Religiosity, a measure of the importance of religious and moral beliefs, was coded on a four-point scale, with higher values indicating a greater importance of religion. Although research suggests that adherence to fundamentalist Christianity is associated with changes in sexual behavior, religious affiliation was excluded due to survey and coding incompatibility that would have biased our results. However, we anticipated that religiosity would capture much of the same effect. Maternal education was included as a proxy for socioeconomic status, and was coded on a four-point scale, with higher values indicating more education.

**Analytic Methods**

In the bivariate analyses, we compared changes in key variables across time. We tested for global differences among the 1979, 1988 and 1995 cohorts, as well as for pairwise differences between the 1979 and 1988 cohorts and between the 1988 and 1995 groups. For categorical variables, we used chi-square tests, while we used analysis of variance (with the Tukey method for pairwise comparisons) for continuous measures.

Our main interest in the multivariate analyses was the effect of cohort year, attitudes and education on two measures of sexual behavior: having had intercourse in the last four weeks; and number of acts of intercourse in the 12 months prior to the survey. We used logistic regression to estimate the model for recent intercourse; a tobit model was used for the number of acts of intercourse in the last year because of the large number of individuals who had never had sex or had not had sex in the last year.*

**Results**

**Trends in Sexual Activity**

Trends in sexual activity are presented in Table 2. (Unless stated otherwise, all results discussed are statistically significant at $p\leq0.05$ and refer to comparisons across all three cohorts.) The proportion of never-married 17–19-year-old urban males who had never had sexual intercourse with a female increased from 66% in 1979 to 76% in 1988 and then decreased to 68% in 1995. These changes were confined to nonblack males; rates of sexual experience among black adolescent men increased between 1979 and 1988, and remained relatively constant between 1988 and 1995.

Recent sexual activity is an important measure of current behavior. Among all youths, the percentage of respondents who had had sexual intercourse in the four weeks prior to the survey increased from 40% in 1979 to 45% in 1988 and then decreased to 39% in 1995. The change in the proportion of teenagers having had recent sexual activity between 1988 and 1995 was significant only among nonblack youths; among black youths, the small increase in this variable was not statistically significant.

The average number of lifetime female sex partners among all youths in all three cohorts was four (range of 3.6–4.1). The average number of partners decreased significantly among nonblack adolescent men, from 3.8 in 1979 to 2.9 in 1995, while the mean increased among black teenagers, from 5.1 in 1979 to 6.9 in 1995.

The average frequency of heterosexual intercourse among all teenage males in the 12 months prior to the survey increased significantly overall, from 14 acts per year in 1979 to 17 per year in 1988 and to 21 acts per year in 1995.1 The overall change in frequency among nonblack youths paralleled the findings among all youths. Among black adolescents, however, there was no change in the frequency of intercourse between 1979 and 1988, whereas between 1988 and 1995 average frequency increased from 13 acts per year to 24 acts per year.

In each time period, black adolescent males were more likely to have ever had sex and to have had more lifetime partners than were nonblack males. However, the average annual frequency of intercourse was similar between black and nonblack teenage men.

**Trends in Attitudes and Education**

The proportion of adolescent men who approved of premarital sex when a couple does not plan to marry increased from 55% in 1979 to 80% in 1988 and then decreased to 71% in 1995 (Table 3). The pattern and distribution of attitudes were similar between black and nonblack respondents. However, there was a significant decrease between 1988 and 1995 in the percentage of nonblack teenagers approving of premarital sex; a similar change did not occur among black youths.

There was a large and significant increase in the percentage of adolescent males who, when faced with a hypothetical nonmarital pregnancy, endorsed having the baby and supporting it: This choice was selected by 19% of youths in 1979, 37% in 1988 and 59% in 1995. All other alternatives—getting married, suggesting adoption or suggesting abortion—became less popular over time. The distribution of attitudes was similar between black and nonblack adolescent men in 1995, but differed markedly by race in earlier time periods. In 1988, for example, blacks were almost twice as likely as nonblacks to endorse having the baby and supporting it, while nonblacks were nearly twice as likely as blacks to support either abortion or adoption.

As shown in Table 4, instruction in topics concerning birth control, STDs and AIDS became increasingly common between 1979 and 1995. Receipt of AIDS education was nearly universal among all