

Part I

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Approaches to Boys' Sexual Development

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The Casanova Complex and Its Inaccuracies

Alex* (not his real name) was a college senior when he agreed to be interviewed for my study of young men's sexual lives. About a year earlier, he'd completed a paper-and-pencil survey on the same topic. On that survey, he said that he'd had sex with four girlfriends and that he'd had hookup sex with about twenty other girls and young women. I asked him to tell me about his most recent hookup; he told me a story from three months earlier.

It happened during winter break. A couple buddies and I rented a cabin at a ski lodge and were up there for about a week. There was one night when we had a party. Some of the guys were there with girlfriends, but I wasn't seeing anyone at the time. We also invited some girls that we'd met while we were there.

I started talking to this one girl, Jess, and it was going pretty well. We'd both had a lot to drink. At some point, I asked if she wanted to go some place quieter to talk. She said OK, and we went back to my room. I guess we didn't really talk very much at that point, maybe five or ten minutes. Then we started making out, and eventually we had sex.

*All interviewee's names, and the names of those they talk about, have been changed to protect everyone's anonymity.

We fell asleep together, and when I woke up, Jess was gone. I never saw her again. But we both knew that this would be a one-time thing. I was fine with that, and she was too.

I asked him why he chose Jess; she wasn't the only girl in the room, after all. Alex told me there was no particular reason he picked Jess, that it was really serendipity—he happened to have been talking to her earlier while waiting to get another drink, and the conversation seemed to go well. He couldn't remember what they'd talked about, but he was sure it was along the lines of small talk—favorite bands, college likes and dislikes, possibly college football, because her school might have been in a bowl game. Whatever it was, the conversation was easy enough. That was it. It wasn't because Jess was hot or had been dancing suggestively or had been flirting with him all night. It was just because they happened to have started a conversation that went smoothly, and (Alex believed) Jess understood that this would be a one-time thing.

Alex never knew Jess's last name and never asked for her cell number, email address, screen name, or any other contact information. She didn't ask him either.

I've heard similar stories from many guys over the years. Most of those guys were looking for a girl to hook up with, but some were looking for another guy. The stories all share the same basic features: a bar or party with alcohol and possibly other drugs, an intention to spend just one night of being together, and little effort to get to know the other person or his or her sexual history.

When I think of someone like Alex, I sometimes think about famous—or infamous—men like Rep. Anthony Weiner and golfer Tiger Woods. They were both married and had children, yet they kept sleeping with people who weren't their legally wedded wives. It was almost as though they just couldn't stop having sex with new people. Retired NBA players Magic Johnson and Wilt Chamberlain each claimed to have slept with hundreds, if not thousands, of women.

Maybe that's what you think all guys are like. Reports like these contribute to the widespread belief that guys just want to have sex and don't care about relationships. In other words, "Men are dogs."

Alex's hooking up (in current slang) or casual sex or having a one-night stand is not uncommon, and it's what many people expect guys to do.¹ In American culture, we are often encouraged to believe that guys think about sex all the time. According to popular culture, it's every seven seconds. Or maybe you heard the recent report that half of young men think about sex at least nineteen times per day?² That's a lot less often than every seven seconds, but it still sounds like a lot.

Likewise, you may "know" that boys are always horny and that they don't care much whom they have sex with—although we think they have a real preference for good-looking or "hot" girls. We think that guys "make the moves" and start all sexual encounters, from kissing through coitus, and we're not entirely sure they'll stop when a girl says no. Sometimes we even joke that teenage boys get a hard-on every time the wind blows. And many people believe that guys really aren't interested in relationships.

Our cultural beliefs also tell us that boys and young men aren't concerned about the consequences of hooking up and that they'll take some pretty substantial risks in order to do so. This perception of young men is the central idea behind a subgenre of movies known as sex comedies. You may recognize some of the titles: *Porky's* (1982), *American Pie* (1999), and *Superbad* (2007). There's also the directly titled *Sex Drive* (2008). The common story line is about a boy or a group of boys who want or "need" to get laid. The boy or boys usually aren't cool or popular.

Alex could be called a player (in current slang) or a Casanova, stud, Don Juan, or a variety of other names. Whatever you call him, he certainly fits some of the prevalent expectations about young men's sexual behavior. And he's often looked up to by other guys; Joe, a college junior, told me that he was "impressed [by players] because they know how to play the game."

But let's take a step back and view this from a different angle. Many Americans believe that boys and young men—especially those between about fifteen and twenty-five years old—are primarily, if not exclusively, interested only in this kind of hookup behavior. Let me say that again: we think this is *normal*. When we act as though this is normal, we may very well be creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Just before I started writing this book, my wife and I were shopping for our infant daughter at a national retail store. I noticed a blue bib that said “Chick Magnet.” Do we really want our baby boys to wear this message?

The Casanova Complex

In *The Casanova Complex*, Peter Trachtenberg analyzed fifty men whom he referred to as “compulsive lovers.”³ He defined the complex as the “compulsive pursuit and abandonment of women” and said these men were able to have so many sexual partners because they were good at seduction, not because they were physically attractive or had lots of money. Following Freud, Trachtenberg traced the cause back to Mom and Dad.

I'm going to expand this definition of the Casanova Complex by tapping into Deborah David and Robert Brannon's 1976 description of the “Jet Set Playboy” as someone who is “usually sighted in expensive restaurants or fast convertibles, accompanied by a beautiful woman (whom he's ignoring).”⁴ When asked to describe the stereotype of a player, the current version of the term, undergraduates say players are attractive, flattering, flirty, self-centered, well groomed and well dressed (in a casual style), involved in their college's social scene, and not expected to be known for their academic prowess.⁵ David and Brannon also described the “Don Juan” as smoldering and irresistible to women, but this seems to be the only use of this term in the research literature.

In an early stage of my dissertation work, I asked 106 university undergraduates to provide a brief description of “players” and “Don Juans,” among other terms.⁶ Both were described as being interested

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in women, being physically attractive, attending parties, and drinking alcohol regularly. Players, much more so than Don Juans, were seen as using women, as focused on status (financial or social), as jerks, as not-nice, as self-centered, and as loudmouths. Students indicated that *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner was a good example of a player, as were various rap performers who were popular at the time. Of course, this was still a study about stereotypes and expectations.

I've also asked people how much they see themselves as a player, using a 1–4 scale where 1 meant “not at all like me” and 4 meant “very much like me.” “Player” was included in a list of ten to twelve terms; other terms in the list included “airhead,” “jock,” “prince/princess,” “nerd,” and “rebel.” In a series of studies, I posed this question to the 2006, 2007, and 2008 senior classes of a rural northeastern high school, under the supervision of my Institutional Review Board. (The high school's name will remain confidential.)

The more strongly a guy saw himself as a player, the younger he was when he had his first sexual experience and the more people he'd had sex with. Not surprisingly, players averaged more sexual partners per year. Further, the more strongly a guy saw himself as a player, the younger he was when he started dating, the more dating partners he'd had overall, and the more dating partners he had each year.

But being a player is also about a set of beliefs, not just a set of dating and sexual behaviors. Not surprisingly, self-described players were more accepting of sexual promiscuity. They also described themselves as competitive, taking risks, and, to a lesser extent, making sure others know they're heterosexual. One would think that the last point wouldn't have been an issue for the handful of gay youth in the study, although it's possible some of them weren't comfortable with their sexual orientation and therefore slept with a number of girls in order to “prove” they were straight. Self-described players were also more sexist. In some ways, you might consider players to be more stereotypically masculine.

Self-described players don't see themselves only as players. They also identified themselves as “jocks,” “populars,” “princes,” “toughs,”

“criminals,” and “rebels.” They were explicitly not “loners” or “nerds.” The first three—jock, popular, and prince—tell us something about self-presentation and social status. Players see themselves as having high social status, and it may be part and parcel of being a jock, popular, or prince. They’re certainly not in the categories that don’t have status: loner or nerd. Being a player might tap into a “bad boy” image and thus coexists with being a tough, a criminal, or a rebel. Although adults may see these kinds of identities negatively, they play well and provide a different form of status during adolescence.⁷ I’ll talk more about status and these kinds of identities in Chapter Five.

School isn’t exactly for players. Or, more specifically, academics aren’t for players. They tended to have somewhat lower GPAs than others and were less likely to be members of academically oriented extracurricular activities, such as math club. At the same time, they were more likely to be members of sports teams or to participate in service activities such as student council; these activity choices line up nicely with some of those other identities, such as that of jock or popular. Players’ nonacademic focus doesn’t seem to hurt their subsequent goals; there was no connection between seeing oneself as a player and a guy’s future academic goals.

There was no connection between being religious and being a player. It would be nice to think that players weren’t religious and non-players were, but that wasn’t the case. It’s also possible that there wasn’t a clear connection because players were wrestling with their beliefs in the same way the real Casanova described in his memoirs; he alternated between a desire to be devout and a sense of himself as someone above conventional morality.⁸ The reality is that these high school students didn’t see themselves as particularly religious. As a group, they averaged just over 2 on a 1–5 scale where 1 was “not at all” religious and 5 was “very” religious.

This pattern of results isn’t unique to high school students. Among almost 350 men ages eighteen to eighty-three who participated in the main part of my dissertation work, men ages eighteen to twenty-nine who described themselves as players were more likely than non-players

to think that having multiple sexual partners was a good—or at least acceptable—thing.⁹ Players also said they'd had more sexual partners overall and averaged more partners per year. In fact, about half of self-described players averaged more than one sexual partner per year compared to about 20 percent of non-players.¹⁰

Adult players also reported holding a number of other attitudes. Most prominent among these was a set of sexist beliefs, as well as a strong desire to be dominant in general. In addition, they believed in taking risks, were somewhat more competitive than others, and placed greater emphasis on being seen as heterosexual. In many ways, the teenage boys and adult men offered very similar profiles of what it means to be a player.

The Casanova Complex and American Culture

The Casanova Complex is a culturally based image that says guys just want promiscuous sex, not relationships, and that almost any behavior, no matter how rude, crude, risky, or destructive, is OK if it'll get him laid. The Casanova Complex includes a set of beliefs that support, justify, and explain the image. Together, the image and the beliefs create and describe a set of expectations about male behavior, as well as a backstory that explains why Casanova-like behavior exists. There are many different pieces of the backstory, and you might believe or accept some of them but not others.

Following Trachtenberg, I'll also use the Casanova Complex to refer to boys and men who are trying to live up to this image. In that way, it parallels such terms as "inferiority complex" or "Napoleon complex."

As a cultural phenomenon, the Casanova Complex requires that most people approve of hooking up, or at least don't disapprove. It doesn't matter if we call it a one-night stand or casual sex or friends with benefits or some other name; what's important is that the general public is on some level OK with this behavior and views it as normal or typical. Indeed, many Americans, perhaps most, will tell you that they're OK with premarital sex and even hooking up. At least that's

what the majority of adolescents and undergraduates tell us, and that sentiment has become increasingly common since the 1970s. Some people have begun to describe college as being dominated by a “hookup culture.”¹¹

At the cultural level, we’ve learned to love at least some Casanovas. If you watch television programs from the 1950s and 1960s, Casanova-like behavior was rarely present, and when it was, it was limited to the bad guys—the characters you weren’t supposed to like or from whom you were supposed to learn lessons about improper behavior. But that seems to have started to change in the 1970s, and two of the biggest “change agents” were named Arthur Fonzarelli and Benjamin Franklin “Hawkeye” Pierce. Both characters were among the most popular of their time.¹²

Set in the 1950s, *Happy Days* aired from 1974 through 1985. From 1976 through 1980, it was a perennial top 20 show. The plots originally focused on clean-cut Richie Cunningham. Fonzie started as a minor character; a greaser with a bad reputation, he was sometimes used as a bad example. The character was very popular from the beginning, and when Ron Howard decided to leave the show at the end of the sixth season (and Richie was sent away to college and then the army), the Fonz became the star. Already somewhat cleansed of his greaser ways by that time, Fonzie got his GED, became a small business owner (motorcycle repair, of course), then a high school teacher and, eventually, dean of boys. We also discovered that he had a heart of gold; he helped straighten out his wayward nephew, Spike, and then took in his cousin Chachi.¹³ In other words, he went from bad-example delinquent to reclaimed and lovable stepson who fit reasonably well into a 1950s white-bread family. And no matter what his status, the girls and women on the show were always attracted to the Fonz, who could get whomever he wanted by standing next to the jukebox and banging on it in his trademarked fashion.

Across the dial and on a different night, wise-cracking Hawkeye Pierce slept with about half the nurses serving in Korea. *MASH* was produced from 1972 to 1983 and was a top 20 show almost every year

it aired. The final episode was watched by an incredible 77 percent of all viewers the night it aired. A doctor, Hawkeye repeatedly flouted the directions of his head surgeon (Major Burns) and followed just enough of the rules to avoid getting in trouble with either of his commanding officers, Lt. Colonel Henry Blake or Colonel Sherman T. Potter. A nice guy and very intelligent, Hawkeye repeatedly questioned orders and challenged the U.S. purpose for being in Korea, paralleling cultural events regarding Vietnam.¹⁴ And no matter what else was happening on screen, Hawkeye could always get laid.

Hawkeye and the Fonz showed us that you could sleep with a lot of women and (almost) everyone would still like and admire you. To kids, teens, and young adults in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Fonzie defined cool. To all of us, laid-back Hawkeye said it's not just the macho guys who can get the girls. More important, we'd gone from "promiscuous characters are bad" to "good guys can be promiscuous too."

The cultural change isn't due just to TV, of course. These shows tapped into and played off messages from the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s. The TV shows were important because they reached a mass audience. I'll give more details on the importance of mass media in Chapter Six, but when you think about the 1960s, you may remember that not everyone supported the revolution. The people who expressed their disapproval of "long-haired hippy freaks" weren't in favor of things like "free love." Yet Fonzie and Hawkeye were the central characters on the most popular TV shows of their time and dominated the ratings. While the Fonz taught the kids that promiscuity was cool, Hawkeye spoke to the adults, including those adults who'd served in Korea and many folks who disapproved of the hippies and their counterculture. In the days before cable TV, VCRs, and ubiquitous reruns, we made time to invite these guys into our living rooms every week; their portrayals of casual sex were witnessed and approved by a broad swath of American households.

Today, you can find shows like *The Pickup Artist* on VH1. On the show, "best-selling author and ultimate pick-up artist" Mystery (real

name: Erik von Markovik), along with his assistants Matador and J-Dog, teach young men on the show how to woo and seduce women. In this so-called reality show, the winner gains the title of Master Pickup Artist.

Pickup artistry isn't limited to TV. There's a pickup artist (PUA) community that consists of thousands of Web sites. There are several well-known gurus, guys like VH1's *Mystery*, who provide coaching, write books, and run "boot camps." There are even conventions. The most popular gurus may make over a million dollars per year.¹⁵

Who Was Casanova?

There is no doubt that a man named Giacomo Casanova lived during the eighteenth century, and most historians agree that his published memoirs seem to be mostly factual. In his memoirs, Casanova reported having 116 distinct sexual partners over a forty-year span, or about three partners per year. Reviewers are clear that some of these were likely fabricated, possibly to shock readers of the day and possibly to help maintain the confidentiality of some of those who aren't specifically named.¹⁶ Biographer John Masters observed that Casanova didn't report any homosexual behavior and speculated that, given his sexual appetites and desire for at least some novel sexual experiences, this seems unlikely. Some have suspected that Casanova's public promiscuity was a cover for his same-sex preferences, a pattern called "Don Juan-ism" in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁷

Casanova's memoirs also make clear that he didn't sleep with just anyone he came across. He explicitly appears to have avoided women he thought might "trap" him into marriage, and he didn't try to seduce women who were clearly "out of his league"—those who were rich or very beautiful. Although he did engage in some sexual risk-taking—he slept with several married women, and some of his encounters occurred in public spaces—he was very careful about which risks to take.¹⁸

We also learn about other aspects of Casanova's character from his memoirs. He comes off as something of a spendthrift and never amasses a fortune of his own, but at the same time, he's not poor, and he travels

frequently. He routinely spent money on the women he was wooing, and he also gave freely to others, including his brother. He was quite intelligent: he spoke several languages and was able to maintain a reasonable knowledge of political and economic conditions in the days before there was a twenty-four-hour news cycle or an official currency exchange rate.¹⁹

Casanova's biographers consistently comment on his morality, taking their cue from his writings on the topic. Casanova saw himself as above conventional morality, thus allowing his sexual adventures. He also described himself as Christian (or Catholic, using current distinctions), and repeatedly seemed to be struggling to reconcile his faith with his promiscuous behavior.²⁰

The Casanova of the memoirs sounds a lot like the self-described players from my surveys. There's nonrelational (hookup) sex, of course, as well as some risk-taking. Casanova was popular, or at least well-connected, and he was reasonably smart.

Research on Promiscuous Youth

The federal government has been funding research on adolescent sexual behavior since the 1960s, primarily to find ways to prevent teen pregnancy and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.²¹ It's fairly uncommon for a teenage boy or young man to get someone pregnant or get a sexually transmitted infection (STI).²² Almost one-third of young men become fathers by age twenty-six, and about one-third of those pregnancies were probably unplanned.²³ Between 5 and 10 percent of eighteen- to twenty-nine-year olds, about nine million people, will contract a new STI in any given year; this age group accounts for almost half of all new STIs.²⁴ Although those totals include a lot of people, most research studies include only a few hundred participants at most, which means that the typical study has only a small number of people who had an unplanned pregnancy or an STI. As a result, researchers have often focused on three other sexual behaviors that are more common and are also good predictors of pregnancy and disease: (1) having multiple partners, (2) poor or inconsistent use, or

nonuse, of protection, especially condoms, and (3) first experience of intercourse at age fifteen or younger.

When you read these studies, you learn that the problem is largely due to the behavior of the kids we'd expect to be causing the problem: kids from low-socioeconomic-status households, children of divorced or single parents, kids who live in urban areas, kids who are black and possibly kids who are Hispanic, kids who hit puberty earlier, and kids who appear older.²⁵ These factors are all associated with greater odds of being promiscuous, but there's nothing about any of these things that explains why some kids who fit into these categories are promiscuous and others aren't.

The research also tells us that these kids tend to have poor-quality relationships with their parents, don't do well in school, are more likely to drop out before completing high school, don't have good-quality relationships with teachers or other school officials, are more likely to be delinquent, and are more likely to have delinquent friends. They're also more likely to drink alcohol and use other illicit drugs and are more likely to have been arrested.²⁶ But for many of these factors, it's not clear which comes first—the behaviors or the promiscuity.

Although these findings may—or may not—fit with your conception of who the “bad kids” are, they don't give us a complete picture of which kids get pregnant in high school. We've all heard stories about otherwise nice, respectable, white teenage girls who get pregnant by their nice, respectable boyfriends. Some of these girls—and boys—carry their or their partner's pregnancies responsibly, but there are plenty of stories of teenage girls who hide their pregnancies and then deliver the child on their own in the school bathroom. Your image of the bad kids probably doesn't include the nice, white, middle-class Gloucester, Massachusetts, high school girls who made a pregnancy pact in 2008, either.²⁷

We need a different, more complete explanation, and the Casanova Complex helps do that. Not all Casanovas are “bad kids,” after all.²⁸ If you found out that the quarterback of your high school's foot-

ball team had sex with a different girl before every game last season, would you be surprised? Would you start thinking of him as a bad kid? Or would you smile and think “Atta boy”? In any case, he’s doing the same thing those so-called bad kids are doing, and the odds that he’ll get someone pregnant or get a disease don’t change just because he’s the quarterback.

Casanova as Part of the Teen and Early Adult Years

Living up to the Casanova Complex may well be an age-related phenomenon. Although we may accept this behavior in teenage boys and young adult men, we tend to look askance at forty-year-olds who are doing it. In *Guyland*, Michael Kimmel points to demographic changes indicating that the transition from adolescence to adulthood now averages about ten years, bookended by high school graduation at eighteen and first marriage in the mid- to late twenties.²⁹ He argues that during this transitional time, and in a variety of ways, we encourage guys to be Casanovas.

Take David, for example. His last relationship ended early in his senior year of college. I interviewed him in the spring, about three months before graduation. He knew he’d be moving at the end of the school year, and after his breakup, he decided that a relationship “wasn’t going to be worthwhile finishing, so I haven’t dated seriously.” His explanation was straightforward: he didn’t want to make decisions about a first job or where he’d be moving after college because of a relationship that probably wouldn’t lead to marriage. So he intentionally didn’t date. But he did hook up.

Earlier, I mentioned a study I conducted in which I asked approximately 350 men, ages 18 to 83, how strongly they identified themselves as players. There were 142 undergraduates ages 18 to 23 and another 65 young men ages 18 to 29 who were not currently in college. Among the young men, 12 percent of the undergraduates and 11 percent of the others described themselves as a player at least some of the time. For the 60 men ages 30 to 49 and the 70 men ages 50

and older, the percentage of self-identified players fell to 7 percent and 3 percent, respectively.³⁰ To me, those numbers say that adhering to the Casanova Complex is mostly relevant for guys under thirty.

Because my focus is on younger guys, I'll spend very little time talking about marriage in this book. But I will tell you that among the 350 men in this study, adults who described themselves as players reported fewer marriages than non-players. Players and non-players reported about the same number of divorces.

Casanova's Problems

As long as guys like Alex are finding willing partners and nobody's in a monogamous relationship, what's the problem? For some, sex with strangers sounds like fun.

On some levels, there may not be a problem, especially if everyone really is being honest about what he or she wants and about what else is going on in his or her life, and if Casanova and his partner truly have equal say.

Yet there are costs, for Alex and his partners and also for you and me. Some of these, like unplanned pregnancies and STIs, are fairly obvious. The research tells us that Casanovas are less likely than other guys to use condoms,³¹ which means they're regularly at risk of catching or passing on an STI. In the year 2000, approximately nine million Americans aged eighteen to twenty-nine contracted an STI, with an estimated direct cost of at least \$6.5 billion (in the year 2000).³² As you might expect, the odds of contracting an STI increase with each new partner; one study reported that 27 percent of men who'd had eleven to twenty partners since age eighteen, and 37 percent of men who'd had twenty-one or more partners, knew they'd contracted an STI at some point.³³ This means that even though only a minority of young men contract STIs, Casanovas are among those at greatest risk for doing so.

If these young men aren't using condoms and if their female partners aren't using contraception correctly, then these guys are also

running the risk of getting their partners pregnant. According to a 2004 World Health Organization report, the United States had sixty pregnancies for every thousand female teenagers, the highest rate of teenage pregnancies of any industrialized or postindustrialized nation.³⁴ The WHO used figures from 1998, not quite ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. We were doing worse than every country in Europe, including the countries that had been behind the Iron Curtain. We were worse than the average of fifty-six pregnancies per thousand girls among the countries of the Middle East and North Africa and of the East Asia–South Asia–Pacific region. In fact, our rates of teen pregnancy were so high that if the United States were in sub-Saharan Africa, a region wracked by poverty, numerous wars during the last hundred years, and poor development, we’d be only third best.

Those unwanted pregnancies have long-term financial costs for us as a nation. When a teenage girl gets pregnant, the likelihood that she’ll graduate from high school drops substantially,³⁵ especially if she’s not yet in her senior year. If a teenage boy is the father of that child, the odds that he’ll finish high school also plummet dramatically, whether the boy intends to help raise the child or not.³⁶ Over the last thirty years, one of the best indicators that someone will end up on welfare or in prison is whether he or she completes high school by age twenty. Regardless of your moral stance, your tax dollars pay the costs of those welfare checks and that jail.

There’s also a loss of human capital. As a nation, we tend not to look kindly on teenage parents. They’re not particularly likely to graduate from high school, and many never get their GED. Without that, it’s very difficult to get a job, which means it’s difficult to become a “productive” member of society. What might those people have contributed to society if they had waited even two years before becoming pregnant?

Some costs are less obvious, such as those related to development and personal growth. What happens if you’re a guy and everyone keeps saying you should have sex with lots of girls, but you don’t think that’s right, or you prefer other guys? Do you start to feel as though you’re

not normal? Do you change your image so that people think you're sleeping around? Do you take other risks, like the guys from the TV show and movie *Jackass*, in order to prove that you're "the Man" so that everyone will ignore the fact that you're not screwing a different girl every week?

Several gay athletes told sociologist Michael Messner that part of the reason they pushed themselves to excel at sports during high school was to gain some protection against charges of homosexuality.³⁷ After all, when those guys were growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, "everyone knew" you couldn't be gay and be good at sports.

Teaching people that all or most guys are Casanovas also has bad implications for women, and not just the women who sleep with these guys. One problem is that you can't sleep with a horde of strangers (or try to) and genuinely respect them. Again, the research tells us that adolescent boys and undergraduate young men who demonstrate or believe in Casanova-like promiscuity tend to be more sexist and to have a lower opinion of women in general than other guys.³⁸ Although sexism isn't the only factor or even the biggest factor, research shows that it contributes to the idea that sexual assault and rape may be justified if the girl was provocatively dressed or "leading the guy on."³⁹ However, these results coexist alongside data indicating that the average college male has become less sexist over the last few decades,⁴⁰ one of many contradictions between the stereotype and the reality of young men and their sexuality.

Further, when we teach girls and women that all guys are Casanovas and only interested in sex, we encourage girls to develop what researcher Deborah Tolman calls a "defensive sexuality."⁴¹ This means we teach girls that sex is about saying yes or no instead of teaching them that sexuality should be about their own desires and pleasure. In other words, we teach girls to ignore their own desires in order to keep boys' sexual desires in check.

By teaching girls that all guys are Casanovas, we mislead girls into thinking that there are few "good" guys who will be monogamous. There's little doubt that young men are more likely to cheat on their partners than are young women,⁴² and guys who adhere to the Casa-

nova Complex are the ones who are most likely to cheat.⁴³ But when we behave as though *all* boys and young men are Casanovas, we're teaching the girls the wrong odds.

The idea that male sexual desire is powerful, ever present, and barely controlled has been a part of American culture for at least two centuries.⁴⁴ Taken to the extreme, it contributes to the possibility that *any* guy could be a rapist, child molester, or some other type of sexual predator. On some levels, that's absurd; we know that very few guys commit sexual crimes. Yet if we believe that male sexual desire is just that common and that powerful, then the idea that *any* guy could be a rapist or a child molester does seem to make sense.

The idea that "any guy could do that" appears in various elements of our culture. Fear of sexual molestation was used against African Americans during the Jim Crow and civil rights eras.⁴⁵ Similar claims have been made about gay men raping straight men in the last few decades.⁴⁶ When the Riverview Center, a rape crisis center, ran a video campaign against child sexual abuse under the title "It Could Be Him" a few years ago, the ad was criticized for tapping into this belief.

How Many Guys Are Promiscuous?

Alex, whose story opened the chapter, reported that he'd had twenty-four partners (twenty in hookups, four in relationships), and he was only twenty-one years old. It's possible that he'll continue to behave in this manner and have more than a hundred partners by the time he reaches fifty. But it's also possible that he'll "settle down" and have one partner for most of that time and have "only" twenty-five partners in his lifetime.

Alex is hardly unique or exceptional. Since 1991, the federal government has surveyed approximately fifteen thousand high school students, grades 9 to 12, every other year, to get a sense of the risky behavior they're engaging in. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asks adolescents to report on a variety of things adults don't want them to do, most notably using alcohol and drugs. The YRBS also asks a

variety of questions about sexual behavior and sex education, including age of first sex and total number of sexual partners. For number of partners, the possible responses are zero, one, two, three, and four or more. Over the last twenty years, the percentage of twelfth-grade boys who said they'd had four or more total partners has ranged from about 21 percent, or one boy in five (in 1995 and 1999), to as high as 31 percent, or nearly one boy in three (in 1993). In 2009, it was about 23 percent, or almost exactly two boys in nine.⁴⁷

The YRBS statistics are the highest percentages I'll give you, but I think they're overestimates. Many guys have sex for the first time around age sixteen, as I'll discuss in Chapter Two, so that'd be his first partner. If he has another partner at seventeen and two more at eighteen, that's four partners. But it doesn't sound as though he's trying to get in bed with every girl he meets.

A better estimate of the number of guys who adhere to the Casanova Complex comes from the research team of Daniel Offer, Marjorie Kaiz Offer, and Eric Ostrove.⁴⁸ In *Regular Guys: 34 Years Beyond Adolescence*, they described a group of guys born between 1946 and 1949. Looking at men who had originally been part of a large study of high school students, the research team identified a group who were statistically average during high school. The researchers talked to them four years after the original survey, and again thirty-four years after that original survey. At middle age, 3 percent said they'd had one hundred or more sexual partners; those are our Casanovas.

Another 13 percent claimed to have twenty-one to ninety-nine partners, and it's less clear if they're Casanovas, in part because there's a vast difference between twenty-one and ninety-nine partners. Think about it this way: if your first sexual experience was at age eighteen and you're being asked about the last thirty-four years of your life, having a hundred partners means you've averaged three partners per year, about the same as Casanova claimed in his memoirs. If you've had twenty-one partners in that time period, you've averaged almost two partners in any given three-year span. Although two partners in three years add up to twenty partners over three-and-a-half decades,

it doesn't mean you had a new partner every week, and it may mean that every partner is part of a yearlong relationship. That's not exactly in keeping with the Casanova Complex or our stereotype of young men's sexual behavior.

Those studies are all focused on the total number of partners a guy has had in his lifetime. Casanovas are expected to have multiple partners in any given year, if not at the same time. Estimates vary somewhat, but between 5 and 15 percent of young men report they've had four or more partners in the last year.⁴⁹ Most guys don't sustain that pace, but some clearly do. About 3 to 5 percent of young men averaged four or more partners per year over a four-year span.⁵⁰

By reputation, Casanovas are expected to cheat on their partners. This "extradyadic" sex—that is, having simultaneous or concurrent partners—is more common among those who consistently have five or more partners per year. Not surprisingly, as the number of partners per year increases, so do the odds that the guy will have extradyadic intercourse. These guys also have the longest stretches of time with multiple partners.⁵¹

As you can see, it's only a minority of guys who really follow the dictates of the Casanova Complex. Offer et al. reported that 12 percent of their middle-aged men said they'd had exactly one sexual partner in their life, and another 33 percent said they'd had two to four partners.⁵² Together, that's 45 percent of middle-aged men who can count their sexual partners on one hand. That's about three times more than the number of Casanovas and nearly half the sample. Researchers who study promiscuous guys consistently note that the majority of guys have only a small number of partners in any given year, usually zero, one, or two, and that the majority of guys have only one sexual partner at a time.⁵³ As Edward Laumann, John Gagnon, Robert Michael, and Stuart Michaels, authors of *The Social Organization of Sexuality*, note, "The vast majority of men and women report that they are monogamous while married or living with a partner. Over 90 percent of women and over 75 percent of the men report[ed] fidelity within their marriage, over its entirety."⁵⁴

Even on VH1's *The Pickup Artist*, the "students" talk about wanting to learn how to talk to girls, and their goals are to start dating and have relationships. That's right—the guys trying to earn the title Master Pickup Artist are really trying to find girlfriends.

You also see that pattern among the young men, and not-so-young men, who make up most of the PUA community. Mark Manson, one of the biggest names on that circuit, estimates that only about 10 percent of the guys who attend workshops, buy books, and appear on discussion boards are interested in being Casanovas. The majority, about 75 percent or so, are guys looking for girlfriends (and possibly wives) and have little or no experience or success in dating.⁵⁵

As you can see, the Casanova Complex describes only a minority of men. In any given year, that might be as much as 15 percent, but when we look at men's behavior over a period of several years, we see that Casanova-like promiscuity drops to no more than 5 percent of the population. This means that Casanova-like promiscuity is in fact not the norm and does not reflect the way most boys or young men really feel.⁵⁶ Throughout the book, I'll provide you with a variety of perspectives to help you understand and think about the reality of young men's sexuality. When we develop sex education curricula based on the assumption that Casanova is the norm and when we act as though Casanova is the reality for all boys and men, we're giving our kids incorrect information.⁵⁷ That's irresponsible behavior by the adults.

We as a nation haven't always approved of young men's promiscuity. If we've changed our expectations once, to promote the Casanova Complex, we can change our expectations again. And change means *change*; it doesn't mean going back to the 1950s. We can return to emphasizing responsibility, honesty, caring, and respect as male traits without sending women back home to care for the house and family. And we can do this while holding onto such "traditional" male values as independence, loyalty, and hard work.