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Family, Peer, and Pubertal Determinants of Dating Involvement Among Adolescents

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of family, peer, and biological contributors to dating involvement among early adolescents (11–14 years of age; $n = 244$). Further, we assess how parental monitoring may be modified by pubertal maturation and older sibling risky behavior. Data on delinquent peer affiliation, pubertal maturation, parental monitoring, older sibling risky behavior, and dating involvement were gathered through observations and surveys from adolescents, mothers, older siblings, and teachers. Results indicate that lower levels of parental monitoring and higher levels of older sibling risky behavior were related to adolescents' dating involvement through delinquent peer affiliation. Pubertal maturation was directly related to dating involvement for early daters. Findings emphasize the value of examining social and biological factors, in concert, over time.

Romantic identity and sexual identity formation are key developmental tasks for adolescents—making involvement with, and the salience of, romantic interests increasingly important (Furman, 1993; Hartup, 1993). By middle adolescence, some involvement with dating is normative (Collins, 2003; Feiring, 1999) and can serve important functions, such as the establishment of intimacy and increased autonomy, as well as recreation (Brown, 1999; Neemann, Hubbard, & Masten, 1995). However, just as much as the functions of dating change with age, so do the relations with adaptive functioning (Furman & Collibee, 2014). Indeed, being romantically involved before middle adolescence (approximately 14–16 years of age; Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999) has been shown to elevate risk for negative psychosocial outcomes, including delinquent behavior and substance use (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Davies & Windle, 2000) and decreased academic competence (Neemann et al., 1995). Theoretically, this link has received some support from Erikson's notion of “off-timing” behavior (Erikson, 1959) in which adolescents who enter into romantic relationships prematurely may foreclose on identity exploration. These social timetable theories posit that early involved youth are not as equipped to handle the emotional demands of these relationships (Neemann et al., 1995), regardless of the normative nature of the behavior (Furman & Collibee, 2014). Finally, it may simply reflect a spurious link between an

orientation toward delinquency and a greater likelihood of delinquent partners (Furman, Low, & Ho, 2009; Haynie, Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2005).

Literature on the risks entailed in dating involvement—especially early dating involvement, as well as the adaptive and constructive role of romantic involvement (Davies & Windle, 2000)—is substantially more mature and expansive than empirical studies of pathways to dating involvement. However, elucidating the context that promotes entry into relationships has important implications for both theory and prevention (e.g., more precise targets; Ivanova, Veenstra, & Mills, 2012). Probably the most comprehensive investigation to date was conducted by Friedlander, Connolly, Pepler, and Craig (2007) in which they examined the joint contributions of parental monitoring, pubertal maturation, and involvement with delinquent peers on timing of dating involvement among early adolescents over a 1-year period. Results suggest that both delinquent peer affiliation and early pubertal maturation increased dating involvement, as well as poor parental monitoring for boys. This study represents an important step in more comprehensively examining social determinants of romantic involvement and builds upon their work in two important regards: (1) we assess the role of broader family (poor parental monitoring and older sibling risky behavior), peer, and biological (i.e., pubertal maturation) contributors to dating involvement among early adolescents (approximately 11–14 years of age), with delinquent peer affiliation as a mediator; and (2) we assess how the association of monitoring and dating may be moderated by pubertal maturation and sibling behavior (considered jointly).

Delinquent Peers as a Mediator to Adolescent Dating

Being involved with romantic partners is embedded within adolescents' broader social context or network. Most dating theories suggest a developmental progression for dyadic romantic relationships, whereby one progresses from same-sex friendships to participation in mixed-gender groups, followed by dating within group activities, and ultimately dyadic romantic relationships that can reside outside the parameters of one's peer group (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004). Thus, the peer group plays a central organizing role in which one is both exposed to potential partners but also observes (and learns) models of romantic interaction (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Furman & Shaffer, 1999). Indeed, some have characterized the peer group as a type of "secure" base from which adolescents experiment with involvement in dating relationships more fluidly (Connolly et al., 2004).

It is reasonable then to hypothesize that the qualities or characteristics of one's peer group will influence not only whom one dates and the qualities of those relations but also the timing or pace of this developmental progression as well. Surprisingly, there is a significant dearth of studies examining the importance of the characteristics of one's peers on dating involvement. The current paper is predicated on the notion that entrenchment with delinquent peers increases the likelihood of dating involvement among early adolescents, to the extent that peers reinforce and escalate orientation toward other precocious behaviors. Delinquent peer groups shape and reinforce a variety of oppositional behaviors, including substance use and sexual activity, that are deviations from normative timing and often represent early bids for autonomy and adulthood (Dishion, Nelson, & Bullock, 2004;

Dishion, Poulin, & Skaggs, 2000). Thus, affiliation with delinquent friends may accelerate interest in, access to, and involvement in dating—which is similar to other behaviors that resemble more “mature” behavior.

Although it has been argued that peers play the most central role in the development of romantic relations (Connolly et al., 2004), it is important to incorporate family factors in our model in order to contextualize the risk posed by peers—including parental monitoring and older sibling risky behavior. Specifically, we propose that each could independently or interactively have a direct or indirect association with dating involvement.

Family influences

The transition to adolescence is often associated with an increase in the prevalence of antisocial behavior (Steinberg et al., 2006), most of which occurs in the context of delinquent peers (Poulin, Kiesner, Pedersen, & Dishion, 2011; Prinstein & Dodge, 2008; Westling, Andrews, Hampson, & Peterson, 2008). Although delinquent peers are central to the elaboration of delinquent behaviors, parent management plays a correspondingly important role (Dishion et al., 2004; Dishion, Spracklen, Andrews, & Patterson, 1996). Given the strong dynamic between parent disengagement and high-risk youth, it is not surprising that increasing peer influence can be mitigated by effective parental monitoring (Dishion, Capaldi, Spracklen, & Li, 1995; Dishion, Nelson, & Kavanagh, 2003; Eddy & Chamberlain, 2000; Westling et al., 2008). Despite the documented potency of parent management during the transition to adolescence (especially parental monitoring) on guiding adaptive adolescent behavior, there are only a few studies to date that have examined parental monitoring and dating involvement. In their study of dating involvement, Friedlander et al. (2007) found that poor parental monitoring was an important contributor to dating, but only for boys. On the other hand, Longmore, Manning, and Giordano (2001) did not find a link between parental monitoring and timing of adolescents' dating among 10- to 17-year-olds, although this study relied on parents' perspective on monitoring behavior. Despite some inconsistency in the literature on the salience of parenting strategies on timing of dating involvement, we hypothesize that parental monitoring is related to dating involvement largely through its influence on delinquent peer affiliation.

Siblings also have a veritably strong influence on adolescent behavior. There is much literature suggesting that siblings, as both a peer and family member, exert unique influences on adolescent substance use and delinquent behavior through modeling and collusion (Low, Shortt, & Snyder, 2012; Reid, Patterson, & Snyder, 2002; Slomkowski, Rende, Conger, Simons, & Conger, 2001). Although this is the first investigation on dating to incorporate older sibling influence—by extension—one could hypothesize that older siblings would have a significant role on adolescent dating. On the basis of the tenets of social learning theory, studies suggest siblings normalize and reinforce antisocial behaviors that generalize to delinquent peer affiliation (Low, Shortt, & Snyder, 2012; Shortt, Capaldi, Dishion, Bank, & Owen, 2003; Snyder, Bank, & Burraston, 2005). Thus, one possibility is that risky older sibling behavior may indirectly relate to dating through attraction to and involvement with delinquent peers. Direct mechanisms are possible as well. Older siblings engaging in risky or off-timing behaviors may normalize precocious behavior, including dating, as well as

introduce older friends who encourage or further validate dating as a normative activity (Stattin & Magnusson, 1990). The current study moves beyond the question of whether parental monitoring and older sibling behavior play a role in dating involvement, but also tests the hypothesis that older sibling behavior may be incrementally more potent under conditions of poor parental monitoring. Thus, we hypothesized that having an older sibling who engages in delinquent or risky behaviors, accompanied by poor parental monitoring, would increase the likelihood of entrenchment with delinquent peers and, in turn, entry into dating.

Biological influences

Many studies examining dating and its consequences have controlled for physical maturation or stage of pubertal development, although the link with adolescent dating has been inconsistent. There are several studies suggesting a positive association for girls (Ellis & Garber, 2000; Phinney, Jensen, Olsen, & Cundick, 1990) and boys (Lam, Shi, Ho, Stewart, & Fan, 2002); still, others have found no relationship for boys (Susman et al., 1985) and at least one study found no link for girls (Friedlander et al., 2007). Most of these studies infer a direct link to dating involvement, although it is also possible that the association is indirect through delinquent peer affiliation, given that precocious pubertal maturation has also been tied to delinquency (Ge, Brody, Conger, & Simons, 2006; Westling et al., 2008). Early pubertal maturation may not necessarily translate to risky behavior (or directly to dating involvement); rather, it is plausible that pubertal maturation is impactful when combined with poor parental monitoring, suggesting moderation. The impact may also be developmentally constrained. Insofar as girls typically begin puberty at 10–11 years of age (boys ages 11–12 years; Steinberg, 1987), it is likely that the effects of puberty would be most potent during the transition to adolescence. Thus, we hypothesized that early pubertal maturation in the context of poor parental monitoring would be related indirectly to dating involvement through delinquent peer affiliation. Second, we anticipated the effects of puberty to be stronger for those making the transition to adolescence.

Summary

A longitudinal model was explored, allowing us to examine prospective associations between family, biological and peer predictors (T1), and dating involvement in early adolescence (T2), while controlling for adolescent externalizing behavior (potential confound, T1) as well as early dating involvement (i.e., during transition to adolescence, T1). Several hypotheses were examined. Although we anticipated older sibling behavior and pubertal maturation could be directly associated with dating, we anticipated these would exert their influence primarily through socialization processes (i.e., delinquent peers and parenting). More specifically, we anticipated that parental monitoring would be associated with dating involvement through delinquent peer affiliation, particularly for those experiencing early pubertal maturation and for those with an older sibling who engages in behaviors. Although longitudinal pathways were of primary interest, cross-sectional associations between pubertal development, monitoring, older sibling behavior, and early dating (T1) were anticipated.

METHODS

Sample

Participants were 244 early adolescents (50% girls) in families with same-sex biological children recruited from public schools located in a medium-sized metropolitan area in the Pacific Northwest. Families identified by area school districts as having (1) one child in public elementary school, (2) an older same-sex child in public middle school, and (3) a mother residing in the home. Families meeting these criteria were sent an introduction letter about the study with an option to receive no further contact. The families on the contact list were screened for biological relatedness to confirm eligibility and invited to participate in a home visit to explain the study. Of the 364 families eligible to participate, 244 (67%) of the eligible families completed assessments at Time 1 (T1). At Time 2 (T2), approximately 3 years after the initial assessment, families were recontacted and asked to participate in a follow-up assessment. Of the 244 families that completed T1, 215 families (48% girls) completed assessments at T2, for a retention rate of 88%.

Demographic Characteristics

Mothers reported the adolescents' racial background as 83% European American; 16% mixed race, including African American heritage; and 1% Native American or Asian American or Pacific Islander. Mothers also reported that 7% of the adolescents were of Hispanic ethnicity. At T1 and T2, the majority (74%) of the adolescents lived with both biological parents and an older sibling in the same household. In 24% of families, mothers were divorced or separated from the fathers, and in 2%, the fathers had died. Twenty-one percent of the mothers had a high school education or less, 58% attended college, and 21% had pursued graduate or advanced professional training. Using the Hollingshead (1975) occupational codes, mothers with occupations as skilled, semiskilled, or unskilled manual workers were 37% at T1 and 32% at T2; clerical workers, small business owners, or minor professionals were 52% at T1 and 54% at T2; and administrators or executives, large business owners, or major professionals were 11% at T1 and 13% at T2. The median household before-tax incomes of the families, including child support and assistance, was \$50,000–\$59,999 at T1 and T2. The percentage of families that received financial public assistance or aid was 19% at T1 and 15% at T2.

Procedure

At T1, adolescents were, on average, 10.87 years of age ($SD = 0.59$) and their older siblings were, on average, 13.33 years of age ($SD = 0.45$); the adolescents participated in laboratory visits with their mothers, older siblings, and same-sex friends that they selected (in same grade or one grade ahead or behind), which included videotaped interviews, videotaped dyadic interactions, and completion of questionnaires. Families and friends were informed that the study was interested in how children make the transition from elementary to middle school and the relationships children have with their siblings and friends during this time. All adolescents had a friend participate at T1. At T2, adolescents were, on average, 13.60 years of age ($SD = 0.79$), and a similar laboratory visit was conducted. Teachers completed questionnaires on the adolescents and older siblings at T1 and T2. Participants were compensated for their time related to all assessments.

Measures

The multimethod and multisource data for adolescent delinquent peer affiliation and the multisource data available for older sibling risky behavior allowed for the forming of latent constructs. Potential indicators from the questionnaire data based on face validity and prior theoretical definitions were identified. Guided by the construct building strategy developed by Patterson and Bank (1986, 1989), scale items were checked for internal consistency before calculating the scale by taking the mean or sum of items. Scales or indicators were then examined for convergence with other indicators for the same construct. Indicators were standardized before combining into construct scores. Correlations among construct indicators and variables are in Table 1.

Parental monitoring at T1—A composite variable was derived from the mean of mother and adolescent reports of mother monitoring (9 items; Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Cronbach $\alpha = .79$ for mothers and $.77$ for adolescents). The correlation between mother and adolescent report of mother monitoring was $.69, p < .001$.

Adolescent pubertal maturation at T1—Pubertal maturation was measured using adolescent report on the Pubertal Development Scale (5 items; Petersen, Crockett, Richards, & Bower, 1988; Cronbach $\alpha = .70$ for girls and $.59$ for boys). An overall pubertal maturation score was computed by averaging across five items (body hair, skin change, growth spurt, voice change, and facial hair for boys; breast change and menarche for girls) to obtain a continuous score (higher scores = more pubertal maturation).

Older sibling risky behavior at T1—A construct for risky behavior was defined by three indicators: delinquent behavior, delinquent peer affiliation, and dating involvement. *Delinquent behavior* represented mother, teacher, and older sibling reports of delinquent behavior. Specifically, mothers reported on older sibling rule-breaking and aggressive behavior using the Child Behavior Checklist (32 items; CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001; Cronbach $\alpha = .89$), Elliot Delinquency Scale (9 items; Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985; Cronbach $\alpha = .61$). Teacher reports comprised of older sibling rule-breaking and aggressive behavior using the CBCL (30 items; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001; Cronbach $\alpha = .93$). Lastly, older siblings reported on their own delinquency using the Elliott Delinquency Scale (27 items; Elliott et al., 1985; Cronbach $\alpha = .91$). *Delinquent peer affiliation* was derived from older sibling report (21 items from the Describing Friends Questionnaire; e.g., How many of your friends drink beer or wine or hard liquor?; range = 0–5 friends; Capaldi & Patterson, 1989; Cronbach $\alpha = .94$; and 10 items from the Peer Network Interview; e.g., Number of friends who hang with a tough crowd?; Dishion et al., 2000; Cronbach $\alpha = .83$). Lastly, *dating involvement* was measured using self-report on one item: Have you ever dated or gone out? Of the older siblings, 53% had started dating or had gone on a date at T1.

Adolescent delinquent peer affiliation at T1—A construct for delinquent peer affiliation was defined by four indicators that represented mother, teacher, and adolescent reports of the degree to which the adolescent associated with friends who got in trouble, participated in antisocial activities, used substances, and observed antisocial talk during

adolescent and friend interaction. The first indicator was the mean of mothers' reports from the Describing Friends Questionnaire (6 items; Capaldi & Patterson, 1989; Cronbach α = .71 and 1 item from the CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001), the second indicator was the mean of teachers' reports (4 items from the Peer Involvement and Social Skills Questionnaire; Walker & McConnell, 1988; e.g., How often does this student associate with students who smoke cigarettes?; Cronbach α = .81; and 1 item from the CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001), the third indicator was the mean of adolescent report (21 items from the Describing Friends Questionnaire; Capaldi & Patterson, 1989; Cronbach α = .87; and 10 items from the Peer Network Interview; Dishion et al., 2000; Cronbach α = .83), and the fourth indicator was the mean of coder and staff ratings of observed antisocial talk during adolescent–friend interaction (8 items; Capaldi, Dishion, & Crosby, 1991; Cronbach α = .91). Coder and staff ratings comprised macro global ratings of (1) how much the adolescent and their friends talked about antisocial topics and activities, rule breaking and substance use, and swore in expressions for emphasis, and (2) how much the adolescent and their friends endorsed each other's delinquent talk with positive affect, support, and encouragement and acceptance.

Adolescent externalizing behavior at T1—The externalizing problem behavior indicator consisted of the mean of mother's and teacher's reports on the broadband externalizing scale comprised of rule-breaking and aggressive behavior of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; cruelty, bullying, or being mean to others; mother report = 32 items, Cronbach α = .89 and teacher report = 30 items, Cronbach α = .94; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). The correlation between mother and teacher report of adolescent externalizing behavior was .44, $p < .01$.

Adolescent dating involvement at T1 and T2—Dating involvement was measured using adolescent report on one item: Have you ever dated or gone out? Of the adolescents, 26% had started dating or had gone on a date at T1 and 56% at T2. Hereafter, we refer to T1 dating involvement as *early dating involvement* and T2 as *dating involvement*.

RESULTS

Analytic Plan

Modeling analyses were conducted to determine the association of the distal predictors at T1 with delinquent peer affiliation and, in turn, dating involvement. Indirect effects were formally tested for significance using the Sobel test (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Moderation by parental monitoring (of pubertal maturation and older sibling behavior) was examined by creating product terms and including those in the structural equation model (as predictors). It is reasonable to expect the relative salience of these predictors to vary by gender; however, we were underpowered to detect reliable differences by gender (given the dichotomous nature of dating involvement and the number of adolescents involved in dating at T1 and T2). All structural equation models were estimated using full information maximum likelihood and included participants with partial data (AMOS 16; Arbuckle, 2007). Missing data were assumed to be missing at random (MAR), conditional on covariates included in the model. Model-based likelihood methods that assume MAR are the recommended

standard (Schafer & Graham, 2002; Wothke, 2000). Missingness by variable ranged from 0% to 18% and was highest for the teacher-report measures at T2.

Goodness of fit for each model was assessed by examining the comparative fit index (CFI), root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), and χ^2/df ; according to conventional guidelines, a CFI of .95 and an RMSEA of .08 or less are considered to indicate a good fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999). According to Arbuckle and Wothke (1999), a χ^2/df ratio between 1 and 3 indicates a good fit. Formal mediation was tested using the Sobel test statistic.

Measurement Model

Before testing the hypothesized structural model, we assessed the measurement model for factor loadings (i.e., construct specification) and correlations among construct indicators (e.g., delinquent peers). All factor loadings on indicators for their respective constructs were significant and ranged from 0.49 to 0.62. Table 1, which provides the correlations between variables in the model, in general, supports the hypothesized model.

Structural Equation Model

In this model (Figure 1; $\chi^2/df = 2.10$, $p > .05$; RMSEA = .05, CFI = .94), lower levels of parental monitoring and higher levels of older sibling risky behavior at T1 were indirectly related to adolescent dating involvement at T2 through greater adolescent delinquent peer affiliation at T1 (Figure 1). In both cases, the indirect effects were significant while controlling for the effects of adolescent externalizing behavior at T1 on all model variables (older sibling risky behavior, $z = 2.75$; $p < .05$; of parental monitoring, $z = -0.26$, $p < .01$). Moderation effects of parental monitoring on adolescent pubertal maturation or older sibling risky behavior at T1 were not significant for dating involvement at T1 or T2. Lastly, although the direct effects of adolescent pubertal maturation at T1 were not significant for dating involvement at T2, pubertal maturation at T1 was positively associated with early dating involvement at T1.

DISCUSSION

Although dating involvement is a normative developmental milestone for most adolescents, involvement in dating before late adolescence has been associated with elevated risk for maladaptive outcomes. Indeed, the majority of literature on adolescent dating has focused on consequences of involvement, with surprisingly little attention to comprehensively examining determinants of timing (or onset) of dating involvement (Ivanova et al., 2012). The overarching goal of the current study was to advance our understanding of this significant developmental transition by jointly assessing the influence of family, peer, and biological factors on early adolescent dating involvement. More specifically, we proposed that more precocious pubertal maturation, older sibling risky behavior, and lower levels of parental monitoring would be associated with dating involvement by early adolescence, through delinquent peer affiliation as a candidate mediator. In a more novel contribution to the literature, we assessed the extent to which parental monitoring modifies the role of pubertal maturation and older sibling risky behavior (i.e., the risks posed by sibling risky

behavior and early pubertal maturation are amplified by poor parental monitoring). Importantly, we assessed these relations while controlling for adolescent externalizing behavior (T1) so as to reduce the possibility of spurious relations between family or biological predictors and onset of dating involvement during early adolescence (T2).

Few studies have assessed family influences on timing of dating involvement; this may be the only study to consider the role of older sibling behavior on timing of dating involvement. At first glance, this is surprising—given the correspondence in adaptive or maladaptive behavior between peer and sibling behavior (Low, Shortt, & Snyder 2012) and between siblings (e.g., substance use; Duncan, Duncan, & Strycker, 2006; Low, Shortt, & Snyder 2012; Low, Snyder, & Shortt, 2012). Furthermore, older siblings are uniquely positioned to shape the timing of dating involvement, given that they are often perceived as *role models* (Conger & Rueter, 1996). Previous research finds both additive and synergistic effects of siblings and parents on delinquent peer affiliation and problem behavior during early adolescence (Bank, Burraston, & Snyder, 2004), although others have found sibling influence can overpower the influence of parenting processes (Snyder et al., 2005). Our data suggest that both play a role and that poor parental monitoring and older sibling risky behaviors may accelerate adolescent dating involvement. This *additive* model is not altogether surprising given that *direct* parental supervision of sibling activities greatly diminishes during the transition to adolescence (Low, Shortt, & Snyder 2012; Shortt et al., 2003). Furthermore, as hypothesized, much of the association between family processes and dating involvement are explained by drift into delinquent peer affiliation (Low, Shortt, & Snyder 2012), suggesting that dating strongly reflects the characteristics and behaviors one one's close friends (Furman et al., 2009).

The current study hypothesized that earlier maturing adolescents would be more likely to be involved in dating by early adolescence, in part because of attraction to and affiliation with older aged peers (for whom dating is more normative). Our findings suggest an association between pubertal maturation and entry into dating may be most pronounced for those who are early daters, as these effects were only evident for those in late childhood who were transitioning to adolescence (average age, 11). These findings are consonant with prior research, indicating that the effects of pubertal maturation are most salient during the transition to adolescence and, thereafter, diminish in potency (Natsuaki, Biehl, & Ge, 2009). However, pubertal maturational levels were not related to dating involvement through delinquent peers and were not moderated by levels of parental monitoring (Brooks-Gunn & Warren, 1985; Crockett & Petersen, 1987). These models suggest that biological markers may play a direct role in the timing of dating involvement, at least early in adolescence. Perhaps these physical and hormonal changes are enough to catalyze autonomy seeking and sexual curiosity, regardless of delinquent peer group membership and reinforcement. These data should be interpreted in light of how gender, as a context, may modify these associations. Because of gender differences in the timing or sequence of pubertal changes, it is reasonable to postulate that physical maturation may have different sequelae for girls compared with boys, and puberty may remain important for boys transitioning to middle adolescence. Clearly, further studies are needed to examine how gender modifies the associations between pubertal timing and activities such as dating.

Aside from the diminishing role of biological maturation on timing of dating involvement, the current findings highlight the salient role of delinquent peer affiliation as a gateway to dating involvement. Taken together, these findings highlight the value of examining both social and biological factors, in concert, over time. In the current case, it appears that delinquent peers increase the likelihood of dating involvement before late adolescence, but, for very precocious developers, the social expectations or hormonal changes that accompany pubertal maturation may increase the likelihood of premature dating involvement, regardless of the characteristics of one's peers. However, given that both dating and pubertal maturation occur on a continuum, and at different paces for boys and girls, longitudinal, transactional data are needed to further elucidate this dynamic association.

The current study has notable strengths, including use of multiple reporters and multiple methods, and spans a 3-year developmental period. As such, we have a more reliable sampling of behaviors and increased confidence in the observed associations. This study is not without limitations, however. We were unable to formally test mediation without the availability of three data points, and the sample is somewhat limited in racial or ethnic diversity, which limits the generalizability. Further, we did not have sufficient power (sample size) to examine how gender may moderate the proposed pathways, obscuring potentially important gender differences. Further, the measurement of dating involvement was limited to a single item, which may hide important nuances between those who are more or less involved in dating. Lastly, we focused on only one candidate mediator; although robust, it is clearly not sufficient in explaining dating involvement. Despite these limitations, this study is important in expanding our understanding of the normative and nonnormative processes underlying entry into dating. The current study validates a growing body of research on the powerful influence of siblings, even in the context of parenting and biological factors, and supports a growing body of scholarship that suggests more precocious dating overlaps with problem or oppositional behaviors.

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FIGURE 1.

Adolescent dating involvement. ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$. *Note.* Correlations for adolescent externalizing behavior with T1 covariates are: $r = .14$, $p < .05$ with pubertal maturation; $r = -.34$, $p < .01$ for parental monitoring; $r = .36$, $p < .01$ for older sibling risky behavior; and $r = .15$, $p < .05$ for early dating involvement. Only significant covariance paths are otherwise shown for ease of viewing.

TABLE 1

Intercorrelations Among Construct Indicators

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Parental monitoring at T1	---								
2. Adolescent pubertal maturation at T1	-.08	---							
3. Older sibling risky behavior at T1	-.28**	.09	---						
4. Adolescent and friend antisocial talk at T1	-.19**	.08	.28**	---					
5. Adolescent delinquent peer affiliation at T1—parent report	-.36**	.07	.30**	.20**	---				
6. Adolescent delinquent peer affiliation at T1—self-report	-.36**	.06	.30**	.24**	.30**	---			
7. Adolescent delinquent peer affiliation at T1—teacher report	-.29**	.11	.29**	.33**	.37**	.32**	---		
8. Adolescent externalizing behavior at T1	-.34**	.15*	.36**	.38**	.50**	.27**	.57**	---	
9. Adolescent early dating involvement at T1	-.24**	.32**	.42**	.19**	.18*	.32*	.31**	.15*	---
10. Adolescent dating involvement at T2	-.17*	.11	.25*	.18**	.23**	.22**	.27*	.25**	.31**

**
 $p < .01$;*
 $p < .05$.