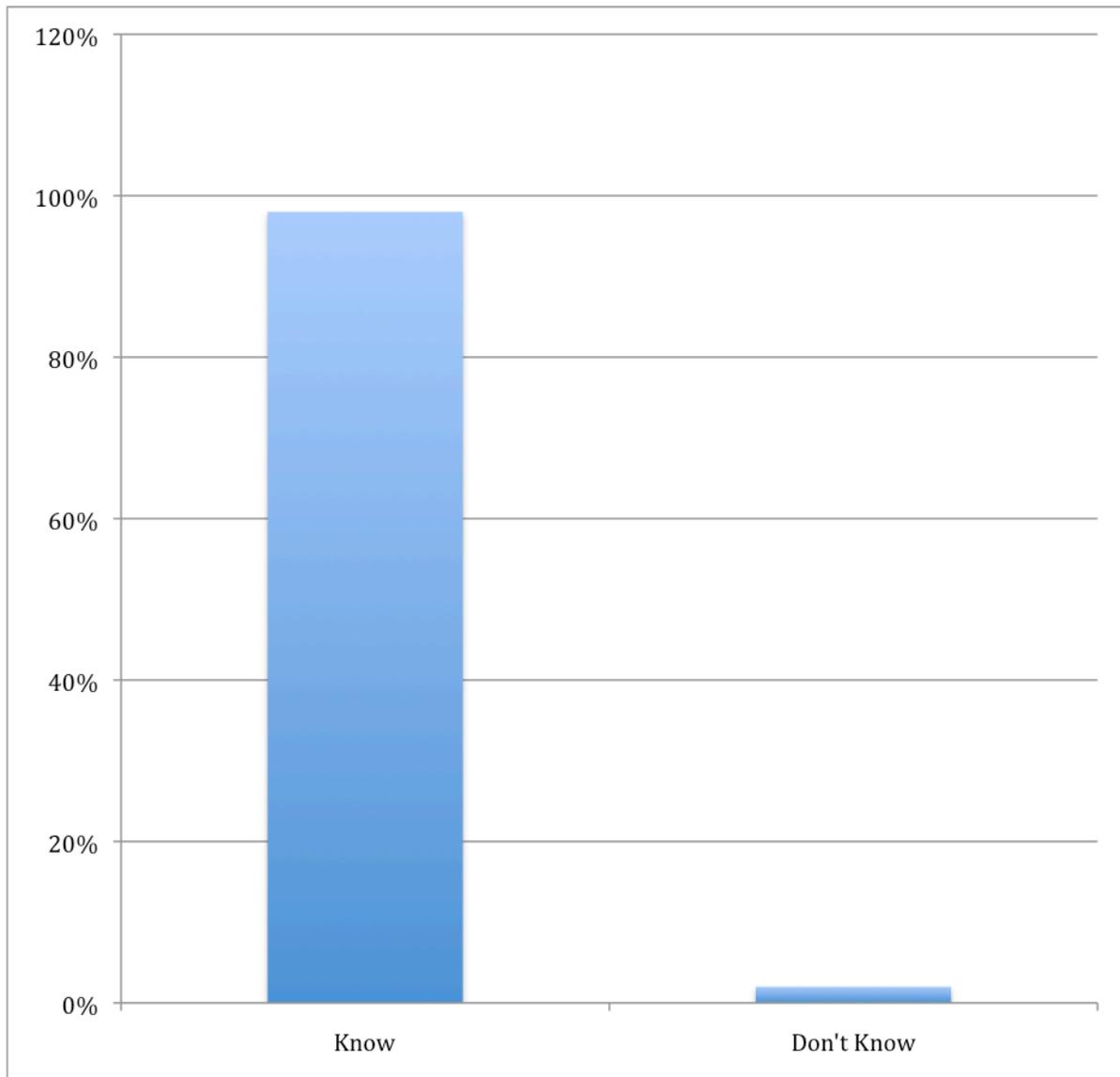
**Reports of How Enjoyable Sex Was**



**\*1 Participant reported “not at all enjoyable” and “a little enjoyable”**

**Figure 3.**

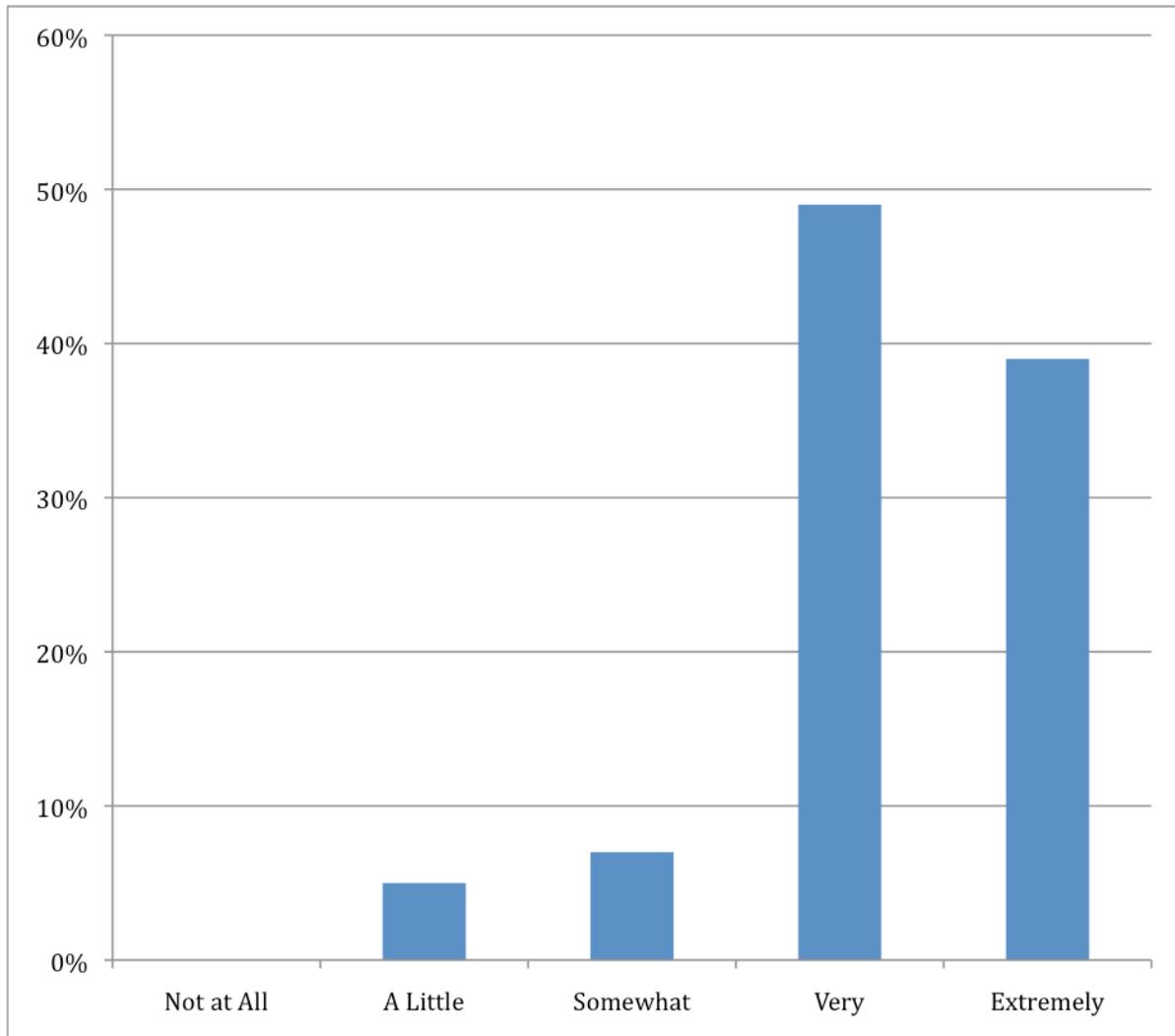
**Participants' Friends' Knowledge of Non-Virgin Status**



**\*1 Participants' Friend did not know of their non-virgin status**

**Figure 4.**

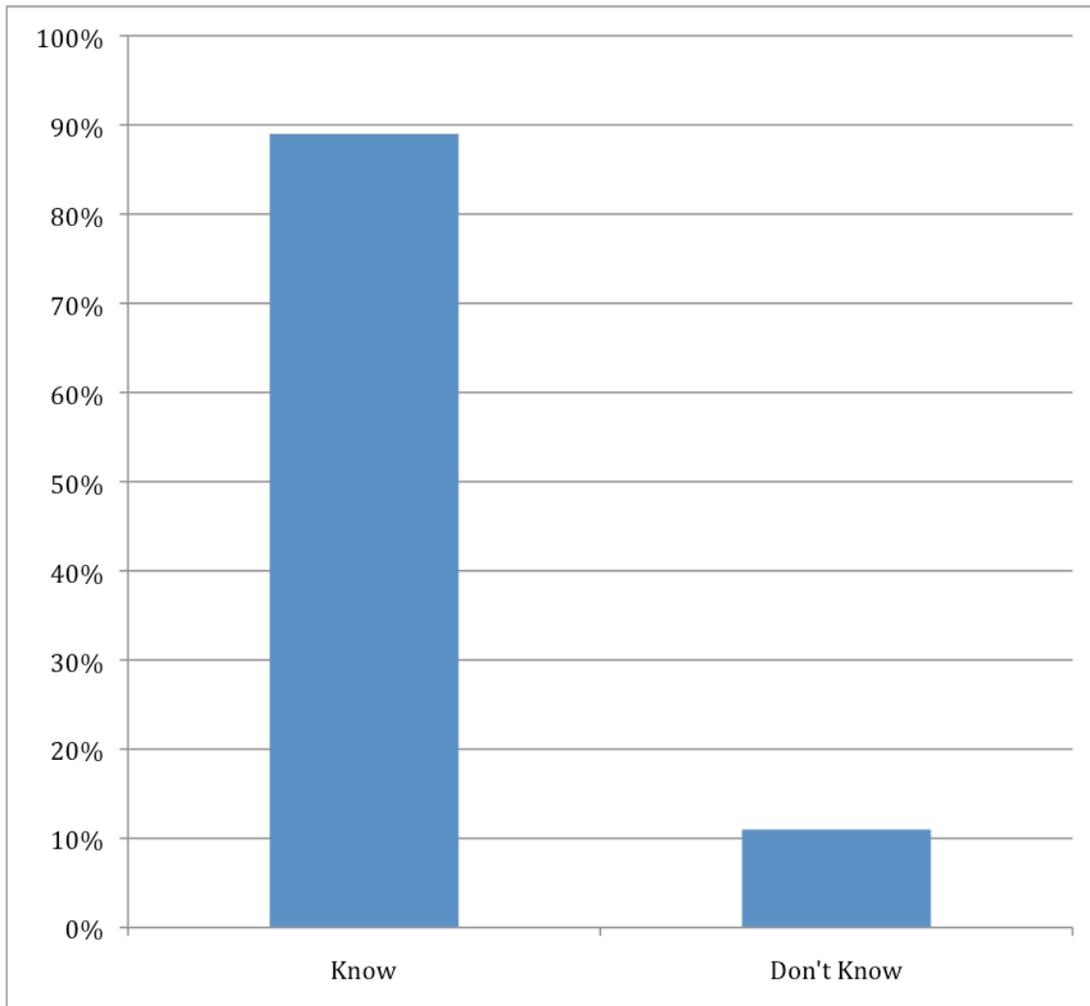
**Friends' Approval of Participants' Sexual Intercourse**



**\*Zero Participants reported their friends as being “not all approving” of their non-virgin status**

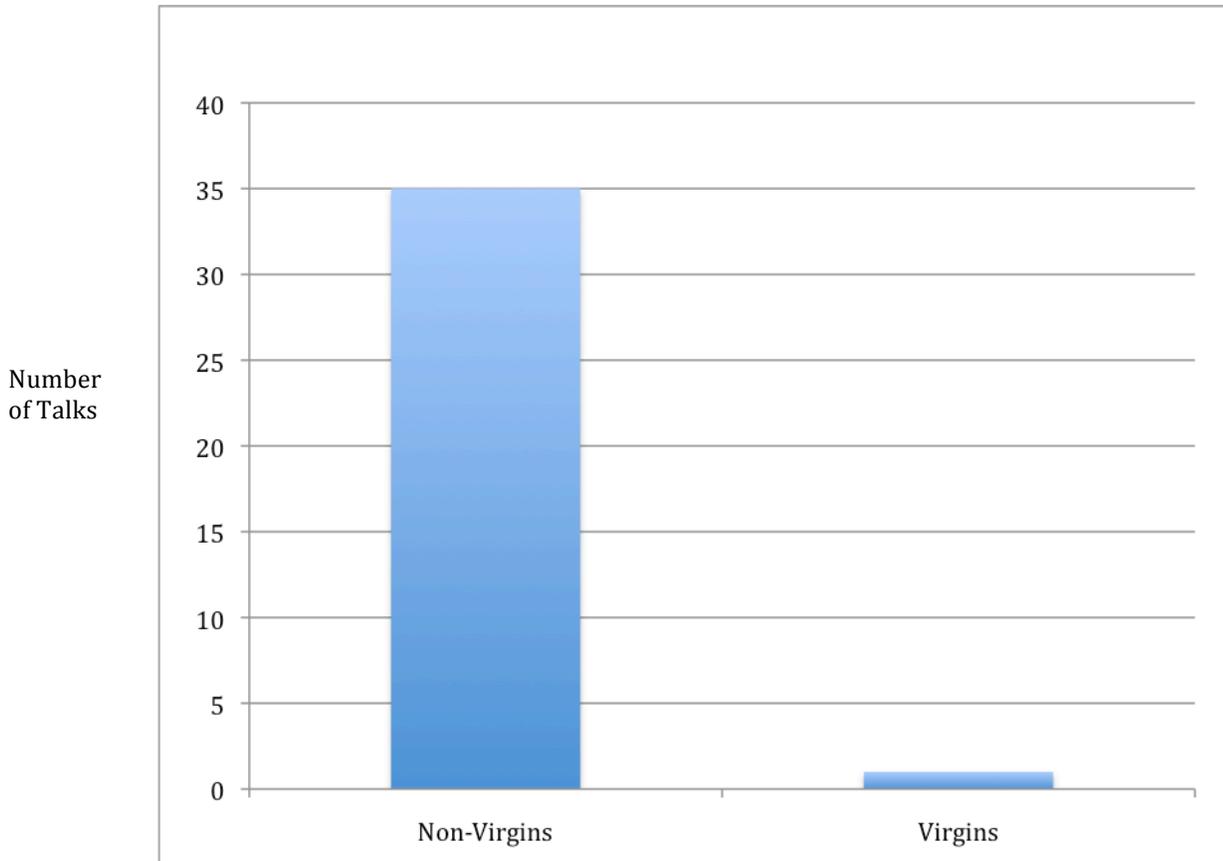
**Figure 5.**

**Participants' Friends' Knowledge of Virgin Status**



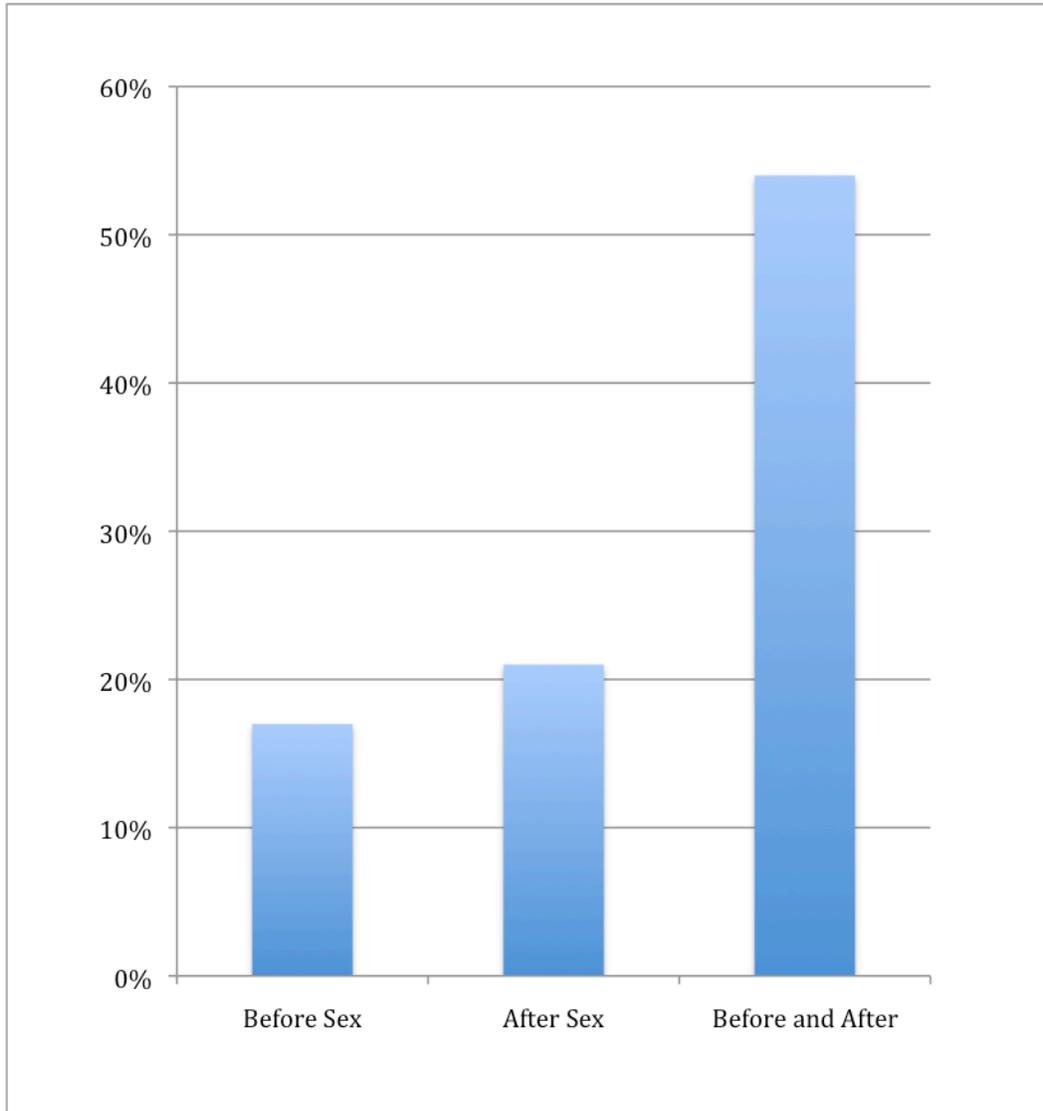
**Figure 6.**

**Contraception Talk From Parents**



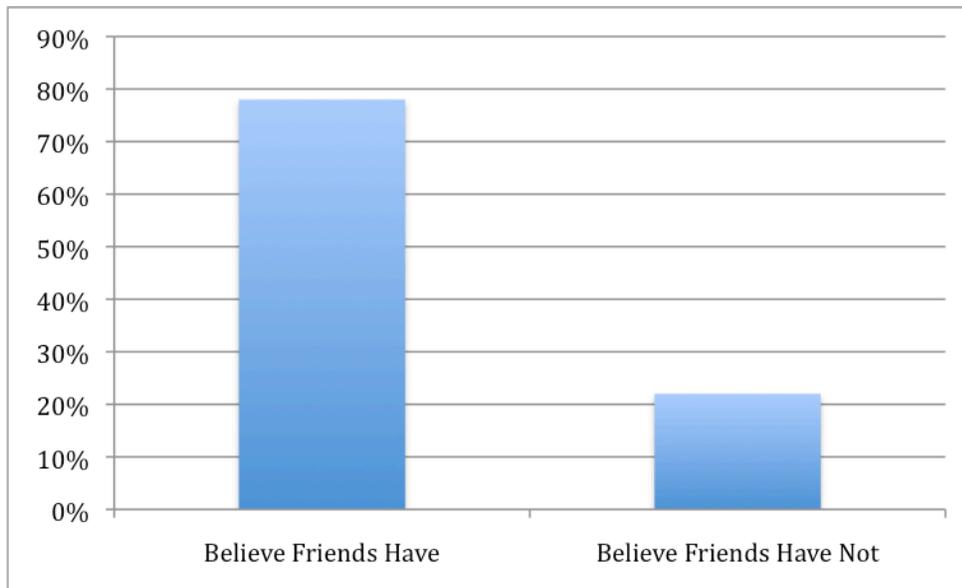
**Figure 7.**

**When Non-Virgins Received a Contraception Talk**

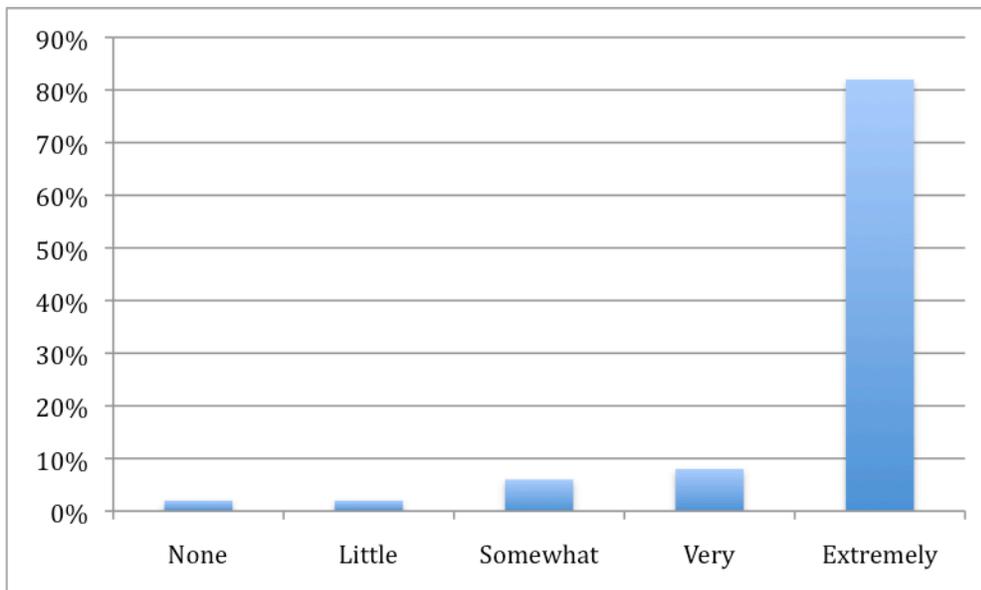


**Figures 8 & 9.**

**Reports of Friends' Sexual Involvement**



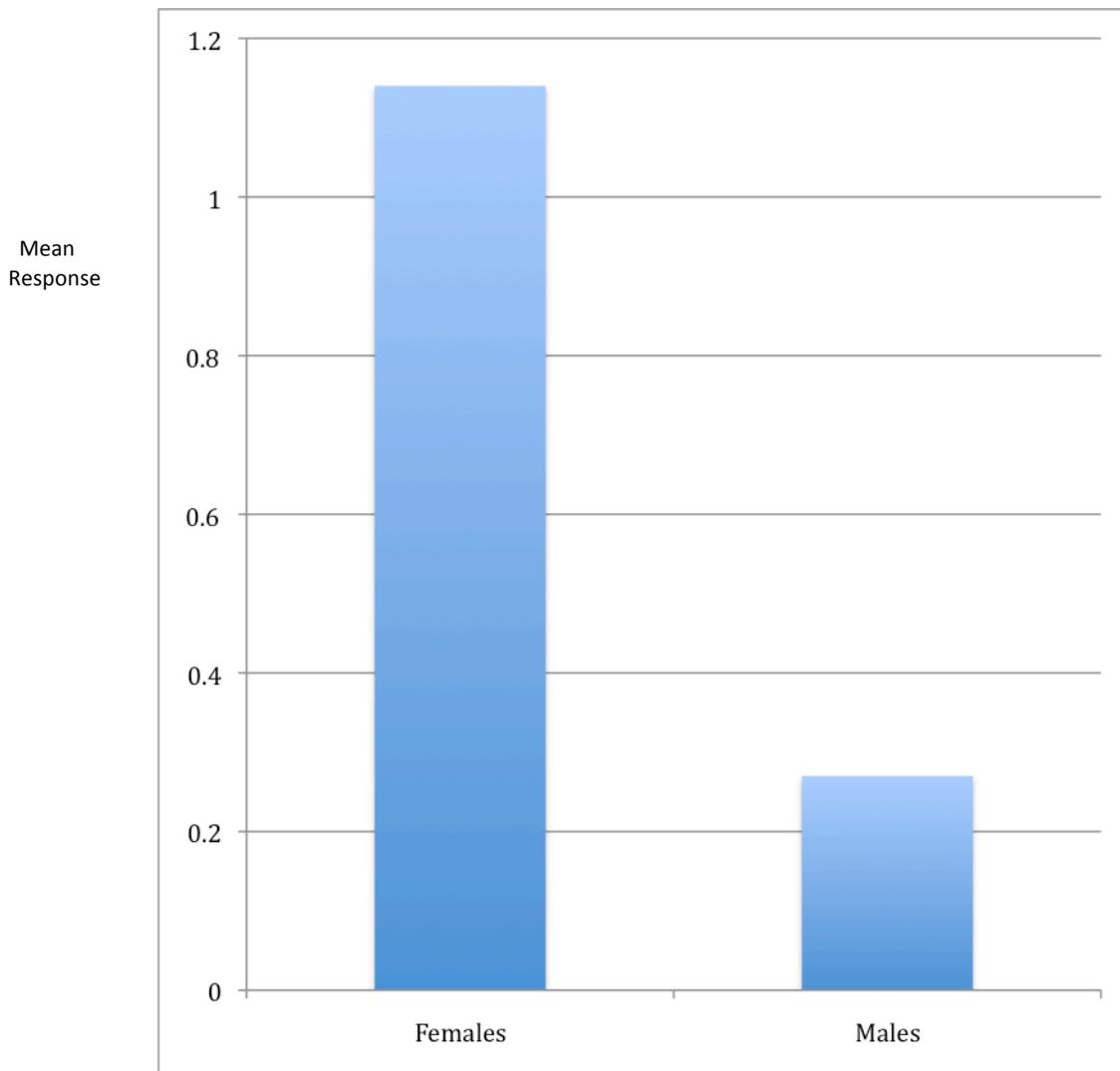
**Certainty of Friends' Sexual Intercourse Involvement**



**\*2 participants said they were not at all certain or a little certain**

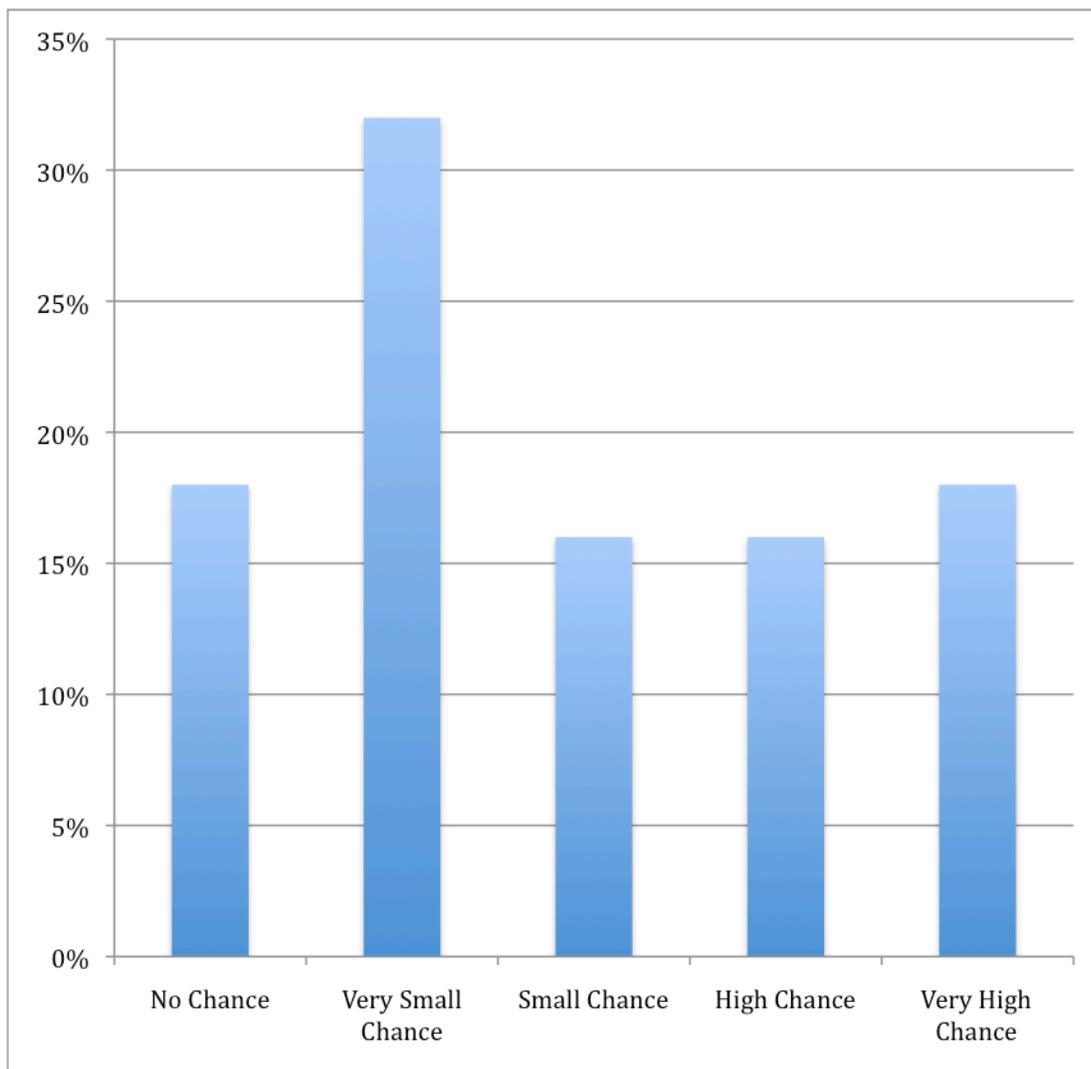
**Figure 10.**

**Males Vs. Females Expected Punishment**



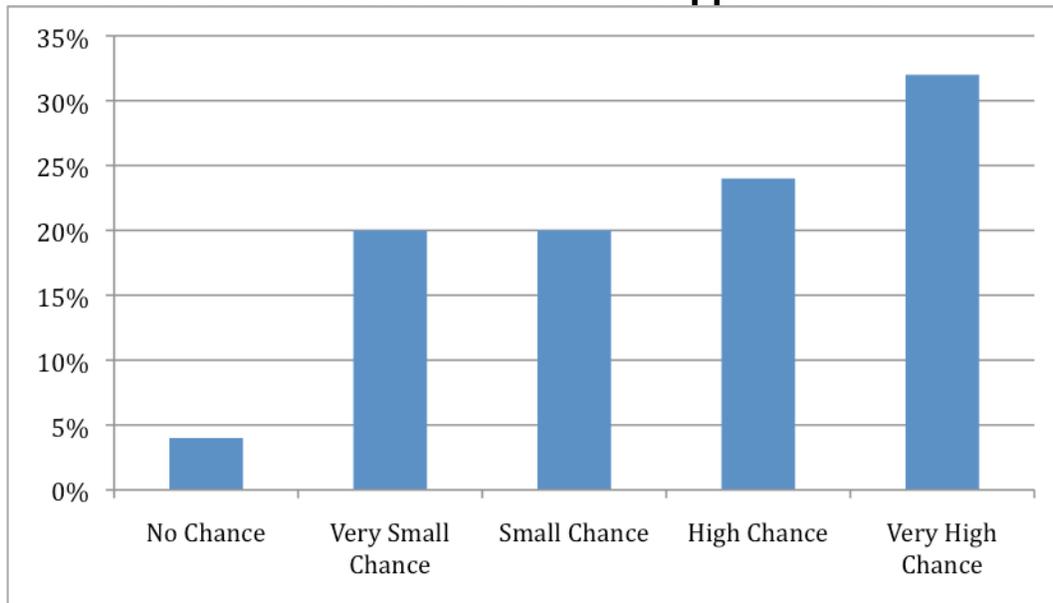
**Figure 11.**

**All Participants' Perceived Parental Disappointment**

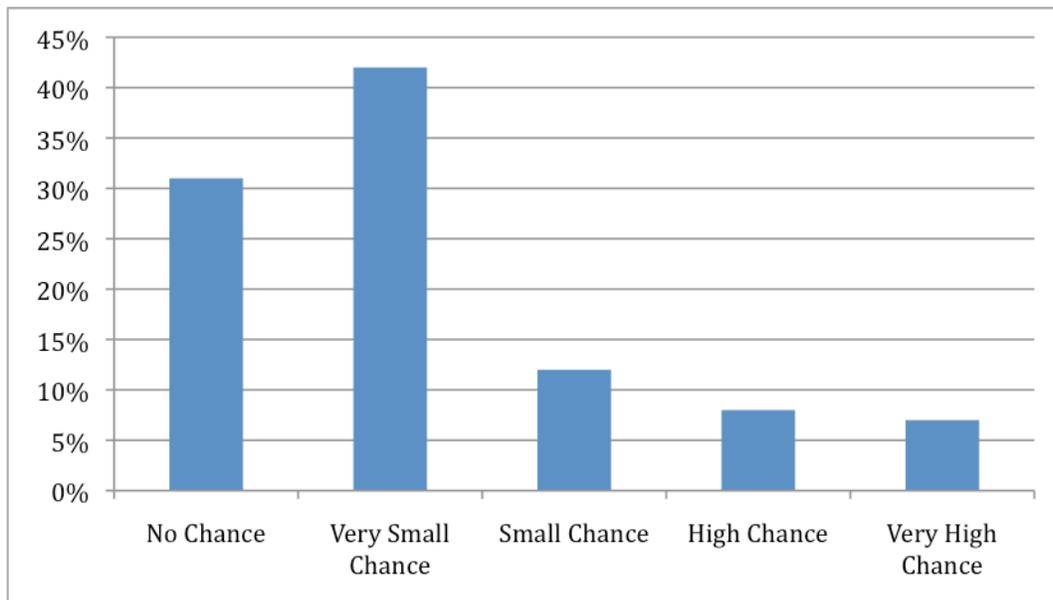


**Figures 12 & 13.**

**Female's Perceived Parental Disappointment**

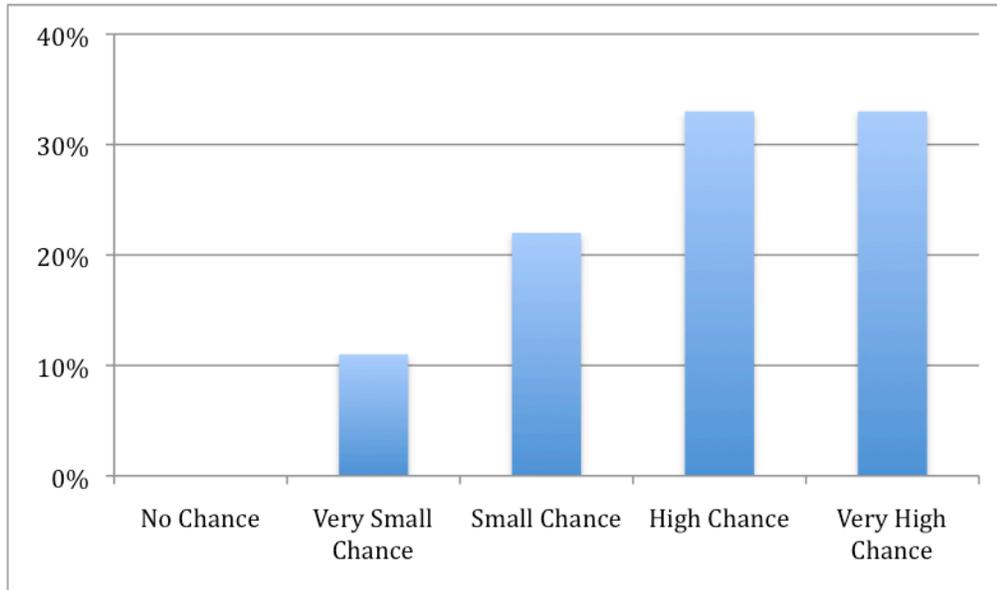


**Male's Perceived Parental Disappointment**

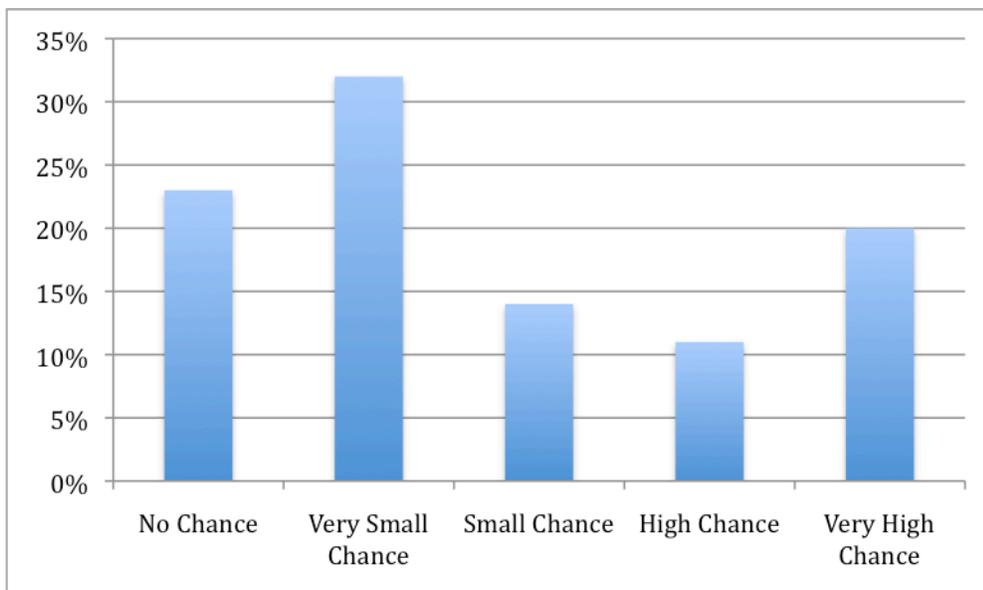


**Figures 14 & 15.**

**Virgins Perceived Parental Disappointment**



**Non-Virgins Perceived Parental Disappointment**



## **Appendix A**

### **Survey Questionnaire**

**1- This study examines adolescent sexuality. Therefore, the questions that you will answer on the questionnaire will pertain to sexuality. If any question you come across makes you feel uncomfortable, please feel free to skip it with no penalty. If you feel you need to withdraw from the study for any reason you may do so at any time. If you have any questions please see the research assistant.**

**-I agree to Participate**

**-I do not agree to Participate**

**2- This part of the study pertains to what you know about your friends. There are also questions that ask you how you think your friends would feel about something you did. There are no right or wrong answers. Please take your time, and be sure to answer each question. If you have any questions, raise your hand.**

**-Continue**

**3- The next set of questions will be about three of your friends. In the box below write down the initials only of one friend with whom you spend the most time. Please write the initials only in order to ensure complete confidentiality. (1 of 3) The reason we want the initials of your friend is because the questions you will answer are about your friends and we want to be sure you are thinking about each friend when you answer each question. No one except the researcher will ever see these initials.**

**4- Has this friend had sexual intercourse?**

**There is an extremely high chance (you are absolutely sure)**

**There is a high chance (you are almost certain)**

**There is somewhat of a chance (you are not sure, but you think they have)**

**There is a small chance (you think they have not)**

**There is no chance (you are absolutely sure they have not)**

**5- How certain are you of your last answer?**

- I am not at all certain**
- I am a little certain**
- I am somewhat certain**
- I am very certain**
- I am extremely certain**

**6- If you believe friend number one has had sexual intercourse, how many partners do you believe they have had sexual intercourse with?**

- One**
- Two**
- Three to four**
- Five**
- Six or more**
- Not Applicable (I do not believe they have)**

**7- How certain are you of your last answer?**

- I am not at all certain**
- I am a little certain**
- I am somewhat certain**
- I am very certain**
- I am extremely certain**

**8- List the initials only of a third friend with whom you spend a lot of time. (2 of 3)**

**9- Has this friend had sexual intercourse?**

- There is an extremely high chance (you are absolutely sure)**
- There is a high chance (you are almost certain)**
- There is somewhat of a chance (you are not sure, but you think they have)**
- There is a small chance (you think they have not)**
- There is no chance (you are absolutely sure they have not)**

**10- How certain are you of your last answer?**

- I am not at all certain**
- I am a little certain**
- I am somewhat certain**
- I am very certain**
- I am extremely certain**

**11- If you believe friend number one has had sexual intercourse, how many partners do you believe they have had sexual intercourse with?**

- One**
- Two**
- Three to four**
- Five**
- Six or more**
- Not Applicable (I do not believe they have)**

**12- How certain are you of your last answer?**

- I am not at all certain**
- I am a little certain**
- I am somewhat certain**
- I am very certain**
- I am extremely certain**

**13- List the initials only of a third friend with whom you spend a lot of time.**

**(3 of 3)**

**14- Has this friend had sexual intercourse?**

- There is an extremely high chance (you are absolutely sure)**
- There is a high chance (you are almost certain)**
- There is somewhat of a chance (you are not sure, but you think they have)**
- There is a small chance (you think they have not)**
- There is no chance (you are absolutely sure they have not)**

**15- How certain are you of your last answer?**

- I am not at all certain**
- I am a little certain**
- I am somewhat certain**
- I am very certain**
- I am extremely certain**

**16- If you believe friend number one has had sexual intercourse, how many partners do you believe they have had sexual intercourse with?**

- One**
- Two**
- Three to four**
- Five**
- Six or more**
- Not Applicable (I do not believe they have)**

**17- How certain are you of your last answer?**

- I am not at all certain**
- I am a little certain**
- I am somewhat certain**
- I am very certain**
- I am extremely certain**

**The next part of the study has to do with your relationship with your parent(s) or legal guardian. These questions will ask you your beliefs about your parent's or legal guardian's disappointment in you if they were to catch you involved in sexual intercourse.**

**18- We would first like to know, which of your parents would you consider yourself to be closest with? If you were raised by a legal guardian, please put your relationship to them in the box below. You will be answering the following questions about the parent that you choose.**

- My Mother**
- My Farther**
- Other (Please Specify):**

**19- \*\*\*VERY IMPORTANT: When answering the next set of questions please answer them for the parent (or for your legal guardian) that you chose above.**

**\*Please note that these questions apply to you whether you HAVE or HAVE NOT had sexual intercourse. Please consider the questions as scenarios that could happen in the future.**

**20- IN THE FUTURE, if you were to have sexual intercourse, what do you think are the chances that your parent or guardian would catch you?**

**No Chance  
Very Small Chance  
Small Chance  
High Chance  
Very High Chance**

**21- IN THE FUTURE, if your parent or guardian found out, what are the chances that he or she would punish you?**

**No Chance  
Very Small Chance  
Small Chance  
High Chance  
Very High Chance**

**22- IN THE FUTURE, if your parent or guardian found out, what are the chances that the punishment would be harsh?**

**No Chance  
Very Small Chance  
Small Chance  
High Chance  
Very High Chance**

**23- IN THE FUTURE, if your parent or guardian found out, what are the chances he or she would be disappointed?**

**No Chance  
Very Small Chance  
Small Chance  
High Chance  
Very High Chance**

**24- These next questions have to do with what you have actually done. We are NOT asking about the future.**

**Yes**

**No**

**25- Have either of your parents ever had a talk with you about any form of sexual contraception?**

**Yes**

**No**

**26- Which of your parents (or legal guardian) talked to you about sexual contraception?**

**My mother**

**My father**

**Both my mother and my father**

**My legal guardian**

**Other (please specify)**

**27- Have you ever had sexual intercourse?**

**Yes**

**No**

**28- Do any of your friends know that you HAVE NOT had sexual intercourse?**

**They do not know.**

**They have asked and I have not told them.**

**Yes, I have told them because they asked me.**

**Yes, I have told them without them asking.**

**29- Do either of your parents (or your legal guardian), know that you HAVE NOT had sexual intercourse?**

**They do not know.**

**They have asked and I have not told them.**

**Yes, I have told them because they asked me.**

**Yes, I have told them without them asking.**

**30- ANSWER THIS QUESTION ONLY IF your parent(s) or guardian knows that you HAVE NOT had sexual intercourse. Please specify which parent knows that you have not had sexual intercourse.**

- Only my mother knows**
- Only my father knows**
- Both my mother and father know**
- My legal guardian knows**

**31- How many partners have you had sexual intercourse with?**

- One**
- Two**
- Three to four**
- Five**
- Six or more**

**32- How enjoyable is sexual intercourse for you?**

- Not at all enjoyable**
- A little enjoyable**
- Somewhat enjoyable**
- Very enjoyable**
- Extremely enjoyable**

**33- Do any of your friend(s) know that you have had sexual intercourse?**

- Yes**
- No**

**34- Of the friend(s) who know that you have had sexual intercourse, how did most find out?**

- I have told them because they asked me.**
- I have told them without them asking.**
- Someone else told them.**
- They found out in some other way.**

**35- Of the friends who found out, to what extent did they approve of this behavior?**

- Not at all approving**
- A little approving**
- Somewhat approving**
- Very approving**
- Extremely approving**

**36- Did your mother or father find out that you had sexual intercourse? If you were raised by a legal guardian, please answer for them.**

**Yes**

**No**

**37- Who found out that you had sexual intercourse?**

**My mother**

**My father**

**Both my mother and my father**

**My legal guardian**

**38- How did your mother, father, or legal guardian find out?**

**He or she asked and you told them the truth.**

**He or she did not ask but you told them anyway.**

**Someone told him or her.**

**You got caught.**

**39- How disappointed was your mother, father, or legal guardian?**

**Not at all disappointed**

**A little disappointed**

**Somewhat disappointed**

**Very disappointed**

**Extremely disappointed**

**40- How harshly were you punished?**

**Not at all**

**A little**

**Somewhat**

**Very**

**Extremely**

**41- Did your mother/father or legal guardian have a talk with you about sexual contraception before or after they found out?**

**No, they did not have a talk with me**

**Before**

**After**

**Both before AND after**

**42- ANSWER THIS QUESTION ONLY IF your parent or legal guardian had a talk with you about sexual contraception. Who had a talk with you about sexual contraception?**

**My mother**

**My father**

**Both my mother and my father**

**My legal guardian**

**Other (Please specify):**

**43- Why didn't he or she find out?**

**He/she asked and you lied.**

**He/she did not ask and you kept it a secret.**

**44- Did your mother/father or legal guardian have a talk with you about contraception before or after you had sex?**

**They did not have a talk with me**

**Before**

**After**

**Both before and after**

**45- ANSWER THIS QUESTION ONLY IF your parent or legal guardian had a talk with you about sexual contraception. Who had a talk with you about sexual contraception?**

**My mother**

**My father**

**Both my mother and my father**

**My legal guardian**

**Other (please specify):**

**Finally, we would like to know a little more about you.**

**What is your gender, or the gender with which you most identify?**

**Male**

**Female**

**What is your current age?**

**17**

**18**

**19**

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