Published in final edited form as:
Sex Roles. 2012 December ; 67(11-12): 670–681. doi:10.1007/s11199-012-0217-4.

Correlates of African American Men's Sexual Schemas

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Abstract

Sexual schemas are cognitive representations of oneself as a sexual being and aid in the processing of sexually relevant information. We examined the relationship between sociosexuality (attitudes about casual sex), masculine ideology (attitudes toward traditional men and male roles), and cultural centrality (strength of identity with racial group) as significant psychosocial and sociocultural predictors in shaping young, heterosexual African American men's sexual schemas. A community sample (n=133) of men in a southeastern city of the United States completed quantitative self-report measures examining their attitudes and behavior related to casual sex, beliefs about masculinity, racial and cultural identity, and self-views of various sexual aspects of themselves. Results indicated that masculine ideology and cultural centrality were both positively related to men's sexual schemas. Cultural centrality explained 12 % of the variance in level of sexual schema, and had the strongest correlation of the predictor variables with sexual schema (r=. 36). The need for more attention to the bidirectional relationships between masculinity, racial/cultural identity, and sexual schemas in prevention, intervention, and public health efforts for African American men is discussed.

Keywords

Sexual schemas; African American; Masculinity; Sociosexuality; Cultural centrality

Introduction

Gender and sexuality are fundamentally intertwined and impact how we view ourselves, and how others view us (Vanwesenbeeck 2009). Men and women are often sexually socialized to think and act in gender ‘appropriate’ ways. These socialization processes have been shown in the literature to help reinforce sociosexual norms (Andersen et al. 1999), beliefs and expectations (Cubbins and Tanfer 2000), gender and sexual stereotypes (Allen and

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Smith 2011) and standards of behavior (Lai and Hynie 2011). Beliefs related to sexuality and enactment of gender roles are deeply rooted in the culture and history of individuals and their relationships with others. For African American men, this socio-sexual history includes a complex convergence of race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Collins 2005). Exploring how young, heterosexual African American men conceptualize sexuality and related contextual issues is important for a better understanding of this group, as well as for debunking myths about them, such as the idea that they are homogenous. While there is literature on heterosexual African American men's sexuality, there is very little about their cognitive representations of sexuality. We sought to identify how African American men conceptualize themselves sexually, and to investigate factors that may impact these self-views. Since sexual schemas are thought to be culturally specific, and our focus is on African American men, most of the literature reviewed used samples from the United States (US)—unless otherwise noted. However, we must note that the impact of the examined psychosocial and sociocultural constructs on sexual schemas is not limited to men in the US.

African American male sexuality has a complicated history in the literature. It is often defined and described by terms such as hypersexual, hypermasculine, and hyperheter-osexual (as cited in Ford et al. 2007). The empirical information on African American men's sexuality has overwhelmingly been more reactive than proactive in that it has occurred primarily in response to high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) rather than with a goal of fully understanding the cultural, contextual and personal factors that inform the construction of meaning of African American male sexuality (Hammond and Mattis 2005). Lewis and Kertzner (2003) contend that the neglect that the scientific literature has paid to African American male sexuality is due to multiple challenges, foremost of which is the lack of a culturally-based theoretical grounding that incorporates an analysis of masculine ideology, norms, and sexual schema that inform African American men's sexuality and subsequent sexual behavior. Our goal was to explore culturally-relevant constructs and their relationships to cognitive representations of sexuality that young African American heterosexual men hold for themselves. We believe that the efficacy of future studies and sexually focused interventions with this population will improve with a better understanding of these relationships and by focusing on the sexual schemas of African American men as the target for change.

Most published studies examining men's sexual schemas have small percentages, if any, of African American men. Therefore the ability to discuss previous research is limited to populations that have different sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociosexual histories than African Americans in the US. However, these studies provide important information about the predictive power of men's sexual schemas. Due to the shortage of information on sexual schemas of African American men, we surveyed a community sample in a southeastern city in the United States. The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between three constructs (sociosexual orientation, masculine ideology, and cultural centrality) thought to be influential in the development of young men's sexual schemas in an effort to better understand the psychosocial and sociocultural links to their sexual schemas that is needed to inform future risk reduction interventions.

Schemas are unique to each individual and/or group, and are made up of multiple factors that may be revised in light of new information. Schemas can be used to not only interpret and predict situations occurring in our environment, but also to guide our responses to those situations. The authors believe that individual differences in sexual beliefs and behaviors may change based on development and experience. Since our sexual self-views are likely to change as one progresses through normative developmental processes from childhood through adulthood, we sought to examine three age groups that represent close, but distinct,

developmental stages. The findings and implications of this study may be relevant to researchers in other countries interested in investigating psychosocial and sociocultural variables relevant to how men conceptualize themselves as sexual beings.

Theoretical Foundation

Schemas are rules used to categorize and interpret the world. Markus (1977) viewed 'schemas' as ways in which we organize information about ourselves which are derived from past experiences, current experiences, and how we facilitate the processing of information. Andersen and Cyranowski (1994) introduced the concept, *sexual self-schema,* which was operationalized as cognitive generalizations about sexual aspects of oneself. This work was influenced by the research of Gagnon and Simon (1973), who emphasized the importance of cognitive factors in sexuality—in the form of sexual 'scripts.' These scripts are thought to cue sexual attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. Sexual self-schemas are thought to provide the information to enact the scripts for future behavioral responses in sexual situations and relationships. Sexual schemas are formed from personal sexual behavior, sexual emotions, and arousal, and help to frame current experience and guide current inferences about sexual perceptions, attitudes and beliefs (Andersen and Cyranowski 1994). Additionally, they serve to organize knowledge about sex and guide how new sex-related information and experiences are perceived and processed. Initially, Andersen and Cyranowski focused on women's sexuality; however, they expanded their work on sexual schemas by examining men's normative beliefs about the important personality dispositions of a sexual man.

Sexual Schemas

Men's sexuality as a social-cognitive-affective phenomenon had not been investigated prior to the Andersen et al. (1999) study. Andersen and colleagues utilized an undergraduate sample (86 % White with no identified African Americans) from a large Midwestern university to develop and validate the Men's Sexual Self-Schema Scale (MSSS). This scale was designed to quantitatively assess men's normative beliefs about the important personality dispositions of a sexual man. In this study, men rated themselves on three empirically derived dimensions of sexual self-schemas: 1) *Passionate/Loving (P/L)*—which represents self-ratings of sexual arousal felt during sexual activities, sex drive, and feelings of love and passion toward a romantic partner; 2) *Powerful/Aggressive (P/A)*—conceptually similar to personality concepts of assertiveness and agency, and the ability to individuate one's self; and 3) *Open-Minded/Liberal (OM/L)*—openness to balancing stereotypical male qualities with strong affiliation, emotional attachment, and love. Findings described men along a continuum from sexually *schematic* (high scorers on all factors) to sexually *aschematic* (low scorers on all factors). Sexually schematic and aschematic men are thought to have different interpretations of their sexual selves which are often on the bipolar ends of the spectrum. A sexually schematic man is thought to be sexually experienced, has a high frequency of sexual relationships (some of which occur without commitment), a wider range of sexual activities, and a broader repertoire of sexual behaviors than aschematic men (Andersen et al. 1999; Hill 2007; Fowers and Fowers 2010). We used the original MSSS to address a gap in the literature by providing descriptive data on sexual schemas of young, heterosexual African American men.

More published studies have examined the utility of the women's sexual self-schema scale than the MSSS. Similar to the women's scale, the MSSS has been shown to have predictive power for sexual behavior. However, the scores on the MSSS have also been shown to have significant relationships with permissive sexual attitudes (Andersen et al. 1999; Taylor 2006), sexism (Sibley and Wilson 2004; Fowers and Fowers 2010), and gender role

expectations (Hill 2007). A brief summary of some of the research using the MSSS is presented below.

Sociosexuality

Sociosexuality is a personality dimension associated with *restrictive* or *unrestrictive* attitudes towards casual sex and actual sexual behavior (Simpson and Gangestad 1991). Individuals with restrictive (i.e., low) sociosexuality typically insist on commitment and closeness in a relationship before engaging in sex with a romantic partner, are less casual about sex, and have fewer sexual partners (Ostovich and Sabini 2004). These individuals tend to choose their partners on the basis of attributes that foster relationship stability and commitment (e.g., fidelity, compatibility, affection). Conversely, those who exhibit an unrestricted (i.e., high) sociosexuality feel relatively comfortable engaging in sex without commitment or emotional closeness, value more superficial attributes such as physical attractiveness and social visibility in a partner (Simpson and Gangestad 1992), and have dating partners who are less affectionate than those of restricted individuals (Yost and Zurbriggen 2006). The sociosexual orientation inventory (SOI; Simpson and Gangestad 1991) is an individual difference measure which examines sexual attitudes related to casual sex, and actual sexual behavior. Andersen et al. (1999) tested undergraduate men from a very large US Midwestern university (race/ethnicity of participants was not reported) who identified as sexually schematic (n=26) and those who identified as sexually aschematic (n=33) on the SOI to ascertain their willingness to engage in uncommitted sexual relations. As predicted, those who were more sexually schematic had significantly higher scores on the SOI indicating more permissive sexual attitudes. Consistent with the results of the men in the Andersen study, we expect a positive relationship between unrestricted sociosexuality and sexual schemas among African American men.

Taylor (2006) conducted a study on sexual schemas and sexual attitudes. This study examined the impact of reading Lad (lifestyle magazines for young adult men) and pornographic magazines on men's sexual schemas. Taylor was interested, as we are, in contributing factors in developing and shaping these schemas. A quantitative survey was administered to 94 undergraduate heterosexual men (70 % White, with no reported African American participants, mean age=19.9) in a large US Midwestern University. Results indicate that Lad magazines were significantly, and positively, related to higher scores on the Powerful/Aggressive subscale of the MSSS, and more permissive sexual attitudes. Findings suggest that younger men may be more interested in lifestyle magazines-which discuss the pursuit of women and offer ways in which the readers' can improve their sex lives, as opposed to magazines that depict idealized, sexually available women. These findings may speak more to the sexual attitudes, beliefs, and norms of masculinity that endorse the importance of the man controlling the ‘chase’ versus the woman being sexually available. The results of the Andersen et al. (1999) and Taylor study suggest to the authors the benefit in gathering more empirical data on the relationship between the sexual schemas, sociosexuality, and masculine ideology.

Masculine Ideology

Masculine ideology, a term proposed by Thompson and Pleck (1995), characterizes traditional attitudes toward men and male roles. Traditional masculine ideology develops as boys and men internalize cultural norms and expectations about male-appropriate behavior from their families, peers, and society (Abreu et al. 2000). Levels of masculine ideology are expected to differ based on race, age, social class (i.e., education and income), and ethnicity (Cazenave 1981; Pleck et al. 1993). Studies examining African American men and their constructions of masculinity show that they consistently score higher than other racial and ethnic groups on measures such as the Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI; Levant et al.

1998) which assesses adherence to traditional masculine ideology (Abreu, et al. 2000). A review of the research on masculine ideology found that more conservative, or traditional, views were associated with being a young, single, African American male living in the southeastern United States (see Levant and Richmond 2007). African American men, especially those who are younger and live in urban environments, are thought to exaggerate adherence to these masculinity norms by adapting a “cool pose” (Majors and Billson 1992). However, other studies present a contrary view and contend that African American men are more egalitarian in their gender ideologies and roles (Harris and Firestone 1998; Bowleg et al. 2000; Bowleg 2004).

Few studies have examined the possible connection between masculine ideology and men's sexual schemas. However, Sibley and Wilson (2004) investigated the moderating effects of men's sexual schemas on the expression of hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes in men toward two female subtypes (promiscuous and chaste). They sampled 61 male students from a university in New Zealand (77 % European/Pakeha, with no reported African American/Black students, mean age=20) and results indicated that men who were more sexually schematic appeared to be more predisposed to interpreting information about women in positive or negative terms. Findings suggest that these cognitions can lead to increased hostile sexism when men perceive the women to fit the criteria of the negative (promiscuous) subtype. Fowers and Fowers (2010) replicated this study with 117 undergraduate students (47 % were men and 11 % were Black/Caribbean) in Florida. Their results were similar to the Sibley and Wilson study in that increased levels of sexual schema was related to increased likelihood of stereotyping, and strengthened men's expressions of sexism. Both studies underscore the impact that masculine ideology and gender role norms/expectations may have on impact of men's sexual schemas. Previous literature suggests that men may attempt fulfill their beliefs about masculinity though risky behavior (as cited in Wade 2009) as a way of showing their defiance to hegemonic views of manhood (Majors and Billson 1992). If a sexually schematic man has more sexual experience and more frequent sexual relationships than an aschematic man (Andersen et al. 1999), we infer that there will be a significant positive relationship between the two. Therefore, we expect that African American men who are more traditional in norms and expectations of sex and gender-appropriate behavior will also be more sexually schematic.

Hill (2007) examined similarities and differences in men and women's sexual schemas among Canadian and US samples. In the U.S. study, 394 undergraduates (43 % were men, 10 % were African American) from a New York City college completed the sexual schema measurements. Men rated themselves lower than women on the dimensions which encompassed the Passionate/Loving and Open-Minded/Liberal adjectives. These findings present the query of whether men were in fact simply lower on these constructs, or if the differences were due to the internalization of gender roles, expectations, and masculine stereotypes. Because masculinity is culturally determined, its associations with sociosexuality and sexual schemas should vary based not only demographic variables, but also on levels of racial/cultural centrality.

Cultural Centrality

There are numerous inconsistencies in the literature on the impact, and even the importance, of ethnic, racial, and cultural norms and identity (Sellers et al. 1997). Sellers et al. attempted to reconcile the inconsistencies in the literature by creating an integrated framework by which to investigate the structure and properties of African American racial identity. They developed the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI), which utilizes these frameworks to describe attitudes and beliefs that may influence behaviors or be products of behaviors. The *Cultural Centrality* dimension of racial identity reflects the extent to which race is a core part of an individual's self-concept (Sellers et al. 1998; Scottham et al. 2008).

Cultural centrality is thought to be stable and acts as a superordinate construct of how a person perceives him/herself in relation to the external world. Research has found that centrality of racial identity (or how much they prefer to identify with an African American reference group) is positively related to self-esteem. The centrality of a particular role/identity (e.g., a sexually schematic man or a traditionally masculine man) is related to the performance of behaviors that are indicative of that role/identity (Stryker and Serpe 1982; Sellers, et al. 1998). Holding more positive, or central, beliefs and attitudes towards one's racial group has been associated with more positive self-esteem (Rowley et al. 1998). The authors posit that a man who has a more positive view of himself culturally may also have a more positive view of himself sexually. Therefore, we anticipate men higher on cultural centrality would be also sexually schematic.

None of the studies utilizing the MSSS mentioned reported a significant percentage of African Americans, if any. Fowers and Fowers (2010) note the importance of using the MSSS with a variety of cultural heritage/backgrounds to provide reliability and validity. As indicated previously, this has not been published with a sample represented by a significant percentage of African Americans. This absence raises the question about possible cultural influences in the role of men's sexual schemas. The current study addresses this limitation by providing information on within-group differences on sexual schemas among a community sample of young, heterosexual African American men. This study fills another gap in the literature by examining three constructs (sociosexuality, masculine ideology, and cultural centrality) thought to be important in shaping sexual schemas. We were interested in integrating these three constructs into a single regression model to identify the impact that they have, collectively, on predicting sexual schemas among the African American men in this study.

Current Study

A community sample of young, heterosexual African American men in an urban Southeastern city in the US completed a 30–40 minute anonymous survey. This study is a part of a larger quantitative study examining individual and cultural influences on HIV-related sexual risk behavior; however, this manuscript only deals with the data from four constructs: sociosexual orientation, masculine ideology, cultural centrality, and sexual schemas. We used descriptive statistics, an overall regression model and bivariate correlations to investigate the overarching research aim of providing much needed information about the sexual schemas of young, heterosexual African American men. Regression and correlational analyses were used to test all hypotheses, which are summarized as follows:

Hypotheses

H1: African American men who have an unrestrictive sociosexuality will be more sexually schematic than those with a restricted sociosexual orientation;

H2: African American men with more traditional masculine ideology will be more sexually schematic than those with less traditional masculine ideologies;

H3: African American men with higher cultural centrality will be more sexually schematic than those with lower scores on cultural centrality.

H4: Cultural centrality, sociosexual orientation, and masculine ideology combined will predict levels of sexual schematization.

Method

Participants

Unmarried African American men (n=133) between the ages of 18 and 29 (M=22.00, SD=2.94) completed the study questionnaires. Most of the sample had completed some education beyond high school (82.0 %) and reported annual household incomes of less than $25,000 per year (66.1 %). Employment status varied among those who were unemployed (39.4 %), employed in part-time positions (41.7 %) and those employed full time (18.9 %). More than half of the participants (54.1 %) reported themselves as ‘single, not in a committed relationship, while 44.4 % reported ‘single, in a committed relationship.’ The remaining 1.5 % were divorced or widowed.

Participants were recruited from three college campuses (one Historically Black Institution [HBI], one Predominately White Institution [PWI], and one racially and ethnically diverse community college) and three community programs (including a post-incarceration release re-entry program, a job skill training program, and an athletic league program). All recruitment sites were in a Southeastern city in the US (see Tables 1 and 2). The original sampling strategy was constructed based on recruiting African American men representing three age categories and developmental stages: 18–21 (adolescence), 22–25 (emerging adulthood), and 26–29 (early adulthood). Additionally, we wanted diversity in education and income levels. The criterion sampling strategy yielded 44 men from an undergraduate HBI, seven men from the PWI (graduate school), 30 men from a community college, 15 men from a job re-entry program, nine men from a job training program, and 19 men from an athletic league; information about the recruitment for the remaining nine men was accidentally not retained. Originally 149 men were recruited for the study. However, five men who reported that they were married on the demographic questionnaire and one man who failed to answer the question were excluded from all analyses. Six men reported less than a high school diploma or GED, as well as one who failed to answer the question, and one who ‘didn’t know' his educational level were also excluded since the questionnaires required reading ability consistent with that level of education. Finally, two men were excluded because as outliers because of extremely divergent scores on the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory, raising doubt about the validity of their responses. Therefore, the final data set included 133 men.

Two MANOVAs were conducted on the data by recruitment site. The first tested for differences in demographic characteristics such as age and education in the original recruitment sites (undergraduate HBI, graduate school, community college, athletic league, re-entry program, and a job training program, see Table 1) and suggested reliable differences, V=.63, F(18, 360)=5.30, p<.001. Follow-up analyses using Dunnett's T3 post-hoc test supported the idea that men recruited from the PWI graduate school were older, F(6, 126)=4.33, p=.001, and had more education, F(6, 126)=21.11, p<.001 than men from the other recruitment sites. The second MANOVA tested for systematic differences on level of sexual schematization, masculine ideology, cultural centrality, and sociosexuality among the recruitment sites, collapsing data across similar sites for power (so, undergraduate HBI and the graduate school were combined, the community college and the athletic league were combined, and the re-entry program and the job-training program were combine, see Table 2), and no reliable differences were suggested by this test, using Pillai's trace due to the unequal numbers in the groups, V=.09, F(8, 224)=1.30, p=.22.

Measures

Sociodemographic information collected from participants included age, education, annual income, employment, and relationship status.

Sexual Schemas—The Men's Sexual Self-Schema (MSSS; Andersen, et al. 1999) measured sexual schemas and assessed three factors: a 10-item Passionate/Loving (P/L) factor, a 13-item Powerful/Aggressive (P/A) factor, and a 4-item Open-Minded/Liberal (O/L) factor. Men rated 45 adjectives (only 27 used for scoring) by considering "*To what extent does the term__describe me?*" on a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranged from *Not at all descriptive* (0) to *Very descriptive* (6). Examples of adjectives rated are *Warm-hearted* (P/L), *Domineering* (P/A), and *Conservative* (O/L). Although the reliability of the first two factors was acceptable (P/L=.87, P/A=.78, after removal of one item, *Inexperienced*) and consistent with prior research, reliability as assessed by Cronbach's alpha was unacceptably low for the Open-minded/Liberal sub-scale at .41 and it was therefore dropped. The remaining factor scores were summed to create a total sexual schema score, with higher scores indicating a more sexually schematic man, as when the standard version for the scale is used. Cronbach's alpha for the total schema scale was .83.

Sociosexual Orientation—The seven-item *Sociosexual Orientation Inventory* (SOI; Simpson and Gangestad 1991) measured willingness to engage in casual, uncommitted sexual relationships. Three items ask respondents to report their number of sexual partners in the past year, the number of sexual partners they foresee having sex with in the next 5 years, and the number of times they engaged in sex with someone on only one occasion. One item assesses frequency of sexual fantasies about someone other than current partner, and the final three questions ask participants to rate three statements that assess thoughts and attitudes about casual sexual relations from *I strongly disagree* (1) to *I strongly agree* (9) resulting in a final scale score with a theoretical minimum of 10 (completely restricted) but without a theoretical maximum (because two of the three behavioral items are not limited). A higher sociosexual orientation score is associated with being unrestricted and more willing to engage in casual, uncommitted sexual relationships. Cronbach's alpha for total SOI scale was .73.

Masculine Ideology—*The Male Role Norms Inventory* (MRNI, Levant et al. 1998) assessed traditional norms for masculine ideology-"beliefs about the importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards for male behavior" (Pleck 1995, p.19) with a 57-item Likert-type scale which included statements such as "*It is important for a man to take risks, even if he might get hurt*" and "*Hugging and kissing should always lead to intercourse.*" Men rated the statements, as it related to them, from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7). The 57 items resulted in eight subscales (Cronbach's alpha in parentheses): *Self-reliance (.68), Avoidance of Femininity (.68), Rejection of Homosexuals (.41), Restrictive Emotionality (64), Aggression (71), Attitudes toward Sex (.68), Achievement/Status (.68), and Non-Traditional Attitudes towards Masculinity (49).* A total *Traditional Masculinity* score (α=.89) was computed by averaging the traditional subscale scores (without including the score from the *Non-Traditional Attitudes towards Masculinity* subscale) with two subscales omitted due to unacceptable reliability, *Rejection of Homosexuals* (Cronbach's alpha=.41) and *Restrictive Emotionality* (Cronbach's alpha=.64); the remaining subscales were each equal to or above .68.

Cultural Centrality—The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers et al. 1998) has four subscales, *Centrality, Private Regard, Public Regard,* and *Ideology* but for the purposes of this study only the Centrality scale was used. An example statement from the Centrality subscale is "*I have strong sense of belonging to Black people.*" The eight items on this scale used a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly agree* (7) and higher scores indicate higher cultural centrality. One of the statements, *Being Black is not a major factor in my social relationships*, did not positively

co-vary with the other items on the sub-scale after it was reverse-scored as is standard, therefore it was omitted and the final Cronbach's alpha for this subscale was .72.

Procedures

Recruitment fliers clearly stated the eligibility criteria. When interested individuals contacted the research team to inquire about participation, the study was explained and a brief screening tool was administered to eliminate those who did not meet the eligibility criteria. Participants were told that the study was designed to better understand individual and cultural influences that impact sexual behavior and HIV risk reduction among young heterosexual African American men. After providing written informed consent, the participant completed the survey. All participants were provided a $25 incentive for their participation.

Results

First we addressed the overarching research aim by providing much needed information on the sexual schemas of young, heterosexual African American men. The mean on the MSSS scale for our sample was 94.88 (SD=14.33). Descriptive statistics for all of the measures are provided in Table 3. Sociodemographic variables were analyzed to see if they covaried with the four summed subscales. Age was positively related to sociosexuality, r=.19, p=.03, such that as the age of men increased, they reported more willingness to engage in casual sexual relationships. Sociosexuality was also positively related to education, r=.26, p=.003, such that men with more education were also more willing to engage in casual sexual relationships.

Hypotheses

Our first hypothesis predicted that African American men with more unrestrictive sociosexuality would be more sexually schematic than those who were more restricted. We tested this idea with a Pearson's correlation and sociosexuality did not predict level of sexual schema, r=−.01, p=0.64. Removal of the two outlier sociosexuality scores did not change the lack of relationship, r=−.02, p=.80. Although neither sexual schema subscale significantly predicted sociosexuality score, they tended to move in opposite directions: Passionate/loving in a negative direction, r=−.11, p=.19, and Powerful/Aggressive in a positive direction, r=.07, p=.45.

The second hypothesis predicted that traditional men (as indicated by the MRNI score) would be significantly more sexually schematic than less traditional men. We tested this idea with a Pearson's correlation and found that level of sexual schema was significantly related to how traditional the men were in terms of their masculine ideology, r=.27, p=.002 (see the correlation matrix in Table 5).

Our third hypothesis asserted that men with higher levels of cultural centrality would be more sexually schematic than those with lower levels of cultural centrality. This was supported with a positive relationship between levels of cultural centrality and sexual schemas, r=.36, p<.001.

We used a simultaneous regression model to test our final hypothesis that sociosexuality, masculine ideology, and cultural centrality would predict levels of sexual schema in African American men. This overall model was significant, F(3, 120)=7.9, p<.001, and the three predictor variables, together, explained 16.6 % of the variance in sexual schemas (see Table 4). Cultural centrality had the strongest correlation of the predictor variables with sexual schemas (r=.36) and the greatest of the standardized coefficients in the regression equation, consistent with the idea that it played the greatest role in explaining variability in sexual

schemas. The variance inflation factors for this model were all less than 1.1, consistent with the idea that multicollinearity did not pose a problem for the model. Additional post-hoc correlational analyses were conducted using the sociosexuality and cultural centrality summed scales and the five Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI) sub-scales with the overall Men's Sexual Self-Schema Scale (MSSS), see Table 5. The cultural centrality scale was positively related to two MRNI subscales: Self Reliance (r=.20, p=.02), and Aggression (r=.29, p=.001). Our dependent variable, sexual schemas, was also positively related to two MRNI subscales: Self Reliance (r=.30, p<.001) and Aggression (r=.26, p=.002), see Table 5.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationships between masculine ideology, sociosexuality, and cultural centrality on the development of men's sexual schemas. A number of significant findings from this innovative study should be highlighted. Primarily, we see that the African American men in our study reported similar scores on the two MSSS subscales as the original participants in the Andersen et al. (1999) study using undergraduate men (M095.33). Most of the published studies we examined did not provide the overall MSSS score so it is difficult to say whether or not our sample was significantly higher or lower than other samples. It is important to keep in mind that we eliminated the Open Minded/Liberal scale due to poor reliability; therefore we must be careful in our categorization of how high or low the levels of sexual schematization are for our sample.

Second, none of the sociodemographic variables were significantly related to any scales other than the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI). It was counterintuitive to the researchers to find that younger men were less likely to endorse sex within casual relationships than were the older men in this study. Men closer to age 18, and still in the adolescence developmental stage, were the most restricted. As men progressed through emerging and early adulthood, they became considerably less restricted. This finding contradicts data published about younger African American men which often paints an unflattering picture of sexual promiscuity and hypersexuality (see West 1993; Whitehead 1997; Collins 2005; Ferber 2007; Wyatt et al. 2008). Additionally, dissimilar to our results, previous studies have shown that younger age is significantly related to higher levels of socio-sexuality (Simpson and Gangestad 1991; Diaz-Loving and Rodriguez 2008). Sociosexuality is an individual difference variable that is thought to fluctuate over time based on experiences over one's life-course. The authors speculate that perhaps sociosexuality may have a developmental and/or experiential component that becomes less restrictive as one matures.

Contrary to our first prediction, sociosexuality was not significantly related to sexual schemas. Both sociosexuality and sexual schemas have been shown to be related to each other and to have predictive power for sexual behavior in previous studies (Simpson and Gangestad 1991; Andersen et al. 1999; Taylor 2006). A possible interpretation of this finding is that the SOI was analyzed here as a unidimensional measure—as it was originally used in the Simpson and Gangestad (1991) study. However, more recent research supports analyzing the measure as two separate components (Webster & Bryan, 2007): a behavioral component and an attitudinal component. Separating these two components may have yielded different inferences regarding the relationships between sociosexuality and the dimensions of the MSSS. The nature of sociosexuality, as an individual difference variable, is that a person high on this would tend to feel relatively comfortable engaging in sex without commitment or emotional closeness.

Support for our second and third hypotheses indicate that a sexually schematic man has higher levels of both traditional masculine ideology and cultural centrality. The relationship

between sexual schemas and masculine ideology was seen with the overall MRNI scale as well as two aspects of traditional masculine ideology, the *Self-Reliance* and *Aggression* subscales. Self-reliance has been found to be associated with personal wellness and motivation to avoid risky behaviors (as cited in Wade 2009). While published studies have examined the relationship between Self-Reliance and health (beliefs and behaviors), none were identified that specifically examined sexuality and/or sexual self-views. However, Wade (2009) did find a significant positive relationship between Self-Reliance and the Sexual and Emotional Wellness subscale of the Holistic Lifestyle Questionnaire (National Wellness Institute 1992). While Wade does not overtly discuss sexuality in terms of cognitive generalizations and rules, it may be inferred that a person's basic or core beliefs about sexual aspects of oneself would be related to other aspects of oneself. Researchers (Lowe 2002; Powell 2007) using the MRNI have described a self-reliant man as one who perceives himself as responsible, disciplined, and confident. An implication of this finding may be that a man who views himself as responsible, disciplined, and confident in his perceptions of other constructs of masculinity may also integrate this into his sexual self-views. Self-Reliance is a construct that should be investigated as a means to promote positive sexual self-views.

The positive relationship between men's sexual schemas and the Aggression subscale could have a number of plausible explanations. One is that the African American men who participated in the study may subscribe to exaggerated beliefs about masculinity which identifies stereotyped masculine behaviors as the ‘norm.’ Adhering to traditional masculinity ideology typically has been seen in a negative light, particularly for African American men whose masculinity has been described as “problematic” (Hammond and Mattis 2005, p. 115). However, our results indicate that a man's positive sexual self-view is indeed intertwined with his increased adherence to his identification of masculine norms. One explanation for this finding may be steeped in the definition of ‘traditional.’ In much of the masculinity literature, traditional is synonymous with conservative; however, this may not be the same for African American men who may apply these terms using a different definitional (and experiential) understanding. For African American men in the U.S., how you define and perceive yourself as a man may be different than how you see yourself as an African American man. Additionally, men in different developmental stages (e.g., adolescence versus early adulthood) may not see the complex interplay of these psychosocial and sociocultural constructs the same way. This is in line with research that describes context-dependent masculinity as the intersection of gender, age, and race (Connell 1995; Roy and Dyson 2010). It will be critical in future research to ascertain if the masculine ideologies of young, heterosexual African American men are interpreted as positive attributes of themselves which then help to develop and maintain positive sexual self-views.

Finally, similar to the MSSS, cultural centrality was related to the Self Reliance and Aggression subscales of the MRNI. This may indicate that for the men sampled, being highly identified with race/culture is in line with beliefs about traditional masculinity which embrace ideas of being responsible, disciplined, confident, and aggressive. While the data published talks about positive and negative associations to certain behaviors, it is important to know whether the associations between traditional masculinity and racial/cultural identity produces negative or positive outcomes as it relates to sexuality. The African American men in our study demonstrate that their internalization of a central racial identity is not only a stable part of their self-concept, but of their gender and sexual schemas as well. Overall, more attention needs to be paid to the relationship between the development (and disentangling) of gender and sexual schemas as well as men's ideas of masculinity and manhood.

We would be remiss if we did not note one of the major criticisms of the MSSS, which may have contributed to some of our results. Hill (2007) notes that the traits listed on the scale are “strongly related to gender stereotypes” (p. 136). Consistent with Hill's research we found that some of the adjectives on the list were too ambiguous and lacked conceptual distinctiveness. The directions did not specifically ask participants to rate themselves on adjectives related to sexuality. Without providing a context for participants' responses, some words were vague enough that participants may have not thought about themselves in a sexual context as they responded to the item. In concert with the Hill (2007) version, future studies utilizing the measure should ask men to describe them themselves as a sexual person and to think about themselves in comparison to others of the same gender and age. One may be concerned about the variability of the internal consistency with this change; the Hill modification produced a Cronbach's alpha consistent with the original scale (.82). In using the measure in future the studies, it would be advantageous to ask minority (racial, ethnic, and sexual) men to compare themselves with other minority men in the same age group, as well as non-minority men in the same group. It cannot be assumed that minority men use non-minority men as a standard for how they see themselves.

Future research exploring how African American men think about their different group memberships may provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of their sexual attitudes and beliefs, sexual decision-making, and subsequent behavior. Given the relationships identified in this study, many of the interventions focused on reducing STI, including HIV rates, among African American men might be improved by incorporating cognitive precursors to behavior such as those investigated in this study.

Limitations and Strengths

No research is without limitations, and one of the most obvious limitations in this study is its reliance on self-report surveys. Asking participants to recall information from up to 12 months ago, as the SOI did, may not be as reliable as asking them to only recall within the last 30 days. Although we did not have a significant amount of missing data (less than 5 %), future studies may benefit from using Audio Computer Assisted Self Inventory (ACASI) to administer the measures, given the ACASI's ability to be programmed to prevent participants from skipping over important questions. As with all non-experimental studies, causal statements about the psychosocial and sociocultural correlates that predicted sexual schemas cannot be made based on the associations established by this cross sectional study. Also, despite our best efforts51% of the sample was between the ages of 18–21 (adolescence). Future studies should aim for equivalent numbers of participants in each of the age categories. Age is often overlooked (Spector-Mersel 2006) as a contributing factor in the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behavior of African American men. We do not assume that the African American community is monolithic and that are results/findings are universal truths. We sampled men from a community in an urban city in the Southeastern part of the U.S. Finally, future studies utilizing the Men's Sexual Schema Scale may need to rely on a more direct approach by asking men to relate their answers specifically to sexuality.

The major strength of the present study is that it augments the existing psychological literature by examining the relationship between sexual schemas, sociosexuality, masculinity ideology, and cultural centrality of young African American men and is the first study to examine these four constructs together to explore African American male sexuality. Although many studies utilizing African Americans are based on between group comparisons; this study examined within-group variations in a sample of African American men rather than making comparisons to other minority or majority populations.

Conclusion

It is imperative that researchers make investigating the cultural nuances and emically defined meanings of constructs a priority if we are to transform the many social, psychological, and health-related challenges experienced by young African American men. Given the identified relationships in the study, the authors believe that many of the interventions focused on reducing STI, including HIV rates among African American men can be improved by incorporating cognitive precursors to behavior such as those investigated in this study. Future research should explore, both separately and interactively, sexual schemas and racial/cultural centrality in men at different developmental phases of life —with a wider range of participants than was recruited for participation in this study.

Acknowledgments

This publication resulted from research supported by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Center for AIDS Research (CFAR), an NIH funded program #P30 AI50410.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables by Original Recruitment Site

Measure	HBI (*n*=44)	Graduate (*n*=7)	Community College (*n*=30)	Re-entry program (*n*=15)	Job Training (*n*=9)	Athletic League (*n*=17)
Mean age in years (standard deviation)	21.3 (2.3)	26.4 (1.9)***	22.4 (2.8)	21.3 (3.4)	22.6 (3.8)	22.3 (3.0)
Modal education level	Some college	Advanced degree***	Some college	High school diploma/general education diploma	Trade School	Some college

*** p≤.01 when using Dunnett's T3 post-hoc test. Chi square test conducted for education level. *HBI* Historically Black Institution

Sex Roles. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2013 December 01.

Table 2
Means (and Standard Deviations) for Study Variables by Combined Recruitment Site

Measure	HBI/Graduate School (*n*=52)	Community College/ Athletic League (*n*=50)	Re-entry program/ Job Training (*n*=24)
Men's Sexual Self-Schema Scale	91.0 (13.5)	98.1 (15.0)	98.3 (7.4)
Centrality, Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity	37.8 (7.5)	37.6 (8.8)	35.1 (11.0)
Total Traditional Score, Male Role Norms Inventory	21.7 (3.3)	23.8 (3.9)	22.7 (2.7)
Sociosexual Orientation Inventory	119.9 (92.4)	115.0 (67.0)	107.0 (73.9)

HBI Historically Black Institution

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Study Scale Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Range (Possible range)
Men's Sexual Self-Schema Scale	94.88	14.33	56.00–125.00 (0 to 132)
Passionate/Loving Subscale	42.88	9.18	20.00–60.00 (0 to 60)
Powerful/Aggressive Subscale	51.42	7.84	32.00–70.00 (0 to 72)
Sociosexual Orientation Inventory	107.80	56.48	15.00–281.00 (10 to unbounded)
Centrality, Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity	33.05	7.90	9.00–49.00 (7 to 49)
Total Traditional Score, Male Role Norms Inventory	22.33	3.42	7.63–31.21 (5 to 35)
Avoidance of Femininity Subscale	4.22	.89	1.43–6.14 (1 to 7)
Self-Reliance Subscale	5.10	.90	1.86–6.86 (1 to 7)
Aggression Subscale	4.79	.96	1.40–7.00 (1 to 7)
Achievement/Status Subscale	4.18	.93	1.57–7.00 (1 to 7)
Attitudes toward Sex Subscale	4.04	.88	1.57–6.50 (1 to 7)

N=133 for all variables

Table 4

Simultaneous Multiple Regression Model Predicting Men's Sexual Self-Schema Scale Score (*N*=133)

Variable	B	SEB	*β*	*t(122)*
Constant	54.4	9.1		6.0
Sociosexual Orientation Inventory	.006	.016	−.04	−.4
Total Traditional Score, Male Role Norms Inventory	4.3	1.8	.21	2.5 *
Centrality, Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity	.6	.2	.32	3.8 **

Multiple R^2=.17 for the model, $F(3, 121)=7.9$, $p<.001$

* $p<.05$,

** $p<.001$

Table 5

Correlation Matrix for Study Variables (*n*=133)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Men's Sexual Self-Schema Scale	–	.87**	.82**	−.01	.36**	.27*	.005	.34**	.29*	.16	.22*
2. Passionate/Loving subscale	–	–	.44**	−.11	.26*	.10	−.10	.27*	.18*	−.02	.06
3. Powerful/Aggressive subscale	–	–	–	.07	.34**	.33**	.12	.28*	.28*	.24*	.28*
4. Sociosexual Orientation Inventory	–	–	–	–	.09	.05	.14	.04	−.01	.04	−.02
5. Centrality, Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity	–	–	–	–	–	.19*	.13	.21*	.27*	.08	.00
6. Total Traditional Score, Male Role Norms Inventory	–	–	–	–	–	–	.70**	.71**	.77**	.82**	.72**
7. Avoidance of Femininity Subscale	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.34**	.38**	.54**	.36**
8. Self-Reliance Subscale	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.57**	.43**	.30**
9. Aggression Subscale	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.46**	.42**
10. Achievement/Status Subscale	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.62**
11. Attitudes toward Sex Subscale	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

*$p \leq .05$

**$p \leq .001$