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Affairs of the Heart: Qualities of Adolescent Romantic Relationships and Sexual Behavior

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Abstract

We know more about parent and peer influences than about the ways in which specific qualities of adolescent romantic relationships may influence sexual decision-making. Using data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study, we focus on communication processes and emotional feelings, as well as more basic contours of adolescent romantic relationships, including power and influence dynamics. Controlling for traditional predictors and duration of the relationship, results suggest that subjectively experienced relationship qualities matter for understanding teens' sexual behavior choices. Further, findings indicate a similar effect of most relationship qualities on male and female reports of sexual behavior. However, influence and power dynamics within the relationship were not related to the likelihood that boys reported sexual intercourse in a focal relationship. In contrast, girls who perceived a more favorable power balance were less likely to report sexual intercourse than their female counterparts who perceived a less favorable power balance. Recognizing that the results capture reciprocal influence processes, longitudinal and qualitative data are used to further explore the complex nature of these associations.

Researchers have increasingly explored the character of adolescent romantic relationships, and scholarly as well as popular interest in teen sexual behavior has continued unabated. Yet as Furman (2002) recently noted, little research connects what have developed as two rather distinct traditions in the adolescence literature (see also Rostosky, Welsh, Kawaguchi, & Galliher, 1999). It is well recognized that social dynamics influence adolescent behavior, yet more research has been conducted on family and peer influences (East, Felice, & Morgan, 1993; Longmore, Manning, & Giordano, 2001; Whitaker & Miller, 2000; Whitbeck, Conger, & Kao, 1993) than on the relationship contexts within which these intimate behaviors unfold.

The current study relies on a symbolic interactionist framework and associated measurement emphasis. This theoretical perspective suggests the need to consider adolescents' own subjective experience of romantic relationships, and develops the idea that these behaviors (as all actions) acquire meaning and significance through interaction and communication with others (Mead, 1934). Clearly, much learning with regard to issues of sexuality takes place within the confines of family and friendship. Yet adolescent dating relations are also social relationships, and such liaisons grow in salience and importance during this phase of the life course (Sullivan, 1953). Thus, it is useful to conceptualize sexual behavior as more fully situated within the particular relational contexts within which it potentially but not inevitably takes place. Consistent with a symbolic interactionist perspective, we focus heavily on *communication* and *emotion* as central to constructions of meaning, and extend the symbolic interactionist framework to encompass dynamics such as *power and influence* (see e.g., Sprey, 1999).

In this analysis, we rely on structured interview data collected in 2001 with 1,321 adolescents as part of the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS). Focusing on teens' reports about their current romantic relationship ($n = 570$), we assess whether specific relationship qualities and dynamics are associated with the likelihood of engaging in intimate sexual behaviors, net of traditional predictors such as demographic characteristics, parental monitoring, sexual behavior of the respondent's peers and the youth's own prior sexual experience. Next we include a longitudinal component based on data from the second wave of interviews conducted approximately one year later. Finally, we draw upon in-depth relationship history narratives collected from a subset of the respondents ($n = 100$) in order to further explore relationship-sexuality connections. A secondary objective of these analyses is to determine whether the influence of relationship processes appears to be uniquely gendered or depends on the age of the respondent. Prior research and theorizing leads to the expectation that qualities that reflect greater perceived intimacy within the relationship may be more important for explaining the sexual behavior choices of female when compared with male adolescents, and that power and influence dynamics may also operate differently for male and female respondents. That is, a more favorable perceived power balance may decrease the odds of sexual intimacy for girls, but increase the odds for boys. It is also possible that the sexual behavior of younger teens (which has typically been considered more problematic/risky) is less strongly tied to relationship considerations and thus age interactions were also assessed.

BACKGROUND

Research on adolescent sexuality has often adapted a problem behavior lens, focusing on predictors used to explain behaviors such as delinquency and drug use. For example, researchers have documented that non-traditional family structure, lack of supervision, and lower parental attachment are associated with an earlier age of sexual onset (Cohen, Farley, Taylor, Martin, & Schuster, 2002; Davis & Friel, 2001; Thomson, McLanahan, & Curtin, 1992). Aside from using similar predictors, research that actively links sexual behaviors to delinquency, drug and alcohol use, smoking and school dropout also perpetuates the problem behavior or risk perspective (Jessor, 1998; Rosenbaum & Kandel, 1990).

Numerous studies have also focused on peer influence processes, both as predictors of sexual behavior, and as influences on the meanings of this involvement. Research has documented that having sexually active friends is related positively to the onset of sexual intercourse (Bearman & Brückner, 1999; Miller et al., 1997), and ethnographic studies have also highlighted that views about romance and sexuality are heavily shaped by peer interactions. Qualitative research in particular has often focused on distinctively gendered meanings about romance and sexuality that stem from peer socialization (Martin, 1996). This research has stressed that male adolescents are frequently encouraged to think of romance as a competitive game where sex is of primary importance (Anderson, 1989; Wight, 1994), while girls are socialized to value romance and the development of intimacy (Eder, Evans, & Parker, 1995). Maccoby (1990) and other scholars have suggested that the competitive interaction style boys hone within the peer group also influences the character of male-female interactions, including inequalities of power within these relationships (see also Thorne, 1993).

A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective on Adolescent Romantic Relationships Symbolic interactionist theorists have noted that all but the most habitual of actions acquire new meaning in light of the interactive contexts within which they occur (Mead, 1934). Thus, while parents may have a general interest in delaying their adolescent child's sexual involvement, and peers (especially male peers) may encourage sexual experimentation and "gamesmanship," it is not likely that couple level behaviors are completely predetermined

by the preferences of these more distal reference groups. In general recognition of the importance of romantic relationships in the lives of adolescents, researchers have begun to examine these relationships more closely (Brown, Feiring, & Furman, 1999), and developmental psychologists in particular have focused on the nature and quality of early romantic ties (see e.g., Florsheim, 2003). However, studies investigating the character of these early relationships have not often examined links to sexual involvement (Furman, 2002).

Prior research has documented that dating, having a boyfriend/girlfriend or 'going steady' are significant predictors of adolescent sexual debut, as this provides the concrete opportunities within which sexual behavior becomes a realistic possibility (Cavanaugh, 2004; Cooksey, Mott, & Neubauer, 2002; Halpern, Joyner, Udry, & Suchindran, 2000; Little & Rankin, 2001; Thornton, 1990). However, beyond simply entering the dating world, it is important to determine whether the adolescent's subjective experience of the relationship is related to sexual behavior choices. Cleveland (2003) relied on data from adolescents as well as their partners and found that the risk profile of the partner added to the odds that sex had occurred, even after the respondent's own risk profile had been taken into account. These findings highlight that both partners that comprise the couple are important to consider, but nevertheless focuses primarily on what each adolescent brings to the relationship, rather than on characteristics of the relationship itself. In addition, this approach sustains the conceptualization of adolescent sexual behavior as fundamentally a risky or problem outcome.

Rostosky et al. (2000) have been critical of the risk and problems approach to adolescent sexuality, and have investigated the connection between such relationship qualities as commitment and the frequency of intimate sexual behaviors within middle and late adolescent relationships. In support of this broader view of sexuality, the researchers documented that perceived commitment was related to 'lighter' forms of sexual intimacy (e.g., fondling), but was not significantly related to variations in the frequency of sexual intercourse. The current study builds on this prior work by specifying multiple qualities and dynamics of adolescent romantic relationships, and assessing whether variations in these subjectively held perceptions are systematically associated with sexual behavior choices. Our objectives differ slightly from those of Rostosky et al. in that our primary interest is in whether adolescents in a dating relationship have moved to particular levels of sexual intimacy, rather than the frequency with which such behaviors occur. However, consistent with the emphases of these researchers, we preserve the distinction between what may be considered 'lighter' forms of sexual intimacy and sexual intercourse itself. Below we focus on the specific dimensions that we assess in more empirical detail in our analyses.

Communication Processes

Researchers have found that as interactions proceed from a superficial to a more intimate basis, the level of *intimate self-disclosure* within the relationship serves as a "barometer" of the state of the relationship (Jourard, 1971). The opportunity to share confidences with another is a basic reward and feature of close attachments (McCall & Simmons, 1966). As such communications reflect and undoubtedly themselves heighten perceived closeness, our hypothesis is that higher levels of self-disclosure will be associated with greater odds of engaging in sexually intimate behavior, including sexual intercourse. The rationale underlying this hypothesis is straightforward: through recurrent interaction and communication, young people begin to perceive certain relationships as significant and close. Those who subjectively experience intimacy of communication with a given partner may construct a view of this relationship as especially meaningful, and in turn become more likely to move to higher levels of behavioral intimacy as well.

A related but conceptually distinct aspect of communication, particularly during adolescence, is perceived awkwardness. Almost by definition, adolescents lack an extensive backlog of experience in conducting male-female relationships, and familiarity with sexually intimate behaviors as well. Thus, a certain amount of social and communication awkwardness often accompanies involvement in this new form of relationship (Brown, Feiring, & Furman, 1999). Our hypothesis is that these feelings of awkwardness should serve as an inhibitor of sexual intimacy even where other factors such as peer norms or low parental supervision might generally predispose teens to sexual involvement.

Emotional Processes

Researchers across a number of disciplines have recently given increased attention to the role of emotions in understanding human behavior (Katz, 1999; Pacherie, 2002; Turner, 2000). Girls are typically depicted as highly invested in and responsive to interactions within romantic as well as within other social contexts (Gilligan, 1982; Thompson, 1995). Thus suggesting that girls may be influenced in their sexual decisions by feelings for their current partner is hardly a novel assertion. However, prior analysis of the TARS data documented that boys often reported strong emotional connections to their partners and emotional engagement in these relationships (authors, 2006). These results accord well with Rostosky's (1999) finding that male and female respondents in their sample did not differ in reported levels of commitment, and with results of in-depth interviews described by Tolman et al. (2004). A next step is to determine whether specific forms of emotional engagement are associated with adolescent sexual behavior choices, and whether such relational features are more strongly related to girls' relative to boys' behaviors.

Intimate self-disclosure and communication awkwardness can be considered indices of closeness or intimacy, but ultimately refer to the amount of talk and comfort with it that occur within the relationship. Thus, in assessing overall feelings of intimacy, we also include attention to even more basic dimensions, including the feeling that one is *cared for* by another, along with the level of *enmeshment* or intensity that characterizes the relationship. It is also useful to consider relationship dynamics that are relatively unique to the romantic context, including feelings of *passionate love*. In general, consistent with our expectations regarding communication processes, we hypothesize that stronger emotional feelings and more positive subjective views of the relationship will be related to the likelihood of sexual intimacy, even after traditional predictors of adolescent sexual behavior have been taken into account. Based only on the ethnographic research reviewed at the outset, we might expect that these relational factors would be more strongly related to girls' than boys' sexual behavior choices. However the aggregate portrait that emerges from prior analyses of the TARS data and other researchers' recent findings (e.g., Tolman et al., 2004) provide a caution to this line of theorizing. Our provisional hypothesis is that few gender differences will emerge in the nature of the association between such factors as love and caring and the likelihood that intimate sexual behavior occurs within a particular relationship.

Influence and Power

Our discussion of relationship qualities has focused on communication processes and emotional feelings that can be considered distinct yet related dimensions of intimacy and closeness. However, such relationships vary further in their power and influence dynamics. To the degree that the partner is viewed as a significant source of *influence* in the life of the adolescent, this should operate in a manner similar to the other dimensions of intimacy outlined above: perceiving the partner as a significant 'reference other' should be associated with higher odds of sexually intimate involvement. Consistent with prior sociological treatments, however, it is also useful to distinguish such influence processes from *power*,

often defined as the ability to overcome some resistance or exercise one's will over others (Weber, 1947).

Some researchers have suggested not only that power is gendered within relationships, but that this may influence the nature of sexual decision-making. While the idea of greater male power in relationships was originally discussed in connection with adult marital relations, the notion of gendered inequalities of power has also developed as a fairly common theme within the adolescence literature (Eder et al., 1995; Thorne, 1993; Martin, 1996; Thompson, 1995). However, Galliher et al. (1999) relied on a multi-method approach, including self-reports and observations, and found that most couples described themselves and were observed as involved in egalitarian relationships. Recent analyses of aggregate trends using the TARS data yielded a generally similar portrait, in that a majority of adolescent respondents described egalitarian decision-making processes (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006). However, analyses of total scores on the power scale used indicated that male respondents scored significantly lower than their female counterparts on perceived power (items referenced who had the most "say" in those instances where the partner disagreed). These findings may reflect that adolescent males are relatively more engaged in these relationships, while being less confident than some previous characterizations would lead us to expect. In addition, structurally based sources of inequality (e.g., greater access to labor force participation, women's heavy investment in childrearing) are, during the adolescent period, still at a distance.

Risman and Schwarz (2002) posit that cohort shifts in gender and power relationships may also have occurred, and forge the link to sexual behavior patterns. They document recent declines in rates of adolescent sexual behavior, and theorize that girls may have become increasingly less dependent on their relationships with males (e.g., higher rates of college attendance and labor force participation), potentially providing more of a sense of autonomy with regard to sexual decision-making. These researchers did not measure power directly, however, suggesting the need to examine whether and how power is related to adolescents' sexual decisions.

If we assume that girls, on average, may have a somewhat stronger interest in delaying sexual intercourse (due to concerns over reputation, pregnancy, and in general a preference for having sex within a more intimate relationship context), a reasonable hypothesis is that those who believe that they have less power will be more likely to report having sex with a given partner. This would also be generally congruent with Galliher's (1999) finding that young women who perceive less decision-making power report lower psychological well-being. In turn, this could be associated with lower self-efficacy with respect to the process of negotiating comfortable levels of sexual intimacy with their partners (see Longmore, Manning, Giordano, & Rudolph, 2004). This hypothesis however, assumes young women's constant interest in delaying sex, and young men's uniform interest in moving forward. Qualitative researchers in particular have increasingly questioned the idea that girls lack "sexual desire," (Tolman, 2005), and recent research has also depicted increasingly complex views of boys' perspectives (Giordano et al., 2006; Tolman et al., 2004; Wight, 1994). Because power has been accorded such a central role in discussions of male-female relationships and sexuality, we believe that it is important to include attention to this dynamic in our examination of links between relationship qualities/processes and sexual behavior outcomes. However, our hypotheses with regard to power are more provisional than those focusing on communication and emotion, as outlined above.

DATA

The Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS) sample ($n = 1,321$) was drawn from the year 2000 enrollment records of all youths registered for the 7th, 9th, and 11th grades in Lucas County, Ohio, a largely urban metropolitan environment that includes Toledo. Respondents were interviewed between June 2001 and February 2002. The sample universe encompassed records elicited from 62 schools across seven school districts. The stratified, random sample was devised by the National Opinion Research Center, and includes oversamples of African American and Hispanic adolescents. The sample represents adolescents in Lucas County and consists of 66% white, 25% African American and 7% Hispanic adolescents, 50.5% male and 49.5% female, who were on average 15 years old at time of interview. School attendance was not a requirement for inclusion in the sample.

From the total sample of 1,321, most respondents (957) reported either that they were currently dating or had recently dated (last year). We limit our analysis to 572 respondents who were currently dating at the time of the first interview. We conducted all analyses using only the responses of youths reporting about a current partner, as well as combining these with reports about their most recent partner. As the results do not differ substantially, we report results from the current daters. The sample is further limited to respondents who report valid responses on the relationship qualities measures of interest ($n = 570$). Within this dating sample, 206 teens (36.1%) reported having had sexual intercourse with this partner. Our analysis of sexual intimacy (other than intercourse) is limited to respondents who had not had sexual intercourse with the current focal partner ($n = 364$). Of the total who had not had intercourse, 44.5% ($n = 162$) report being sexually intimate (beyond kissing/making out) with the partner. We focus these analyses on heterosexual relationships only, as the number of youths who indicated a gay or lesbian identity at the time of the first and second wave interviews was too small to allow for a separate analysis.

The second wave interview was completed in 2002 and 1,177 (or 89% of the wave one sample) interviews were conducted. We compared youths interviewed/not interviewed on all variables included in the models described below. These attrition analyses indicated that generally respondents who were located and interviewed did not differ significantly from non-interviewed respondents, however race was associated with reinterview. A lower proportion of African Americans were interviewed at wave two. The analytic sample for the longitudinal component consists of those respondents who reported currently dating at time one, but who had not yet had sex within the context of the focal relationship ($n = 325$) or 89% of eligible wave one respondents. The final sample is limited to 300 respondents who had valid data on sexual activity between waves. At wave two, 24% ($n = 72$) reported that they eventually had sex with their wave one dating partner, while 76% ($n = 228$) did not.

A subsample of 100 respondents also participated in less structured, open-ended interviews. These adolescents were selected randomly from among those respondents who indicated having some dating experience at the time of the wave one structured interview (see the definition of dating below). In addition to this criterion, we selected on race/ethnicity and gender characteristics of the respondents. The resulting set of relationship history narratives were elicited from an equal number of male and female adolescents, and approximately equal numbers of White, African-American, and Hispanic youths. Thus, the qualitative subsample is similar to the analytic sample for the quantitative analyses (adolescents with some dating experience), but is somewhat more diverse than the sample as a whole.

Procedures

Parents were initially contacted by phone, in order to obtain permission for the child to be contacted and interviewed. Written consent from parent or guardian and child was obtained

prior to the interview, which typically took place in the respondents' home. The parent, usually the mother, filled out a paper and pencil questionnaire while the child answered questions using a preloaded laptop. The interviewer first recorded basic demographic information, and subsequently familiarized youths with the laptop procedures so that they could record the sometimes sensitive information in relative privacy. Respondents were paid \$25 for their participation, and parents were paid \$25 for completing the questionnaire.

MEASURES

Definition of a Romantic Relationship

We developed a simple definition that precedes the romantic relationships section of the interview schedule: "Now we are interested in your own experiences with dating and the opposite sex. When we ask about 'dating' we mean when you like a guy, and he likes you back. This does not have to mean going on a formal date." This introduction and definition was selected after extensive pre-testing, and, we believe, reflects contemporary trends in dating that are less focused than in earlier eras on formal activities. In addition, the latter type of definition is strongly class-linked, and would tend to exclude lower SES youth. Our definition also differs from that used in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), where respondents are asked whether they currently have a "special romantic relationship." We wished to avoid selecting on a relationship the respondent specifically defines as special, since understanding the patterning of relationship qualities is a primary objective of the study.

Dependent Variables

The respondent was asked about three levels of sexual intimacy, including whether they had a) kissed or 'made out' with the partner, b) fooled around with X, defined as "more than kissing/making out but not sexual intercourse," and c) sexual intercourse with X. A definition of sexual intercourse was also provided: "sometimes this is called 'making love,' 'having sex,' or 'going all the way.'" Given the ubiquitous nature of kissing among dating couples, we limit our multivariate analyses to two behaviors, sexually intimate behavior and sexual intercourse. For the longitudinal analyses, we used the partner first name, nickname, or initials and other demographic information about the current partner at wave one to link to sexual information provided about whether the respondent went on to have sex with that partner, as indicated at wave two. These analyses are restricted to whether sexual intercourse occurred, since this step in the relationship is sufficiently concrete that it may be less subject to recall problems.

Measures of Relationship Qualities/Dynamics

Communication Processes—To measure *intimate self-disclosure* we rely on a revised version of West and Zingle's (1969) self-disclosure scale. This five-item index asks respondents to report about how often (from 1 (never) to 5 (very often)) they communicate with the partner about a range of topics, e.g., "something really great that happened, something really bad that happened, your private thoughts and feelings" ($\alpha = .87$). To measure *communication awkwardness* we use items drawn primarily from Powers and Hutchinson's (1979) personal report of spouse communication apprehension items, revised for the younger sample. Respondents indicate agreement (from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)) with four items: "Sometimes I don't know quite what to say with X," "I would be uncomfortable having intimate conversations with X," "Sometimes I find it hard to talk about my feelings with X," and "Sometimes I feel I need to watch what I say to X" ($\alpha = .71$).

Emotional Processes—A sense of *caring* is measured by the single item indicator, “my partner cares about me,” while *enmeshment* in the relationship is measured by the item, “My partner and I are practically inseparable.” To measure *love*, we use items drawn from Hatfield and Sprecher’s (1986) passionate love scale, including: “I would rather be with X than anyone else;” “I am very attracted to X;” “X always seems to be on my mind;” and “The sight of X turns me on.” (alpha=.85). Respondents indicate level of agreement (from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree)).

Power and Influence Dynamics—*Influence* items were developed from a similar scale originally used to measure peer influence (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Pugh, 1986), and reflect the level of agreement (1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree)) that respondents have been influenced by or actually changed things about themselves due to their relationship with the partner. Items include: “X often influences what I do;” “I sometimes do things because X is doing them;” and “I sometimes do things because I don’t want to lose X’s respect” (alpha = .71). A higher score reflects the perception of greater partner influence. *Power* is measured using a version of Blood and Wolfe’s (1960) decision power index revised for use with this younger sample. Questions focus on the likelihood of getting “one’s way,” given some disagreement. The scale includes an overall assessment (“If the two of you disagree, who usually gets their way?”) and also items that reference specific situations (“what you want to do together,” “how much time you spend together,” “how far to go sexually”). Responses include 1) X more than me, 2) X and me about the same, 3) no disagreement, and 4) me more than X. A response of no disagreement on a particular domain was recoded as 2 and the ‘me more than X’ was recoded as 3. Higher scores on this scale reflect greater perceived power relative to the partner (alpha = .77).

Control Variables

Models control for basic relationship parameters, including *duration* of the relationship and whether/not the respondent had *sex prior to entering the focal relationship*. The duration indicator measures the length of time the respondent was in a relationship prior to having sex. Teens who have not had sex are assigned the length of relationship at the time of interview. This strategy of anchoring duration around sexual intercourse ensures we have captured relationship duration prior to having sex. The duration variable is categorical and grouped into 4 categories: less than six months with value of 1, seven to eleven months with a value of 2, one year to two years with a value of 3, and two or more years with a value of 4. The mean duration is the second category (7–11 months) and for those who had sex 2.1 and those who did not 1.9. The average duration for teens who had sex is longer (1–2 year) than those who did not have sex (7–11 months). The measures of relationship duration among teens who had sex with their boyfriend/girlfriend and those who did not differ; thus the measure is recoded into the following four categories: less than 2 months, 2–5 months, 6–11 months, and one year or more. Prior sexual intercourse is measured by a question that asks whether (yes/no) the respondent had ever had sex prior to the focal relationship.

Sociodemographic controls include *gender* (female = 1), *age* (continuous indicator), and *race/ethnicity*. Race/ethnicity is measured with a series of two dummy variables indicating African American and another Hispanic with the reference category being white. We also include dummy variables reflecting variations in *mother’s education* (less than 12, greater than 12, and 12th grade completion is the reference category), a strategy that allows for the observation of non-linear effects. This measure is derived from a questionnaire completed by parents, rather than from youth reports. *Family structure* is represented in the models as a set of dummy variables with married biological as the reference category (married biological, single parent, stepparent, other). *Parental monitoring* is included, as prior work has shown that this is often a significant predictor of sexual behavior. Monitoring is

measured by a six item scale completed by the parent that includes items such as: “When my child is away from home, s/he is supposed to let me know where s/he is,” “I call to check if my child is where s/he said,” “My child has to be home at a specific time on the weekends.” Responses range from 1 (none of the time) to 4 (all of the time) ($\alpha = .73$). A measure of *peers’ sexual behavior* is included that asks respondents: “How many of your friends do you think have had sex?” Responses include none, one, a few, some, most of them or all of them (1–6).

Analytic Strategy

Using data drawn from the first wave of interviews, we estimated a series of logistic regression models exploring the association between each relationship quality or dynamic described above (e.g., intimate self-disclosure) and whether or not the adolescent reported that the relationship had become sexually intimate. We analyzed sexually intimate behavior short of intercourse and sexual intercourse separately. We estimated all models focused on sexually intimate behavior other than intercourse first by restricting these analyses to those who had not yet had intercourse with the partner, and also relaxing this restriction. Results do not vary substantially; thus we present results based on the more restricted sample group. A baseline model is presented that includes basic relationship parameters, demographic variables, family factors, and peer behavior. We subsequently entered the relationship quality measure to evaluate whether this added to the fit of the model, using a likelihood ratio Chi-square test and R^2_L to assess model fit. We introduce gender and relationship quality interaction terms into each model by including the cross-product of the covariates (e.g., gender and intimate self-disclosure) to determine whether relationship processes appear to have a stronger connection to the sexual behavior reports of female relative to male respondents. Although not a central focus, we also estimated models that include age and relationship quality interactions to test for developmental differences in the influence of the couple dynamics indicators. It is possible that the traditional risk variables are more important for understanding sexual behavior on the part of younger respondents, while relationship variables are more important for understanding sexual behavior choices of older adolescents.

A longitudinal assessment focused on currently dating adolescents who had not yet had sexual intercourse with their partner at the time of the first interview. We examined whether reports of relationship quality from wave one were significant predictors of having sex between the waves of interviews with that partner as reported at wave two. We also drew upon the qualitative data to further explore relationship-sexuality connections from the perspective of adolescents themselves. These open-ended “relationship history narratives” in general are used to illustrate the statistical results, but also to refine our understanding of these complex relationship dynamics. The in-depth interviews were generally scheduled separately from the structured interview, and were conducted by a full time interviewer with extensive experience eliciting in-depth, unstructured narratives. Areas covered in general parallel the structured protocol, but allow a more detailed consideration of respondents’ complete romantic and sexual histories. The prompt stated: Maybe it would be a good idea if you could just kind of walk me through some of your dating experiences. When did you first start liking someone? Probes were designed to elicit detail about the overall character and any changes in a focal relationship, and about the nature of different relationships across the adolescent’s romantic and sexual career. The resulting relationship narratives were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. We relied on Atlas ti software to assist with coding and analysis of the qualitative data.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for all study independent variables for the sample of teens who were dating, and the primary dependent variable, sexual intercourse. The final rows present the distribution of these variables across the sample. As described above, but not included in the correlation matrix, among teens who have not had sexual intercourse with their dating partner ($n=364$), 45% were sexually intimate. Among the sample of teens who were dating 36% had sexual intercourse with their dating partner. Our longitudinal analyses are limited to respondents who had not had sexual intercourse at wave one with their current partner, and 24% went on to have sexual intercourse with their wave one dating partner prior to the wave two interview.

The first two columns of Table 2 present the baseline models (no relationship qualities are included) predicting sexual intimacy and intercourse. As shown in baseline models, duration of the relationship is significantly related to sexual intimacy and sexual intercourse, while reports of sex prior to the focal relationship are related to sexual intercourse in the current relationship. Female respondents are somewhat ($p < .10$) less likely to report sexual intimacy, and age is positively related to both forms of sexual behavior. Parental monitoring and peers' sexual behaviors are related to sexual intercourse in the expected directions. These covariates are generally similar in their association to the two dependent variables across all models, with some minor exceptions.

In addition, results reveal that the relationship qualities are related to sexual intimacy when relationship duration is not in the model. However, a majority of the relationship quality measures were not significantly related to sexual intimacy (short of intercourse) when duration is included (exceptions include communication awkwardness, love, partner influence). Thus, we have only included results for sexual intercourse in the full models in Tables 2 – 4. Full results of the sexual intimacy analyses are available from the authors on request.

Communication

The next model predicting sexual intercourse adds level of reported self-disclosure. Results indicate that, controlling for the other factors, variations in levels of self-disclosure are not significantly related to sexual intimacy, but are associated with increased odds of adolescents reporting sexual intercourse within the focal relationship. Each unit increase in self disclosure increases the odds of sexual intercourse by 10% ($\exp(.10)$). The likelihood-ratio Chi-square test indicates a that the addition of self-disclosure adds significantly to the fit of the sexual intercourse model ($p < .003$) and not the sexual intimacy model ($p = .11$). To investigate whether intimate self-disclosure was similarly related to the experience of sexual behavior for girls and boys, we estimated models that included self-disclosure by gender interaction terms. These interaction terms were not statistically significant, indicating a similar association between self-disclosure and the likelihood of reporting both levels of sexually intimate behavior for girls and boys (results not shown). A model including an age by self-disclosure interaction is marginally significant for sexual intercourse ($p < .06$), indicating a somewhat greater effect of intimate disclosure for older respondents.

Results in the next column in Table 2 also indicate that higher levels of perceived *communication awkwardness* with the romantic partner are associated with lower odds of sexual intercourse. Each unit increase in communication awkwardness reduces the odds of sexual intercourse by 11% ($\exp(-.11)$). Communication awkwardness adds to the fit of the model ($p < .003$). An interaction term added to this model is not statistically significant, indicating a generally similar effect for boys and girls. We find an interaction of age and

communication awkwardness is marginally significant ($p < .10$) suggesting a somewhat weaker effect of awkwardness among older respondents.

Adolescents who provided in-depth relationship history narratives frequently highlighted that ease of communication was a key aspect of feelings of closeness and with the partner's importance in their lives:

Like, okay, with me, like, if me, if me and Jesse, if we have a problem we don't go to somebody else, I'll go straight to him! And I know, like we can, we can talk about it and talk about what had happened and talk about what, makes us mad or whatever and talk about what we can do next time... And like, I think I can talk to him, about anything, anything at all. I don't know he just...he's probably the most important person in my life ever! [Christy]

I'd say your girl—not only she is your girlfriend, but one of your best friends. So, you could talk, tell each other everything. We basically just talked about everything, I mean, it could be, anything from personal, to school, to what you did over the weekend. We just, discussed every different topic you could think of. [David]

Jeremy, quoted below, makes a more explicit connection to sexual intimacy, as he notes that feelings of comfort with his partner were a consideration as he contemplated having sex for the first time. His remarks appear consistent with the observed inverse association between communication awkwardness and sexual intimacy highlighted above:

I was real cool with her, and I knew it, I wouldn't, it wouldn't be no problem, for me to be with her, because I know her, you know like that, and it wouldn't be no, kind of embarrassment if something went wrong! We laughed about it, you know, while getting into it, we laughed about it, you know, ask little questions, it be questions here and there, like that. [Jeremy]

Emotional processes

Next we consider emotional processes. Table 2 presents results for perceived level of caring, feelings of enmeshment and the experience of passionate love. Each of the emotional dimensions (caring, enmeshment, and love) is associated with increased odds of reporting sexual intercourse, as shown in Table 2. A unit increase in caring increases the odds of sex by 129% ($\exp(.83)$). A unit increase in enmeshment increases the likelihood of sex by 48% ($\exp(.29)$), and a unit increase in love increases the odds of sexual intercourse by 12% ($\exp(.11)$). Log likelihood Chi-square tests indicate that the addition of the emotional processes measures significantly add to model fit ($p = .000$, $p = .000$, and $p < .03$ respectively). Gender and emotional processes interaction terms were not statistically significant, suggesting a similar relationship between each of these emotional dimensions of the relationship on boys and girls' likelihood of engaging in sexually intimate behaviors with the focal partner. Similarly, age interactions were not significant, indicating that the emotional indicators have similar associations across age groups.

One set of themes in the relationship history narratives that accord well with the quantitative results concerns the element of 'sorting' many respondents described. An aspect of viewing one relationship as especially close and meaningful is recognizing that not all relationships contain these positive features. Indeed, the narratives sometimes reflect elements of ambivalence about the opposite sex, and areas of gender mistrust. For example, adolescent girls' may accept the societal view that boys "only want one thing," yet develop very positive feelings about a particular boy. In these cases, the young women have attempted to and apparently believe that they have separated "the wheat from the chaff" where boys are concerned. This notion of sorting is apparent in the quotes from Sarah and Ashley's

narratives, as both emphasize the degree to which their own boyfriends should be viewed as different from ‘average boys’:

He really wants a relationship...I mean he’s really good at the relationship so....that makes me more like trusting guys and thinking guys are changing, but still I know they’re out there and they just want one thing... [Sarah]

He’s not, I can’t compare him to anybody else cause he acts different than those average boys that try to talk to me. He’s different...Some guys like they’ll talk to me and then, when I talk to them on the phone, like, “oh when can I have sex with you,” I’m like, “excuse me, [if] that’s the only reason why you wanted to get my number, then you could have just not tried to talk to me at all.” [Ashley]

These views that a given partner represents a departure from the norm contribute to the likelihood of constructing the relationship as something special, a dynamic that increases the feelings of trust/closeness that in turn may make sexually intimate behavior more likely. Although it is more intuitive to envision this as a dynamic involved in girls’ sexual choices, our analysis also reveals some indications of this sorting process in boys’ choice-making as well:

She was like... moving too fast... Like she want to have sex with me in the car and I’m like, “No,” and then she starts touching me I’m like, “I’m cool, I’m cool, I got to go.” And I did that and I left... I was just I don’t know, she wasn’t the girl that I wanted to have sex with... She wasn’t the right girl... [Aaron]

If more distal processes (e.g., the desire to gain status in the eyes of male peers) were the only relevant considerations, it is unlikely that Aaron would have been concerned about whether or not his companion were ‘the right’ girl. Quotes such as the above thus accord well with the quantitative results documenting a significant relationship for both females and males between such relationship qualities as caring and the likelihood of becoming sexually intimate with a given partner.

The issue of causal order

The magnitude of the associations revealed in the cross-sectional results described above likely reflects that some portion of this association stems from *effects* of sexual behavior on such features of the relationship as perceived intimacy of communication and caring. Indeed, in response to a direct question in the structured interview about the influence of sex on the relationship, over 60% of the boys and 80% of the girls reported that sex had brought them somewhat or much closer to their partner. Jordan’s narrative provides an illustration of this idea of reciprocal effects, in this case on levels of intimate self-disclosure:

Yeah, yeah it was like, I say, when we was together, we would talk, and, but we wasn’t saying some of the stuff but after, we got real close, and after, you know what I’m saying, we got together, or had sex, or whatever, it was like, it was just, like you could just say whatever! Anything! She, I felt like saying something to her, and I say it... We, not as freely, but after that, it just changed, like we got a little bit more closer! And, for, for uh... and felt, like a little bit more comfortable around each other. That’s how it was. [Jordan]

Jordan clearly perceived an increase in intimate self-disclosure after he and his partner had sex, highlighting that some of the positive meanings/relationship dynamics may follow from as well as predict the likelihood of sexual intimacy. We do not believe, however, that the associations documented in the quantitative analysis are *primarily* due to after-effects of sex on these relational dynamics. If this were the case, this would require us to accept that these relationships were viewed by the young people involved as in no way special or significant, but only became so upon introducing sex into the relationship.

As a strategy for exploring the issue of temporal sequence more systematically, we focused on the current daters within the sample who had not had sex at the time of the first wave of interviews. In these models, we used wave one relationship quality reports to predict whether the respondents who had not had sex at wave one went on to have sex with that partner, as reported at the second interview wave. Thus, this subgroup is not randomly selected, since by definition it will not include couples who had experienced high levels of enmeshment, feelings of passionate love and the like and had already become sexually intimate by the time of the wave one interview (as reflected in the cross-sectional models). These youths are also somewhat younger, less likely to have had sex with a prior partner, and average durations of the current relationships of this group are also shorter than those reported across the larger cross-sectional sample. Yet a benefit of this approach is that sexual intercourse itself cannot be a factor that influenced the nature of the relationship quality reports. Results of these analyses, identical in form to the cross-sectional models, reveal similar, albeit somewhat more modest associations (Table 3). At the zero-order, intimate self-disclosure, caring, enmeshment, and love were significantly associated with odds of reporting that later intercourse occurred (communication awkwardness was not significant), and caring, feelings of enmeshment, and self-disclosure were significantly associated with sexual intercourse when models including all covariates except duration were estimated. When duration was included in the models, as shown in Table 3, intimate self-disclosure was no longer significant, but feelings of enmeshment remained a significant predictor of later sexual intercourse; caring was marginally significant.

Power and influence

Table 4 presents results of a set of cross-sectional analyses focusing on whether perceptions of influence and power within adolescent romantic relationships are systematically linked with sexual behaviors. Perceived partner influence is not significantly related to sexual intercourse and does not add to the fit of the model. Gender and age interactions were not significant, indicating similar associations of influence of boys and girls and across age groups. However, partner influence is positively related to sexually intimacy (not sexual intercourse) and adds to the fit of the model (results not shown). Longitudinal analyses focusing on teens who were virgins at wave 1 indicate that partner influence continues to not be related to sexual intercourse (results not shown).

In the aggregate, power was not related to the odds of either form of sexually intimate behavior and does not add to the fit of the model. However, an interaction of gender and power is statistically significant in the sexual intercourse model. Specifically, girls who score higher on perceived power have lower odds of sexual intercourse. The coefficient for girls is $-.22$ ($p < .05$); the coefficient for boys is $.04$ (n.s.). This interaction term is not significant at the bivariate level, but becomes significant when prior sexual history is introduced into the model. Further analysis reveals that the effect of power is primarily observed among girls who were virgins prior to entering the current relationship. For girls who report having sex in a previous relationship, variations in levels of power do not influence the odds of having sex in the focal relationship. It is also important to highlight that regardless of their sexual status or histories, girls' power scores are higher than those of comparably situated boys. Further, variations in boys' own reports of the power balance in the relationship were not related to the likelihood of having sex within the context of their current/most recent relationship. The association between power and sexual behavior is similar for each age group.

These results indicate that some gendered processes may be involved, but more research is needed to fully understand the nature of adolescent couples' power dynamics, and how this affects sexual decisions. Since one of the items comprising the power scale references decision-making about sexuality specifically, we examined the distributions of responses to

the question: “When the two of you disagree about how far to go sexually, who usually gets their way?” Responses include: a) the couple are in agreement; b) both partners have equal power; c) the partner has more power; or d) the respondent has more power. Adding a layer of complexity to the above interaction results, we observe that a majority of all teens, male and female, indicate either that they have not disagreed about how far to go sexually (35%), or reported equal power (31%). Further, only 8% of females and 12% of males thought that the male in the relationship had more power or ‘say’ in this area, and the content of many of the relationship history narratives tends to reinforce the notion that girls’ perspectives are important to the decision-making process:

So, if a girl says yes and a guy says no, it’s a maybe. If a guy doesn’t know and a girl says yes, it’s yes. If a guy says yes, and a girl says yes, it’s yes. If a girl says no and a guy says yes, it’s no. If a girl doesn’t know, and a guy says yes, it’s no. If a girl, then, if a girl says yes and a guy says yes, it’s yes. I think it’s more that way, so I think the women have more control because their opinion matters more in that situation. [Brett]

Brett’s narrative is instructive in simply elaborating the large number of possible combinations of interest where sexual decisions are concerned; yet the main point of his description appears to be that girls’ perspectives are very important in understanding what eventually takes place. The content of Brett’s comments likely incorporate what he has learned from parents, peer, and school personnel, and may also reflect the tendency for self-serving biases in personal narratives (Neisser, 1994). Thus it seems unlikely that boys would develop a narrative account that reflects elements of ‘pushing’ or coercion, and girls may also be reluctant to admit that boyfriends’ advances derive from an uneven power balance. Yet the number of narratives reflecting perceived mutuality and the detail included about this provide indications that many adolescents involved in intimate relationships do not themselves envision these dynamics in ways that outside observers might characterize them (i.e., the idea that males generally have more power in these relationships and use it to gain sexual access):

That was something that I had been saving. I really wanted to save it for marriage, but I was curious and and um...she was special enough to me that I could give her this part of my life that I had been saving and um...she had felt the same way because she wanted to wait until marriage, but we had decided and we was both curious I guess and so it just happened. [Tim]

Actually, it was at times, where we both wanted it, then there was that times when we both said “we think we should wait”. You know, because, there were times where I’d be like “well, you know, you know I might feel at this time like, you know, we need to have sexual whatever” then she’ll be like “well, no, I think we just need to wait a little longer”. You know, then, she might say “okay, well I feel it’s time” and I’ll be like “well, no, I think we need to wait a little longer.” [Kevin]

A number of other male and female respondents describe a dynamic in which girlfriends had apparently initiated the move toward sexual intimacy:

Well she put the moves on me really you know what I’m saying, she kind of like, she actually put the moves on me, you know. [Pat]

Actually I put the pressure on him...we never had sex which I wanted to just because, like, that was like my first love. I loved him so much and he wanted to wait ‘cause he was a virgin actually until this year. [Caroline]

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative results complicate the notion that on average males have greater power in adolescent relationships, and use it to achieve sexual intimacy with their generally reluctant female partners. If a coercive process were typical, girls’ own

reports of feelings of closeness would not be reliably associated with the odds of sexual involvement, as revealed in the analyses focused on various dimensions of intimacy reported above. This suggests that many adolescent girls involved in sexually intimate relationships do construct positive meanings about these relationships, before and subsequent to their sexual involvement. Yet the positive gender interaction reflecting lower power scores for female respondents who transitioned to first sex suggests that some distinctively gendered processes are also involved. More research is needed because in this analysis, we cannot ascertain whether such girls are influenced by an unfavorable power balance to make this transition, or whether the transition itself influences their perceptions of the balance of power in the relationship. In the longitudinal analyses focused on those who had not had intercourse with the current partner at the time of the wave one interview, power and influence were not associated with the odds of reporting later sexual intercourse at wave two (results not shown). These results are consistent with the cross-sectional pattern.

DISCUSSION

While adolescent sexual behavior is related to such social dynamics as parenting practices and the orientations of one's peers, these results suggest that the generally positive qualities of romantic relationships we assessed are also important to a comprehensive understanding of intimate sexual behaviors. The results show that basic feelings of caring and other forms of emotional engagement are positively related to the odds of sexual behavior, and findings are particularly consistent for the models focused on sexual intercourse. The cross-sectional analyses show significant associations between all of the positive relationship qualities examined and sexual behavior, even after duration of the relationship, prior sexual experience, and other parent and peer factors had been taken into account. The results of longitudinal analyses focused on the subset of respondents who had not yet had sex at the time of the first interview are generally similar, but results were stronger for the emotional processes relative to the communication indicators. When duration was included in these models, intimate self-disclosure was no longer significant, but the index of caring and measure of enmeshment remained significant predictors. This pattern of results suggests that perhaps some of the association between intimacy of communication and the sexual behavior reports captured in the cross-sectional examination reflect effects of the behavior itself on the assessments of the intimacy of self-disclosure. However, the results for caring and feelings of enmeshment are consistent across both sets of analyses. Similarly, power and influence were, in the aggregate, unrelated to the likelihood that sexual intercourse occurred, whether we examined these linkages cross-sectionally or longitudinally.

These results complicate the view of sexuality as but one of a roster of other problem outcomes such as drinking, drug use and delinquent behavior, as they indicate that relationship dynamics that are considered good, healthy or even prosocial are important to a comprehensive understanding of adolescent sexual decision-making. Many of the relationship qualities we assessed are related but conceptually distinct dimensions of intimacy. It has been useful to consider these separately, rather than as a summary measure, however, as this highlights that the adolescent involved with a special romantic partner may experience multiple rewards of intimate involvement, including intimate self-disclosure, feelings of caring, and more passionate emotions (McCall & Simmons, 1966). The findings suggest some limitations not only of traditional risk perspectives on adolescent sexuality, but also of recent media treatments decrying the end of formal dating and romance. These media accounts have suggested that most teen sexual activity occurs within the context of casual relationships characterized by little caring or commitment (Denizet-Weis, 2004). Prior research (e.g., Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2005) shows that many adolescents do eventually gain sexual experience that could be considered "non-relationship" or casual sex, but this is not the most common context for sexual involvement. Within the dating world

itself, our results show that qualities that generally reflect higher levels of intimacy are significantly associated with the likelihood of sexually intimate behaviors. More research is obviously needed across the range of different contexts in which sex occurs. High risk liaisons will continue to be an important research focus because of the social and health implications of involvement in short term, low commitment relationships. Nevertheless, the findings described above are also potentially important, because they highlight that many of these relationships have positive significance for the youths involved in them. These findings are thus congruent with a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective. According to this framework, sexual behavior emerges not only due to an absence, lack or breakdown in the adolescent's life (e.g., low parental supervision), but are associated with social dynamics that have positive meanings for the adolescent. These results also have policy implications, suggesting the need to incorporate discussions of relationships into programs focused on sexual risk-taking, as an important supplement to curricula that currently emphasize the risky or potentially health compromising nature of this activity (e.g., programs focused on the "Health Beliefs Model" —see e.g., Becker, 1988).

It is also important to note that in many instances we did not find a strong pattern of gender differences in the effects of relationship qualities. This provides evidence that relationship centered processes and dynamics are associated with boys' as well as girls' decisions. These findings thus temper the view that girls develop and make choices on the basis of their connections to others, while boys are primarily interested in achieving autonomy. The idea that boys have relatively little interest in romance is not supported by previous analyses of these data (Giordano et al., 2006), and the present analysis contributes beyond this prior work by documenting that both boys' and girls' perceptions of relationship qualities/dynamics are significantly linked to sexual behavior. A potentially important exception is the finding with regard to gendered effects of power. A majority of youth, regardless of sexual history, describe a situation of relatively equal power or one favoring girls in an unequal power balance; yet the lower scores of girls who transitioned to first intercourse with a focal partner suggest that this relational dynamic does not follow the pattern of gender similarity observed in assessments of the influence of overall closeness or intimacy. More frequent assessments are needed in order to fully understand the sequencing of power and sexual decisions as influenced by respondent gender. In this analysis, only a few age interaction terms were statistically significant, but more research is needed that could provide a more nuanced understanding of developmental changes in the impact of these and other relationship qualities.

This study is limited by our focus on youths residing in a single geographic region. And while we believe that respondents' subjective experiences are important to understand, this focus also has limitations, in that objective measures/observations (e.g., of power dynamics) might reveal a different pattern of results. Couple level data would also be a useful supplement to the individual reports we focused upon in this analysis. In future research, it will also be useful to focus more attention on problematic features of romantic relationships, such as conflict, jealousy, and cheating behaviors (see e.g., Tuval-Mashiach & Shulman, 2006). This multi-faceted approach is needed to document the specific conditions under which adolescent romance is associated with outcomes such as depression or violence, and when these relationships may foster positive emotions, identity development, and as indicated in these results, the development of sexual intimacy.

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TABLE 1

Correlation Matrix and Means and Standard Deviations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1 Sexual intercourse	—																							
2 Self-disclosure	.21***	—																						
3 Comm. awkwardness	-.18***	-.31***	—																					
4 Caring	.22***	.52***	-.23***	—																				
5 Enmeshment	.19***	.33***	-.14***	.40***	—																			
6 Love	.16***	.43***	-.12***	.49***	.46***	—																		
7 Influence	.00	.01	.31***	-.03	.13**	.18***	—																	
8 Power	-.05	.04	.03	.05	-.02	-.09*	-.12**	—																
9 Duration	.10*	.30***	-.15***	.28***	.26***	.26***	.08+	.04	—															
10 Sex prior to rela.	.43***	.01	-.04	.00	-.01	.04	-.06	.07+	-.14***	—														
11 Female	-.10*	.17***	-.03	.11**	.04	.03	-.21***	.31***	.08+	-.12***	—													
12 Age	.44***	.24***	-.22***	.17***	.05	.14***	-.04	-.06	.18***	.28***	-.03	—												
13 White	-.13**	.16***	-.09*	.06	-.05	.08+	.07+	-.14***	-.11**	-.23***	.07	.00	—											
14 Black	.09*	-.16***	.09*	-.04	.05	-.08+	-.01	.13**	.12**	.18***	-.05	.00	-.84***	—										
15 Hispanic	.08+	-.03	-.00	-.03	.01	.00	-.10*	.04	-.00	.10*	-.05	-.00	-.39***	-.18***	—									
16 Two to parents	-.08+	.12***	-.08+	.07+	-.03	.05	.05	-.03	.02	-.17***	.01	.12**	.36***	-.31***	-.13**	—								
17 Single parent	.10*	-.05	.05	-.01	.04	-.01	.03	.04	-.01	.14***	-.00	-.05	-.18***	.18***	.01	-.53***	—							
18 Step-parent	.02	-.03	-.02	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.08+	-.01	-.06	.00	-.08+	-.02	-.13**	.09*	.07+	-.39***	-.26***	—						
19 Other parent	-.04	-.08*	.07+	-.05	.02	-.03	-.04	-.01	.05	.06	.08+	-.09*	-.16***	.11**	.09*	-.35***	-.23***	-.17***	—					
20 Less than 12 years	.12**	-.07	.06	.00	.06	-.06	.02	.09*	-.02	.10*	-.05	-.04	-.23***	.13**	.19***	-.18***	.12**	-.01	.12**	—				
21 12 years	-.03	-.01	.05	-.02	-.01	.02	-.04	-.01	-.02	-.06	.00	-.07+	.05	-.06	.02	-.01	-.03	.06	.00	-.27***	—			
22 More than 12 years	-.05	.05	-.09*	.02	-.04	.03	.02	-.06	.03	-.01	.03	.09**	.11**	-.03	-.15***	.14***	-.05	-.05	-.08*	-.45***	-.74***	—		
23 Monitoring	-.27***	-.08+	.09*	-.06	-.07+	-.05	-.08+	.12**	-.05	-.09*	.14***	-.39***	-.12**	.09*	.07+	-.02	-.00	.05	-.02	.00	.03	-.03	—	
24 Peer attitudes	.52***	.18***	-.12***	.08*	.08+	.13**	-.03	.01	.02	.47***	-.11**	.45***	-.19***	.16***	.08+	-.14***	.12**	.00	.05	.10*	-.04	-.03	-.18***	—
M	.34	14.90	9.17	4.34	3.07	11.38	6.38	8.26	1.94	.32	.56	15.58	.65	.28	.08	.44	.26	.16	.13	.14	.31	.55	20.55	3.40

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
SD	1.58	13.36	10.63	2.55	3.87	8.61	8.30	5.97	3.54	1.56	1.66	5.49	1.59	1.49	.88	1.66	1.47	1.24	1.13	1.16	1.55	1.66	9.04	5.84

N = 570.
+ p ≤ .10;
* p ≤ .05;
** p ≤ .01;
*** p ≤ .001

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TABLE 2
Communication and Emotional Processes and the Likelihood of Adolescent Sexual Behavior

	Baseline		Self-Disclosure	Communication Awkwardness	Caring	Enmeshment	Love
	Sexual Intimacy ^a	Sexual Intercourse ^b	Sexual Intercourse ^b	Sexual Intercourse ^b	Sexual Intercourse ^b	Sexual Intercourse ^b	Sexual Intercourse ^b
<i>Qualities of Communication</i>							
Self-disclosure			.10**				
Communication awkwardness				-.11**			
<i>Emotional Processes</i>							
Caring					.83***		
Enmeshment						.39***	
Love							.11*
<i>Basic relationship Parameters</i>							
Duration	.31***	.38***	.31**	.34**	.26*	.30**	.33***
Sex prior to relationship	-.07	1.42***	1.44***	1.43***	1.49***	1.50***	1.42***
<i>Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>							
Gender							
(Male)							
Female	-.41 ⁺	-.16	-.31	-.22	-.35	-.24	-.18
Age	.26**	.43***	.40***	.40***	.42***	.45***	.42***
Race							
(White)							
Black	-.52 ⁺	-.21	-.06	-.13	-.11	-.26	-.12
Hispanic	.01	.11	.19	.13	.19	.05	.13
<i>Family Factors</i>							
Family structure							
(Two biological parents)							
Single parent	.21	.06	.10	.09	.06	.05	.06
Step-parent	.16	.25	.22	.24	.34	.27	.29
Other parent	.17	-.58	-.54	-.56	-.53	-.58	-.60

	Baseline		Self-Disclosure	Communication Awkwardness	Caring	Enmeshment	Love
	Sexual Intimacy ^a	Sexual Intercourse ^b					
Parental education							
Less than 12 years (12 years)	.28	.56	.56	.58	.57	.44	.59
More than 12 years	.18	-.40	-.41	-.43	-.41	-.42	-.39
Monitoring	-.01	-.09**	-.10*	-.10*	-.09*	-.08 ⁺	-.09*
Peer attitudes	.05	.52***	.50***	.53***	.53***	.52***	.51***
-2 Log L	441.01	484.76	476.06	475.89	462.64	470.33	479.87
R ² _L	.12	.35	.36	.36	.38	.37	.36

^aLimited to only those who have not had sexual intercourse (N = 364)

^bN = 570.

⁺p ≤ .10;

^{*}p ≤ .05;

^{**}p ≤ .01;

^{***}p ≤ .001.

Note: The logistic regression coefficient represents the log odds (or natural logarithm of the odds) of experiencing sexual intercourse. Positive values indicate higher odds; negative values indicate lower odds.

TABLE 3

Longitudinal Models

	Baseline	Self-Disclosure	Comm. Awkwardness	Caring	Enmeshment	Love
<i>Qualities of Communication</i>						
Self-disclosure		.05				
Communication awkwardness			.05			
<i>Emotional Processes</i>						
Caring				.22 ⁺		
Enmeshment					.15 [*]	
Love						.06
<i>Basic relationship Parameters</i>						
Duration	.08 ⁺	.08 ⁺	.08 ⁺	.08 ⁺	.08	.08 ⁺
Sex prior to relationship	.42	.42	.42	.42	.42	.42
<i>Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>						
<i>Gender</i>						
(Male)						
Female	.31	.31	.31	.31	.31	.31
Age	.12 ⁺	.12 [*]	.12 [*]	.12	.12 ⁺	.12 ⁺
<i>Race</i>						
(White)						
Black	.38	.39	.38	.38	.38	.39
Hispanic	.54	.55	.54	.55	.55	.54
<i>Family Factors</i>						
<i>Family structure</i>						
(Two biological parents)						
Single parent	.41	.41	.41	.41	.41	.41
Step-parent	.42 ^{**}	.42 ^{**}	.42 ^{**}	.42 ^{**}	.42 ^{**}	.42 ^{**}
Other parent	.60	.60	.60	.61	.60	.60
<i>Parental education</i>						
Less than 12 years	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50
(12 years)						

	Baseline	Self-Disclosure	Comm. Awkwardness	Caring	Emmeshment	Love
More than 12 years	.34	.34	.34	.34	.35	.34
Monitoring	.07	.07	.07	.07	.07	.07
Peer attitudes	.11***	.11***	.11***	.11***	.11***	.11***
-2 Log L	284.68	283.54	284.49	281.52	280.68	283.85
R ² _L						

N = 300.

+ p ≤ .10;

* p ≤ .05;

** p ≤ .01;

*** p ≤ .001.

Note: The logistic regression coefficient represents the log odds (or natural logarithm of the odds) of experiencing sexual intercourse. Positive values indicate higher odds; negative values indicate lower odds.

TABLE 4

Influence and Power and the Likelihood of Adolescent Sexual Behavior

	Influence	Power
Influence	.05	
Power		-.10
<i>Basic Relationship Parameters</i>		
Duration	.37***	.39***
Sex prior to relationship	1.43***	1.48***
<i>Sociodemographic Characteristics</i>		
Gender		
(Male)		
Female	-.11	-.03
Age	.44***	.42***
Race		
(White)		
Black	-.19	-.16
Hispanic	.16	.17
<i>Family Factors</i>		
Family structure		
(Two biological parents)		
Single parent	.06	.03
Step-parent	.28	.23
Other parent	-.56	-.64 ⁺
Parental education		
Less than 12 years	.54	.57
(12 years)		
More than 12 years	-.41	-.40
Monitoring	-.09*	-.09*
Peer attitudes	.53***	.53***
-2 Log L	483.59	482.40
R ² _L	.35	.35

^aLimited to only those who have not had sexual intercourse (N = 364)

^bN = 570.

⁺p ≤ .10;

*p ≤ .05;

**p ≤ .01;

***p ≤ .001.

Note: The logistic regression coefficient represents the log odds (or natural logarithm of the odds) of experiencing sexual intercourse. Positive values indicate higher odds; negative values indicate lower odds.