



Later life sex differences in sexual psychology and behavior

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ABSTRACT

Several sex differences in sexual psychology and behavior have been documented across cultures and across historical periods. These differences have been investigated almost exclusively in young adult samples, however. Using data secured from an older adult sample of retirement center residents in Southeast Florida, USA ($n = 186$, $M = 67.00$ years), we assessed the replicability of several sex differences in sexual psychology and behavior in later life. Results replicate the sex differences identified in younger adult samples, including: (1) older men more than older women report interest in a greater number of sexual partners; (2) older men require less time before consenting to sex than do older women; (3) older men more than older women prioritize attractiveness in a prospective romantic partner, whereas older women more than older men prioritize good financial prospects; and (4) older men report a higher frequency of sexual arousal and sexual fantasies than do older women. Discussion addresses limitations of the current research and directions for future research addressing later life sex differences in sexual psychology and behavior.

1. Introduction

Sex differences in sexual psychology and behavior have been documented cross-culturally and cross-historically (Buss, 1989, 2001), and investigated from a range of academic disciplinary perspectives (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). Notable sex differences in sexual psychology and behavior concern preferences in a prospective long-term romantic partner, sexual behaviors, and sexual fantasies.

2. Sex differences in sexual behavior and psychology

When asked what characteristics they prefer in a prospective long-term romantic partner, men and women agree on the importance of some characteristics, such as sense of humor and kindness, but differ in their prioritization of other characteristics (Buss, 1989; Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001). Whereas women prioritize the earning potential and social status of a long-term partner, men prioritize attractiveness and youth (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 2001), even when given a budget to design their ideal short-term or long-term partner using a list of 18 characteristics (Li, Valentine & Patel, 2010). Although the sexes agree on several characteristics that constitute a desirable long-term partner, sex differences in partner preferences provide insight into sex-differentiated sexual psychology.

In addition to reporting greater interest than women in short-term

sexual relationships, men report more lifetime sexual partners and a greater frequency of infidelity to a long-term partner (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Although both sexes participate in long-term relationships and short-term relationships, men are more interested in short-term sexual encounters than women and are more likely than women to have sex with someone other than their committed romantic partner (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). When asked about their ideal number of sexual partners over various intervals of time, men report higher numbers of ideal partners than do women (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). When asked to indicate how likely they would be to have sex with a desirable person after knowing that person for various lengths of time, men are more likely than women to indicate that they would have sex with that person (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Men not only desire more sexual partners and more short-term mating opportunities than women, but are also more eager to have sex with a desirable person after knowing that person for shorter lengths of time.

There are notable sex differences in sexual fantasies. Relative to women, men indicate greater frequency of sexual fantasies, report more imagined sexual partners, and more frequently substitute one imagined partner for another during a single fantasy (Ellis & Symons, 1990). Sexual fantasies may provide a more accurate measure of sexual psychology, as they address private thoughts rather than reported behaviors, and are not limited by the confines of reality (Ellis & Symons, 1990).

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3. Sexuality in later life

These sex differences have been investigated and documented primarily in young adults, albeit across different cultures, countries, and historical periods. However, sexual interest and activity persists into later life (Leigh, Temple & Trocki, 1993; Lindau et al., 2007). Although much of the research addressing the sexual behavior of older adults focuses on sexual dysfunction, such as erectile dysfunction or lack of sexual interest (Nicolosi et al., 2004), a few studies have documented the persistence of sexual behavior and desire in later life for both men and women (DeLamater & Sill, 2005; Beutel, Stöbel-Richter, & Brähler, 2008; DeLamater & Moorman, 2007). For example, DeLamater and Moorman (2007) reported an inverse relationship between age and sexual behavior, and Beutel et al. (2008) reported an inverse relationship between age and sexual desire. Specifically, DeLamater and Moorman recorded the frequency of different sexual behaviors in a large sample of older people and found that, although greater age is associated with decreased frequency of sexual behaviors, older men and older women report both partnered sexual activity and masturbation. Further, DeLamater and Sill (2005) found that older people report sexual desire, although age was inversely correlated with the level of desire. These researchers also found that self-reports of the importance of sex predicted the strength of sexual desire for both sexes; however, whereas current involvement in a sexual relationship predicted sexual desire for older women, this was not the case for older men. Conversely, whereas education predicted sexual desire for older men, this was not the case for older women. Other studies of sexual psychology and behavior have documented sex and age differences in online sexual activity and sexual fluidity (Baumgartner, Valkenburg & Peter, 2010; Kinnish, Strassberg & Turner, 2005). Baumgartner et al. (2010), for example, found that adolescents, aged 12–17 years, and adults, aged 18–88 years, engaged in similar levels of risky, online sexual behavior, although men took more online sexual risks than did women, regardless of age. Kinnish et al. (2005) found that, relative to heterosexual men, heterosexual and gay women reported greater changes in their sexual orientation over the lifespan. These are among the few such sex differences reported in the sexual psychology and behavior of older people. Identifying whether and to what degree older men and older women differ in their sexual desires and behaviors is as important as understanding how older adults differ from younger adults in sexual desires and behaviors, not least because such sex differences can inform counseling and treatment programs (Camacho & Reyes-Ortiz, 2005; Nicolosi et al., 2004).

The current research addresses a gap in the literature regarding sex differences in sexual behavior and desire in older populations. We explored the sexual psychology and behaviors of older men and older women with a self-report survey that included several measures, including ideal sexual partner number desired in the future and preferences for characteristics in a prospective long-term romantic partner. These measures were adapted from previous studies that evaluated the sexual psychology and behavior of younger adults. We therefore are able to explore whether sex differences in sexual psychology and behavior identified among young adults replicate among older adults.

4. Methods

4.1. Participants

Participants were 186 individuals (69 male, 133 female) residing in a retirement community in Southeastern Florida, USA. The mean age of participants was 67.00 years ($SD = 8.68$), ranging 47–86. For men, mean age was 66.68 ($SD = 9.05$), ranging 53–84; for women, mean age was 67.28 ($SD = 8.51$), ranging 47–86. Individuals were not formally screened for pre-existing conditions, such as psychopathology, health problems, or special educational needs. Table 1 presents additional descriptive statistics available for the sample.

4.2. Procedures

Participation was voluntary and not rewarded. Flyers alerting residents to the study were posted throughout the retirement community, and prospective participants were encouraged to contact the researcher by telephone to indicate interest in participating. Residents who indicated interest arranged to meet with the researcher at the retirement community. The researcher provided participants with a single survey packet, which they were told would take about one hour to complete. Participants also were provided with a security envelope in which to seal the completed surveys. The researcher returned to the retirement community every few days for the next two weeks to collect completed surveys. The survey requested demographic information, including sex and age, along with the measures described below. Participants were assured that their responses would be confidential, but also that they could skip questions they did not feel comfortable answering.

4.3. Measures

4.3.1. Factors in choosing a long-term partner

Participants were asked to evaluate the desirability of 18 different characteristics in a prospective long-term partner, including “Good cook & housekeeper,” “Good looks,” and “Education & intelligence.” Participants were provided with the following instructions: “Even if you already have a long-term partner, please evaluate the following factors in choosing a long-term partner, as if you were choosing one today”. For each item, participants indicated how desirable that characteristic is in a long-term partner by rating it on a scale from 0 (*irrelevant or unimportant*) to 3 (*indispensable*). This measure included items from Buss (1989).

4.3.2. Sexual behaviors and attitudes

Participants were asked 11 questions about their sexual behaviors, including the following items: “Have you ever had sexualintercourse with another person while you were involved in a committed relationship?”, “Have you had sexualintercourse with another person since you have been involved in your current, committed relationship?”, and asked to respond “yes” or “no” to these items. Participants were also asked: “With how many different partners of the opposite sex have you had sexual intercourse?” This measure was developed for the current research using items from several measures developed by Buss and Schmitt (1993). Only some of the items from Buss and Schmitt's measures were used in an effort to reduce the burden on participants.

4.3.3. Partner number

Participants were asked to indicate how many different sexual partners they would like to have over several time intervals. These 11 intervals ranged from one month to 30 years, as well as the remainder of their lifetime. Participants were provided with the following instructions: “For each of the following time intervals, with how many different partners would you ideally like to have sexualintercourse?” This measure included items from Buss and Schmitt (1993).

4.3.4. Time before consenting to sex

Participants were asked to indicate how strongly they would consider having sex with a desirable person after knowing that person for time durations ranging from “1 s” to “5 years.” Participants were provided with the following instructions to respond to the 12 items: “If the conditions were right, would you consider having sexual intercourse with someone you viewed as desirable if...” and were asked to indicate the degree to which they would consider sex after knowing that person for each time duration. Participants answered on a scale from –3 (*definitely not*) to +3 (*definitely yes*) for each item. This measure included items from Buss and Schmitt (1993).

Table 1
Participant demographic information.

	Men					Women				
	M	SD	Min	Max	%	M	SD	Min	Max	%
Age	66.68	9.05	53	84		67.28	8.51	47	86	
Marriages	1.56	0.80	0	4		1.28	0.73	0	7	
Divorces	0.76	0.80	0	3		0.51	0.76	0	5	
<i>Ethnicity</i>										
Caucasian						71.00			79.00	
Hispanic						7.20			6.50	
African American						11.60			5.80	
Asian American						1.40			0.70	
Native American						2.90			7.20	
Other						4.30			2.90	
<i>Relationship Status</i>										
Married						79.70			50.00	
Separated						1.40			1.40	
Divorced						7.20			14.50	
Widowed						4.30			23.20	
Engaged						0.00			0.70	
In a committed relationship						10.10			9.40	
Dating multiple partners						4.30			3.60	
Not dating or romantically involved						5.80			21.00	

Note. *n* for men = 35 and *n* for women = 68.

Table 2
Sex differences in characteristics desired in a long-term romantic partner in older adults.

	Men		Women		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Pleasing disposition	2.71	0.52	2.62	0.67	0.75	0.15
Good looks	1.85	0.82	1.53	0.70	2.07*	0.42
Mutual attraction, love	2.74	0.51	2.84	0.48	-0.94	0.20
Sociability	2.32	0.59	2.26	0.75	0.40	0.09
Similar political background	0.85	0.96	1.00	0.89	-0.77	0.16
Good cook & housekeeper	1.79	0.69	0.94	0.94	4.68***	1.03
Similar educational background	1.54	1.04	1.75	0.99	-0.97	0.21
Refinement, neatness	2.32	0.73	2.28	0.73	0.26	0.05
Similar religious background	1.68	1.20	1.74	1.02	-0.26	0.05
Good financial prospects	1.29	0.87	2.24	0.85	-5.53***	1.10
Chastity (no previous experience in sexual intercourse)	1.12	1.04	0.71	0.99	1.91	0.40
Dependable character	2.61	0.70	2.76	0.67	-1.10	0.22
Ambition & industriousness	1.82	0.76	2.28	0.77	-2.84**	0.60
Desire for home & children	1.94	1.14	1.75	1.30	0.70	0.16
Good health	2.41	0.50	2.43	0.70	-0.11	0.03
Education & intelligence	2.20	0.68	2.34	0.78	-0.89	0.19
Favorable social status or rating	1.21	1.04	1.93	2.62	-1.54	0.36
Emotional stability and maturity	2.58	0.56	2.84	0.48	-2.45*	0.50

Note. Cohen's *d* is a measure of effect size where 0.20 is a *small* effect, 0.50 is *medium* and 0.80 and greater is *large*.

n for men = 35 and *n* for women = 68.

**p* < .05.

***p* < .01.

****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

4.3.5. Survey about fantasies

Participants completed 23 items about their sexual fantasies. Specifically, participants were asked: "Approximately how often do you have sexual fantasies?", and "Approximately how often do you get sexually aroused?" Responses for these items ranged from "never" to "more than 10 times a day." Participants were also asked: "On the average, how many different imagined partners do you have sexual fantasies about in a single day?" and could answer from "none" to "more than eight". Participants were also asked: "In your sexual fantasies do you have a clear image of the genital features of your imagined partner?" and "In your sexual fantasies do you have a clear image of the facial features of your imagined partner?", and could respond from "never" to "always" for both items. Participants were asked: "How often

do you substitute one imagined partner for another during the course of a single fantasy?", and could respond from "never" to "regularly". Participants were asked to respond either "yes" or "no" to the question: "Considering your sexual fantasies throughout the course of your life, do you think that in your imagination you have had sexual encounters with over 1000 different people?" This measure included items from Ellis and Symons (1990).

5. Results

5.1. Factors in choosing a long-term partner

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for responses to items in the *Factors in Choosing a Long-Term Partner* measure, along with the results of independent-means *t*-tests of sex differences and associated effect size estimates. Cohen's *d* was used as a measure of effect size for *t*-tests. Cohen (1977) defines effect sizes as *small* at 0.20, *medium* at 0.50, and *large* at 0.80 or greater. The results revealed sex differences in the value placed on several characteristics of a prospective long-term partner. Replicating the sex differences documented for younger adults, older men placed greater importance on physical attractiveness and good housekeeping than did older women, whereas older women placed greater importance on financial prospects, emotional stability, and ambition than did older men (see Table 2).^{1,2}

¹ Data for the *Factors in Choosing a Long-Term Partner* measure were limited compared to other measures included in the survey packet. Only 33 to 35 men, and 65 to 68 women, responded to the items on this measure. In the section of the questionnaire immediately before *Factors in Choosing a Long-Term Partner*, participants completed a section in which they were asked to skip certain items if they were not currently in a committed romantic relationship. Although the directions for the *Factors in Choosing a Long-Term Partner* instructed participants "even if you already have a long-term partner, please evaluate the following factors in choosing a long-term partner, as if you were choosing one today", it is possible that participants misread these directions and skipped these items, thinking that they were only expected to complete the items if they were not in a long-term relationship.

² Two cases (one man and one woman) were excluded from analysis because the participants indicated ideal partner numbers that were greater than three standard deviations above the mean (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Table 3
Sex differences in ideal number of sexual partners over various time durations in older adults.

	Men		Women		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
1 month	1.62	6.45	0.38	0.56	1.94	0.27
6 months	1.88	6.58	0.44	0.64	2.22*	0.31
1 year	2.16	6.86	0.48	0.73	2.47*	0.34
2 years	2.50	7.36	0.53	0.88	2.71**	0.38
3 years	2.95	8.29	0.54	0.93	2.91**	0.41
4 years	3.34	9.39	0.55	0.96	2.95**	0.42
5 years	3.54	10.45	0.58	1.08	2.82**	0.40
10 years	3.65	10.54	0.57	1.08	2.90**	0.41
20 years	4.23	11.15	0.58	1.09	3.24**	0.46
30 years	4.42	11.35	0.60	1.24	3.30**	0.47
Remainder of life	5.04	11.99	0.75	1.35	3.42**	0.50

Note. Cohen's *d* is a measure of effect size where 0.20 is a *small* effect, 0.50 is *medium* and 0.80 and greater is *large*.

n for men = 60 and *n* for women = 104.

**p* < .05.

***p* < .01.

****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

5.2. Sexual behaviors and attitudes

Replicating the sex differences documented for younger adults, a *t*-test revealed that older men reported more lifetime sexual partners than did older women (for men, *M* = 21.45, *SD* = 37.15; for women, *M* = 4.89, *SD* = 7.50; *t* = 4.66, *p* < .001, *d* = 0.62). Also replicating the sex differences documented for younger adults, a *t*-test revealed that older men were more likely than older women to report currently seeking a short-term mate. A chi-square test revealed that older men were more likely than older women to respond "yes" when asked if they have ever been unfaithful to a committed partner [chi-square (1, *n* = 176) = 8.23, *p* = .004, *r* = 0.22]. Correlation coefficients were used as measures of effect size for chi-square tests. Cohen (1988) defines effect sizes as *small* at 0.10, *moderate* at 0.30 and *large* as 0.50 and greater. There was no significant sex difference, however, for whether participants had ever had sex with someone other than their current partner [chi-square (1, *n* = 123) = 1.49, *p* = .22, *r* = 0.11].

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for responses to items addressing ideal partner number and the results of independent-means *t*-tests of sex differences and associated effect size estimates. Participants were asked how many different sexual partners they would ideally have in the next month, 6 months, 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, 4 years, 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, and for the remainder of their lives. For every time period, and replicating sex differences documented for younger adults, older men's responses were higher than women's, but this difference was only significant from the 6-month period onward.³

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for responses to items addressing time required before consenting to sex and the results of independent-means *t*-tests of sex differences and associated effect size estimates. Participants were asked how likely they would be to consent to sex with a desirable person after knowing that person for 5 years, 2 years, 1 year, 6 months, 3 months, 1 month, 1 week, 1 day, 1 evening, 1 h, 1 min, and 1 s. Replicating the sex differences documented for younger adults, older men were more likely than older women to consent to sex after knowing someone for each duration from 3 months to 1 s.

5.3. Sexual fantasies

Table 5 presents descriptive statistics for items on the *Survey About Fantasies* and the results of independent-means *t*-tests of sex differences and associated effect size estimates. Replicating the sex differences documented for younger adults, the results indicated that older men

Table 4
Sex differences in likelihood of consenting to sex with someone known for various times in older adults.

	Men		Women		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
5 years	1.19	2.41	1.38	2.04	-0.52	0.09
2 years	1.29	2.20	1.20	2.13	0.26	0.04
1 year	1.09	2.25	1.06	2.15	0.07	0.01
6 months	1.12	2.23	0.58	2.31	1.41	0.24
3 months	1.02	2.24	0.17	2.38	2.25*	0.37
1 month	0.79	2.36	-0.48	2.46	3.19**	0.53
1 week	0.25	2.52	-1.06	2.55	3.16**	0.52
1 day	-0.12	2.66	-1.37	2.51	3.02**	0.48
1 evening	-0.21	2.62	-1.42	2.50	2.92**	0.47
1 h	-0.33	2.69	-1.45	2.51	2.68**	0.43
1 min	-0.54	2.71	-1.50	2.51	2.27*	0.37
1 s	-0.60	2.71	-1.50	2.49	2.18*	0.35

Note. Cohen's *d* is a measure of effect size where 0.20 is a *small* effect, 0.50 is *medium* and 0.80 and greater is *large*.

n for men = 58 and *n* for women = 114.

**p* < .05.

***p* < .01.

****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

Table 5
Sex difference in sexual fantasies among older adults.

	Men		Women		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Frequency of sexual fantasies	3.12	1.68	1.98	1.06	5.57***	0.81
Frequency of sexual arousal	3.06	1.48	2.11	0.97	5.20***	0.76
Imagined sexual partners per day	1.24	1.24	0.56	0.96	4.13***	0.61
Frequency of imagined-partner switching during a single fantasy	1.03	1.04	0.62	0.82	2.90***	0.44
Clarity of facial features during fantasies	2.45	1.17	1.94	1.44	2.42*	0.39
Clarity of genital features during fantasies	2.18	1.20	1.46	1.36	3.56***	0.56

Note. Cohen's *d* is a measure of effect size where 0.20 is a *small* effect, 0.50 is *medium* and 0.80 and greater is *large*.

n for men = 67 and *n* for women = 115.

**p* < .05.

***p* < .01.

****p* < .001 (two-tailed).

report more frequent sexual fantasies and sexual arousal than older women. Older men more than older women also reported a higher average number of imagined sexual partners per day, more frequently switching partners during a single fantasy, and clearer mental images of their partner's facial and genital features. These sex differences replicate in an older sample sex differences documented for younger adults.

In addition to reporting more imagined partners than older women, a chi-square test revealed that older men were more likely than older women to indicate that they have had over 1000 different imagined partners in their lifetimes, again replicating a sex difference documented for younger adults [chi-square (1, *n* = 181) = 14.24, *p* < .001, *r* = 0.28]. Finally, when asked what they focus on during sexual fantasies, a chi-square test revealed that older men were more likely to report that they focus on the physical characteristics of their partner, whereas older women were more likely to report that they focus on their own physical and emotional responses within the fantasy, replicating sex differences documented for younger adults [chi-square (3, *n* = 159) = 30.96, *p* < .001, *r* = 0.44].

6. Discussion

The results of the current study provide a compelling argument for the persistence of several sex differences in sexual psychology and

behavior among older adults, replicating the results of parallel research on young adults. Older men desire a greater number of sexual partners than do older women, require less time before consenting to sex, and fantasize about more sexual partners, indicating that sex differences in sexual psychology and behavior identified in young adulthood persist into later life.

6.1. Factors in choosing a long-term partner

Older men report a preference for attractive long-term partners, as well as good housekeepers, whereas older women report a preference for prospective partners with access to resources. Younger men also prefer attractive long-term partners more than do younger women, indicating that attractiveness in a long-term partner remains important for men into later life. Older women more than older men, in contrast, report preferences for financial prospects, emotional stability, and ambition in a prospective long-term partner. These findings are consistent with sex differences documented in younger adults; however, unlike younger women, older women placed greater importance than did older men on emotional stability in a long-term partner (Buss et al., 2001). These results suggest that emotional stability in a long-term partner becomes more important to women as they age, or less important to men as they age. This could be because older women, relative to younger women, associate emotional stability more closely with earning potential or because older women perceive emotional stability as indicative of a partner's ability to provide adequate care for them in their old age.

6.2. Sexual behaviors and attitudes

Older men are more likely than older women to report sex with someone other than their committed romantic partner at some point in their lives, but were just as likely as older women to report that they had been unfaithful to their current romantic partner. Because participants were asked about behaviors in the past, it is perhaps not surprising that older men's reported frequencies of infidelity and lifetime sexual partners are similar to reports by younger men (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Buss, 1989; Wiederman, 1997).

Consistent with sex differences identified in younger adults, older men desired more sexual partners than did older women for every future time interval from 6 months to the remainder of their lives (Buss, 1989). Although nearly all (95.5%) of the older men reported that they were currently in a romantic relationship, they also reported a desire for more sexual partners than did older women, only 63.7% of whom reported that they were currently in a romantic relationship. Regardless of age or relationship status, men desire a greater number of sexual partners than do women.

Relative to older women, older men report a greater likelihood of consenting to sex with a desirable person after knowing that person for time periods ranging from one second to three months. Replicating sex differences documented in younger adults, older men appear to be less interested in spending time getting to know a prospective sexual partner than are older women (Buss, 1989). Given that older men desire more sexual partners than do older women, it follows that they are more eager than older women to have sex with a person they have known for a relatively short period of time.

6.3. Sexual fantasies

Asking participants about their sexual fantasies provided further insight into the sexual desires of older people, in addition to affording an opportunity to investigate whether these desires differ between older men and older women in ways paralleling sex differences identified in younger adults. Older men, relative to older women, report a greater frequency of sexual arousal and sexual fantasy, more imagined sexual partners during their fantasies, and place greater importance on the

facial and genital features of their imagined partners. From these survey items, we documented not only that older men engage in certain sexual behaviors more frequently than do older women, but also that the sexes differ markedly in reported sexual arousal and desire. These results are notable because they indicate that, even if older adults are inaccurate in their estimates of lifetime sexual partners, older men currently desire more sexual partners than do older women. These sex differences in sexual fantasy replicate those documented in younger adults (Ellis & Symons, 1990).

6.4. Limitations and future directions

The current results may not be generalizable to older people outside of Southeastern Florida or, indeed, to older people not living in retirement communities. Moreover, further research might investigate whether the sex differences observed among older people in the current research are replicated in non-Western countries.

Self-report items assessing past sexual behaviors may be subject to biases to appear more or less sexually promiscuous, for example (Schmitt & Buss, 1996). Such biases may result in underreporting or overreporting of lifetime sexual partners, or dishonest reports of infidelities. Similarly, items assessing past sexual behaviors may be vulnerable to recall errors, resulting in unintentionally inaccurate responses (Shaw, Bjork, & Handal, 1995; Zaragoza & Lane, 1994). Problems of recall might be especially concerning for older people (Gilewski, Zelinski, & Schaie, 1990). Asking participants to report on the behaviors of their current romantic partner (rather than providing self-reports) and conducting a prospective longitudinal study may ameliorate some bias in reports and problems with recall, respectively. Finally, the stability of the effects observed in the current research would be improved with a larger sample, especially by securing responses from a larger sample of older men, who were considerably outnumbered by older women in the current study.

Previous research has provided evidence that partner preferences in younger adults shift in response to the sex ratio, or the number of men to women available as potential partners (Stone, Shackelford, & Buss, 2007). As is the case in other populations of older adults given the greater life expectancy of women, women in the current sample outnumbered men (Barford, Dorling, Smith, & Shaw, 2006). The impact of sex ratio on the sexual psychology and behavior of older adults may, therefore, be of interest to future researchers.

In summary, identifying whether and to what degree older men and older women differ in their sexual psychology and behaviors is as important as investigating whether and to what degree older adults differ from younger adults in sexual psychology and behaviors, not least because such sex differences can inform counseling and treatment programs (Camacho & Reyes-Ortiz, 2005; Nicolosi et al., 2004).

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