

The Romantic Relationships of Youth

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## Youths' Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships are central in youths' lives. High school students typically say that they interact more frequently with their romantic partners than they do with parents, siblings, or friends (Laursen & Williams, 1997). Romantic relationships are believed to play important roles in the development of an identity, the transformation of family relationships, the development of close relationships with peers, the development of sexuality, scholastic achievement and career planning (see Furman & Shaffer, 2003). As discussed subsequently, romantic relationships are closely linked to psychosocial adjustment (see also Furman & Rose, 2014).

This chapter reviews the scientific literature on youths' romantic relationships. We primarily focus on adolescents' romantic relationships, but we also discuss the developmental links between adolescent relationships and subsequent romantic relationships in early adulthood. Unfortunately, the existing literature is limited in several important ways. Few studies have specifically focused on same-sex romantic relationships; investigators have either constrained the samples to other-sex relationships or not differentiated between same-sex and other-sex relationships. Additionally, most research has been conducted in North America or Europe. Romantic experiences in other cultures are very different, especially in adolescence (see Brown, Larson, & Saraswathi, 2003). Similarly, we know relatively little about the romantic relationships of adolescents who are ethnic or racial minorities, or those from low socioeconomic status families. Certainly, many studies have tried to obtain samples that are representative in terms of ethnicity, race, or social class. However, these studies often do not examine differences among the ethnic/race or social class subgroups within the sample. Therefore,

the findings may apply to the general population, but not necessarily to specific ethnic, racial, or subgroups.

In the sections that follow, we discuss the main issues in the field, relevant theory, methods, and central research findings. We conclude by identifying a number of important topics for subsequent research and theory.

### **Main Issues**

#### **Definitions**

Following Collins' (2003) description, romantic relationships are defined as mutually acknowledged on-going voluntary interactions; these relationships typically have a distinctive intensity, which is usually marked by expressions of affection and sexual behavior. Although most social scientists would describe romantic relationships in similar terms, little attention has been given to how romantic relationships should be operationally defined. Sometimes investigators have simply asked participants if they have a romantic relationship, and the participants decide on the basis of their own definition. In other cases a brief description is provided or a minimal duration is required. To further complicate matters, it can be unclear whether a relationship is ongoing or if it has ended; almost half of young adults report breaking up with their partner and getting back together, often repeatedly—a phenomenon described as “relationship churning” (Halpern-Meehin, Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2012). Further attention should be given to the operational definition of romantic relationships as it affects estimates of the frequency and duration of romantic relationships and perhaps even the findings that are obtained (see Furman & Hand, 2006).

Although the present chapter focuses on romantic relationships, the study of romantic relationships entails more than examining the number and characteristics of specific dyadic romantic relationships. Individuals have cognitions and emotions about these relationships. Moreover, romantically relevant experiences occur outside these ongoing relationships. One common phenomenon today is “hooking up” or engaging in some sexual behavior on some occasion without an expectation of seeing the person subsequently. Fantasies, crushes, and one-sided attractions may also occur, as well as interactions with potential romantic partners. In this chapter I use the term *romantic experiences* to refer to this broad range of experiences, emotions and cognitions, including both those within and outside of particular relationships.

### **Prevalence of Dating and Romantic Relationships**

In a national survey conducted in 2012 in the United States, 42% of eighth graders, 60% of tenth graders, and 64% of twelfth graders said they were “dating” (Child Trends Databank, 2015). Similarly, in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, 44% of 14-year-olds, 55% of 16-year-olds, and 72% of 18-year-olds reported having a “special” romantic relationship in the past 18 months (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003). The proportions are even greater when more inclusive definitions of romantic relationships are used (see Furman & Hand, 2006). Asian-American youth are less likely to have a special romantic relationship than adolescents from other ethnic or racial groups (Carver, et al. 2003).

### **Dimensions of Romantic Relationships**

The study of such relationships requires a multi-faceted framework. Similar to Furman and Rose (2015), I focus on the following four dimensions: (a) presence and

number of relationships, (b) relationship features, including relationship qualities, cognitions and emotions, (c) characteristics of the self and partner, and (d) the history of the relationship.

The presence of a relationship and number of relationships simply refers to whether one has a romantic relationship, or the number of such relationships one has had. Sometimes the term romantic involvement is used to refer to the number and extent of such relationships.

Relationship features include the qualities of such relationships and individuals' cognitions and emotions about their relationships. Romantic relationship qualities can be characterized along four dimensions: (a) positive relationship qualities, such as intimacy and support, (b) negative relationship qualities, such as conflict, (c) relative status/power, and (d) comparisons of the relationship with other relationships, which may be reflected in features such as jealousy. Most research has focused on positive and negative features, and less is known about power/status or relationship comparisons.

Relationship cognitions and emotions not only include thoughts, feelings, and representations regarding a specific partner and that particular relationship, but also include thoughts, feelings, and representations of romantic partners and romantic relationships in general. Such cognitions would include constructs such as internal working models, romantic attachment styles, or rejection sensitivity.

The characteristics of the person and the partner refer to the personal attributes that each person brings to the relationship and their attributes during the course of the relationship. Not only is it important to consider the characteristics of the person and the

partner, but also the interplay between the two individuals' characteristics, such as their similarity.

The final dimension is the history of the relationship over time. Relationships change over time, and the current status of the relationship cannot be fully understood without knowing the history or development of the relationship over time. Despite the importance of history, this dimension has received little attention..

The recognition that romantic relationships vary along a number of dimensions leads quite naturally to three central issues that theorists and researchers have examined. First, what is the developmental course of romantic relationships? Second how are other close relationships associated with romantic relationships? Third, how are romantic relationships related to adjustment? The sections that follow focus on the theory and research relevant to these three central issues.

### **Theories of Romantic Relationships**

The theoretical formulations that have guided current research on adolescent romantic relationships ground romantic relationships in the normative social experiences of adolescence. Two traditions have been especially important: attachment theory and Sullivanian and behavioral systems theory.

#### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment relationships to parents are hypothesized to change in adolescence, because of the hormonal changes brought on by puberty (Ainsworth, 1989). Such changes push the adolescent to search for a peer, usually of the other sex, with whom to establish an attachment relationship. Ultimately, such a person is expected to become the primary attachment figure, replacing a parental attachment figure as uppermost in the

attachment hierarchy; however, the romantic partner is not usually expected to be the primary attachment figure until late adolescence or early adulthood (Ainsworth, 1989).

Romantic love is hypothesized to facilitate this change in the hierarchy as it promotes attachment between adult sexual partners (Shaver & Hazan, 1988).

Adult romantic attachments are recognized to be different from infant attachments to a caregiver in that the attachments are usually reciprocal, with each person being attached to the other and serving as an attachment figure for the other. Moreover, adult romantic attachments involve sexual behavior. To accommodate these features, Shaver and Hazan (1988) hypothesized that romantic love involves the integration of the attachment, caregiving and sexual/reproductive behavioral systems.

A key hypothesis of attachment theory is that an individual's experience with parent has a major effect on their later affectional bonds. Specifically, individual differences in how romantic love is experienced and manifested are due to differences in past attachment. As discussed subsequently, empirical research provides evidence of such continuities.

### **Sullivanian and Behavioral Systems Theory**

Sullivan (1953) hypothesized that there were five basic needs that motivated individuals to bring about certain interpersonal situations: (a) tenderness, (b) companionship, (c) acceptance, (d) intimacy, and (e) sexuality. Each need is associated with a key relationship that typically fulfills this need (Buhrmester & Furman, 2003). The need for tenderness emerges in infancy and is met through relationships with parents. The need for companionship emerges in early childhood. Initially companionship occurs with adults, but that need is subsequently fulfilled through interchanges with peers. As

children become increasingly involved with peers in middle childhood, the need for acceptance by them becomes important. In preadolescence, the need for intimate exchange emerges and results in the establishment of “chumships,” which are typically close same-sex friendships. Chumships serve as a foundation for later, more sexually charged intimate relationships with romantic partners. With the onset of puberty at adolescence, sexuality or true genital lust emerges; moreover, adolescents gradually become interested in achieving intimacy with a romantic partner that is similar to the intimacy achieved in chumships. The task of late adolescence and early adulthood is to establish an enduring relationship.

Building upon the insights of attachment and Sullivanian theorists, Furman and Wehner's (1994) behavioral systems theory proposes that romantic partners become major figures in the functioning of the attachment, caregiving, affiliative, and sexual/reproductive behavioral systems. The attachment, caretaking, and sexuality systems have received considerable theoretical attention by attachment theorists, but the affiliative system has not. The affiliative system refers to the biological predisposition to interact with known others, and is hypothesized to underlie the capacities to cooperate, collaborate with another, and co-construct a relationship. Affiliation and sexuality are expected to be the central systems in romantic relationships initially, but eventually the attachment and caregiving system become salient as well.

Behavioral systems theory expects a moderate degree of consistency between romantic relationships and relationships with peers and parents. At the same time romantic relationships are not expected to be simple replications of other relationships because romantic relationships typically differ in some respects from those with friends



or parents. Moreover, the partner and his or her experiences affect the nature of the relationship as well.

### **Other Theories**

In addition to these theories, symbolic interactionism (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006), developmental task theory (McCormick, Kuo, & Masten (2011), and life-span developmental systems perspectives (e.g. Capaldi, Shortt, & Kim, 2005) have guided some research. Moreover, some theories, such as social exchange theory and evolutionary theory, have been commonly used in the study of adult romantic relationships, but not in the study of adolescent relationships to date (Laursen & Jensen-Campbell, 1999). More work guided by theory would help accumulate a more systematic body of knowledge.

### **Methods**

Many of the methods used for studying youth's romantic relationships are similar to those used for studying other peer relationships. Self-report measures have been administered in the majority of studies; sometimes interviews have been used to assess experiences and cognitive representations. A small number of studies have examined adolescent couples' patterns of interactions (see Furman & Simon, 2006; Galliher, Welsh, Rostosky, & Kawaguchi, 2004; Harper & Welsh, 2007). Until recently almost no studies have used time-intensive measures, such as daily diaries, but such work is beginning to appear. Although common in research on adult romantic relationships, experimental studies of adolescent romantic relationships are relatively rare (see Ha, Overbeek, & Engels (2010) for an exception.)

Most commonly, data have been collected from only one person in the relationship, but in some cases, both members of the dyad have been included. Actor-partner interdependence models (APIM), a type of structural equation modeling, have been used to examine how the characteristics of each person affect themselves and their partner. For example, APIM models revealed that *middle* adolescents' cognitive romantic relationships affect their own behaviors in the relationship (actor effects) and their partners' behavior toward them (partner effects; Furman & Simon, 2006). Similarly, both genders' affiliative experiences are linked with better conflict resolution skills (actor effects), and females with more frequent affiliative experiences have partners with better conflict negotiation behavior in middle adolescence (partner effects, Seiffge-Krenke & Burk, 2013). The evidence of partner effects underscores the importance of studying romantic dyads as relationships (Furman & Rose, 2015).

### **Key Studies**

#### **Development of Romantic Relationships**

Approximately half of early adolescents report having at least one current other-sex "crush", which is characterized by unilateral romantic or sexual attractions or fantasies (Bowker, Spencer, Thomas, & Gyoerkoe, 2012). In early adolescence such crushes are more common than romantic relationships or even other-sex friendships. Although common, little is known about the significance of having a crush or being the object of a crush.

Heterosexual romantic relationships themselves usually emerge out of interchanges in the general peer groups (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004). Typically adolescents interested in the other gender first engage in affiliative activities in

a mixed-gender group context (e.g., parties). Second, they begin to go out on a “date” with someone as part of a group. Finally, they begin to form dyadic romantic relationships. Interestingly, such relationships are unlikely to be with other-sex friends from their closest group of peers (Kreager, Molloy, Moody, & Feinberg, 2015).

Overtures to establish a romantic relationship with a friend may be less common as they come at a risk to the friendship and may threaten the cohesion of their peer group.

As they grow older, a higher proportion of adolescents have relationships (Carver, et al, 2003), and they increase in duration (Lantagne & Furman, 2016). Many begin to cohabit or marry. Integrating career plan and life plans with those of a partner is thought to be key for establishing a long-term commitment to a life partner (Shulman & Connolly, 2013).

Recent longitudinal work has documented age changes in the quality of romantic relationships. Specifically, positive interactions and feelings of passionate love increase with age, as does one's influence on the partner (Giordano, Longmore, Manning, & Flanigan, 2012). Such age changes depend on the length of the relationship, however (Lantagne & Furman, 2016). For example, support increase with age in relationships that are less than two years in length. In contrast, adolescent relationships of two years or appear to be as supportive as young adults' long-term relationships, although such lengthy relationships are atypical and tumultuous in adolescence. Such findings indicate that not only do relationships develop as the participants grow older, but they develop over the course of the relationship—a topic that has received much less attention.

Although the preceding paragraphs describe the developmental changes in romantic relationships that commonly occur, there is not a single pattern of romantic

development. Adolescents vary in when began to establish a romantic relationship; for instance, those with a mature physical appearance are more likely to have romantic relationships at an earlier age (Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner, & Collins, 2004). Similarly, the degree of romantic involvement varies as well. For example, physical attractiveness and satisfaction with one's attractiveness are predictive of having romantic relationships (Gordon, Crosnoe, & Wang, 2013; Furman & Winkles, 2010). Thus, some youth may have relatively few or intermittent romantic experiences, whereas others may be seeing someone or have a romantic relationship most all of the time. Moreover, approximately half of adolescents who had previously had a romantic relationship reported having intentionally avoiding being in a romantic relationship for a few months or longer (Byers, O'Sullivan, & Brotto, 2016).

The nature of these romantic experiences also varies. Two key dimensions of romantic experiences have been identified by several investigators (Dhariwal, Connolly, Paciello, & Caprara, 2009; Furman & Winkles, 2010). The first is casual or exploratory. Those who are high on the causal/exploratory dimension have multiple relationships, on and off relationships, breakups, and a high diversity of activities. Those high on the serious/consolidation dimension have long, more serious relationships in which a high proportion of time they are in love and engage in frequent sexual activity. The two dimensions are relatively independent of each other; some individuals primarily have one kind of relationship, whereas others may have both, thus underscoring the potential diversity of experiences.

Six different types of dyads in middle adolescence have also been identified: (a) commensurate relationships, in which both males and females report high levels of

affiliation or friendship and high levels of romantic feelings and preoccupation with their partners, (b) affiliative relationships, in which both are high in affiliation but low in romantic feelings and preoccupation with their partners, (c) romantic dyads, in which both members are high on romantic feelings and preoccupation, but average or low on affiliation, (d) nonlove relationships, in which both members are low in affiliation, romantic feelings and preoccupation, (e) female-oriented relationships, in which females are average in affiliation and romantic feelings and preoccupation, whereas males are low on both, (f) male-oriented relationships, which is the reverse of female-oriented relationships (Seiffge-Krenke & Burk, 2013). Thus, although romantic relationships tend to change in certain ways with development, the different dimensions of romantic involvement and different types of dyads underscore the heterogeneity of romantic relationships.

### **Parent-Child Relationships and Romantic Relationships**

Consistent with attachment theory, parent-child relationships as early as the toddler years are linked with subsequent experiences with peers and romantic partners. Specifically, secure attachment in infancy is related to childhood peer competence, which predicts adolescent friendship quality, which then predicts romantic relationship quality of romantic relationships in early adulthood (Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007). Similarly, those who are more secure with respect to proximity seeking in infancy have less anxious romantic relationship styles in late adolescence (Fraley, Roisman, Booth-LaForce, Owen, & Holland, 2013).

Maternal sensitivity in early and middle childhood is also related to higher-quality romantic relationships in middle adolescence (Roisman, Booth-LaForce, Cauffman,

Spieker, & The NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2009). At the same time, higher maternal sensitivity is also related to less involvement in romantic relationships in middle adolescence, suggesting that substantial romantic involvement in adolescence may be premature (see Furman & Collibee, 2014).

Parent-child relationships in adolescence also influence subsequent romantic relationships. Nurturant-involved parenting in adolescence is predictive of warmth, support, and low hostility toward romantic partners in early adulthood (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000). Marital hostility during middle adolescence is also predictive of hostility in romantic relationships in late adolescence (Stocker & Richmond, 2007). Middle adolescents' cognitive representations of relationships with parents also predict adolescents and young adults' cognitive representations of their romantic relationships (Furman & Collibee, in press). In sum, substantial evidence exists linking relationships with parents throughout childhood and adolescence to subsequent romantic relationships.

### **Peer Relationships and Romantic Relationships**

Peers also play a fundamental role in the development of romantic relationships. Middle childhood and adolescent friendship qualities are predictive of romantic relationship qualities and cognitive representations of romantic relationships in late adolescence and early adulthood (Fraley, et al., 2013; Simpson, et al., 2007). Similarly adolescents' cognitive representations of their friendships are predictive of their romantic representations in late adolescence and early adulthood (Furman & Collibee, in press). The characteristics of one's friends matter as well. Having friends or peers who engage in dating violence or other forms of aggression predicts engaging in dating violence oneself (see Capaldi, Noble, Shortt, & Kim, 2012).

The general peer group both provides opportunities for developing romantic relationships and makes it more challenging for some youth to develop such relationships. Early adolescents who are liked by many of their peers (including “controversial youth” who are liked by some and disliked by other peers) are more likely to have romantic relationships than other youth. On the other hand, “neglected youth” (i.e., those who receive few liked-most and few liked-least nominations) are less likely to have romantic peer (Miller, Lansford, et al., 2009). Having a large network of same-sex peers in middle adolescence is predictive of having a large network of other-sex peers concurrently, which in turn is predictive of having a romantic relationship subsequently (Connolly, Furman & Konarski, 2001). Finally, those who frequently engage in indirect aggression are more likely than their peers to have a romantic relationship subsequently, whereas those who are frequently victimized by their peers are less likely. Indirect aggression may serve as a means of increasing one’s status in the peer group by reducing the status of others, whereas victimization may stem from a lack of status in the group (Arnocky & Vaillancourt (2012).

### **Continuity in Romantic Experiences**

Early romantic experiences forecast subsequent ones. Those who have fewer romantic partners and higher-quality romantic relationships in middle adolescence are more likely to have higher-quality romantic relationships in early adulthood (Madsen & Collins, 2011; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Those who are involved in a long term relationship in adolescence are more likely to get married in early adulthood than those who are only casually dating or not dating; those who are not dating will have had fewer relationships by their mid-twenties and will be less likely to be cohabiting (Meier & Allen, 2009).

Finally, representations of romantic relationships in middle adolescence are predictive of representations in late adolescence and early adulthood (Furman & Collibee, in press).

Thus, even though romantic relationships are likely to change substantially from adolescence to early adulthood, early romantic experiences in romantic relationships have an enduring effect on the nature of romantic relationships in early adulthood.

### **Networks of Relationships**

Most research has focused on one type of relationship, but some work has examined multiple types of relationships or the networks of close relationships. In general, the quality of different relationships tends to covary. For example, levels of support in adolescents' relationships with friends, romantic partners, and mothers are moderately related (Laursen, Furman, & Mooney, 2006). In fact, the three most common configurations of networks are those in which levels of support are high in all three relationships, those in which support is low in all three, or those in which support is low in relationships with friends and mothers, and the adolescent does not have a romantic relationship. To the degree that the characteristics of different relationships or relationship partners are similar, one would expect them to have similar influences. At the same time, each may also provide a unique contribution to romantic relationships and adjustment. For example, representations of relationships with parents, friends, and romantic partners all provide unique contributions to the prediction of subsequent romantic representations after the other representations are controlled for (Furman & Collibee, in press). Similarly, the characteristics of different relationships or relationship partners may all provide unique contributions to the prediction of adjustment and



development. For example, friend and partner delinquency and parents' deviance all contribute to the prediction of adolescent delinquency.

Although it is clear that different types of close relationships contribute to the development, one of the current challenges in the field is to identify the precise nature of the links among the characteristics of different relationships. As noted previously, some investigators have tried to identify mediators of the association between early experiences with parents and subsequent romantic relationships. Such processes may include friendship qualities (Simpson et al., 2007) or adolescent parent-child relationships (Overbeek, Stattin, Vermulst, Ha, & Engels, 2007).

More complex links also exist, such as moderating effects. For example, having deviant friends is associated with higher rates of perpetrating dating violence, but this link is stronger when parents support aggressive solutions to conflict (Miller, Gorman-Smith, Sullivan, Orpinas, & Simon, 2009). The relative significance of the relationship also plays a role. For example, late adolescents and young adults who make the transition from best friend to romantic partner as the primary intimate relationship show greater commitment to their partner and display fewer emotional problems (Meeus, Branje, van der Valk, & de Wied, 2007). Moreover, stronger parental support in late adolescence was not associated with greater commitment to a romantic partner, but it was in early adulthood. This pattern suggests that the links between relationships with parents and romantic partners become stronger when the romantic relationships become more significant.

Finally, this section has emphasized the importance of cross-relationship links and the contributions of multiple types of relationships. Yet it is important to remember that

relationships are self-organizing systems. Thus, the qualities, cognitions, emotions, and interactions within a romantic relationship are tightly linked to one another and indeed may be the central predictors of each other. For example, associations between representations of one type of relationship and interactions in another type of relationship do occur, but they are attenuated when representations of the same type of relationship are included in the prediction of interactions in that type of relationship (Furman, Stephenson, & Rhoades, 2014).

### **Adjustment**

Being involved in a romantic relationship is associated with depressive symptoms in adolescence, particularly for early adolescents and females (see Davila, 2008).

Similarly, romantic involvement is linked to externalizing symptoms and substance use in adolescence (Furman & Collibee, 2014). Indeed, extensive romantic involvement along with other indices of pseudomature behavior in early adolescence is predictive of poorer adjustment in early adulthood (Allen, Schad, Oudekerk, & Chango, 2014). The associations between romantic involvement in early adolescence and poor adjustment are a function of two different factors. Early adolescents who become more involved in romantic relationships are not as well adjusted as their peers; romantic involvement in early adolescence is stressful and can lead to problems in adjustment (see Davila, 2008; Furman & Rose, 2014).

On the other hand, romantic involvement in early adulthood is associated with lower levels of internalizing and externalizing symptoms and substance use. Precocious involvement in adolescence may undermine development, but romantic involvement in early adulthood can promote adjustment when such involvement is a salient

developmental task. Consistent with this idea, higher quality romantic relationships are associated with better adjustment in both adolescence and early adulthood, but the associations are often stronger in early adulthood (Collibee & Furman, in press; Meeus, et al., 2007; van Dulmen, Gony, Haydon, & Collins, 2008).

The characteristics of romantic partners are also linked to adjustment. Those with delinquent partners are more likely to be delinquent themselves (Lonardo, Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2009). Similarly, partners' substance use predicted the adolescents' substance use not only concurrently, but also a year later and six years later (Gudinos-Miller, Lewis, Tong, Tu, & Aalsma, 2012). At the same time, it is unclear what is responsible for the similarity in the adolescents' and partners' delinquency and substance use in these studies. Adolescents could have chosen partners with similar characteristics (a selection effect); they could have become similar because of their interactions with each other (a socialization effect); finally, those who were not similar may have been more likely to break up (a deselection effect). In most of the research, it is unclear which process or processes led to the similarity because the adolescent and partner were already in the relationship at the onset of the study. However, some work has assessed early adolescent and romantic partner adjustment both prior to and after their relationship had begun (Simon, Aikens, & Prinstein, 2008). Before the relationship, the adolescent and partner are similar in depressive symptoms, indicating they had selected similar partners. Some adolescents are also socialized in the romantic relationship. Those who are high in depression and date less depressed partners become less depressed than they were before. Similar socialization effects are found for

relational aggression and victimization. In effect, those who date high functioning partners changed more.

Friends of romantic partners, as well as romantic partners, may be influential (Kreager & Haynie, 2011). In particular, friends of romantic partners' drinking is predictive of adolescents' drinking. These associations hold after taking into account adolescents' prior drinking, suggesting that this is not a selection effect. Instead, romantic partners may serve as a bridge or liaison, connecting adolescents to new peers who promote changes in drinking behaviors, which spread across peer networks.

Romantic partners may not only introduce individuals to new friends, but also affect the roles old friends play in adolescents' lives. In particular, the similarity between friends' alcohol use decreases when one of them develops a romantic relationship; this change suggests that romantic partners may reduce the influence friends may have on adolescents and perhaps take their place in some respects (DeLay, Laursen, Bukowski, Kerr, & Stattin, 2016).

**Dating Violence.** Dating violence is a serious and very common problem. Approximately one in four women and one in five men experience physical violence in a relationship (Desmarais, Reeves, Nicholls, Telford, & Fiebert (2012). Approximately half of intimate partner physical violence is bidirectional (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2012). In a recent national survey, 14% of adolescent women and 6% of men reported being sexually coerced in the last 12 months (Kann, et al. 2014).

Cyber dating abuse or technology-assisted adolescent dating violence (TAADV) is also quite common. Estimates typically range from 5% to 15% for perpetration and 10% to 30% for victimization (Stonard, Bowen, Lawrence, & Price, 2014). Most

commonly, TAADV consists of using a social networking account without permission . Other forms include receiving texts/emails soliciting unwanted sexual acts, being pressured to send sexually explicit photographs, receiving threatening text messages, or receiving intimidating numbers of text messages/emails (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, & Lachman, 2013). Importantly, victims of TAADV are more likely to also have experienced dating abuse; perpetrators are more likely to report perpetrating other forms of abuse (Stonard, et al. 2014).

Both physical and psychological violence affect the psychological well-being, physical health and health behavior, particularly women's (Lawrence, Orengo-Aguayo, Langer, & Brock, 2012). Numerous risk factors have been identified. These include: violence between parents, experience of child abuse, family conflicts, antisocial behavior, and substance use problems, associating with aggressive peers, minority group status, acculturation stress and other types of stress (Capaldi et al., 2012). Hostility toward women and beliefs that violence can be justified are important proximal predictors. On the other hand, parental monitoring, involvement, and support are protective factors as is higher friendship quality. Less attention has been given to the nature of romantic relationships in which dating violence occurs. Existing work indicates such relationships are characterized by more verbal conflict, greater jealousy by both the adolescent and partner, more infidelity by both, and feelings of less power by the perpetrator. Interestingly, they do not differ from other romantic relationships in terms of feelings of love, self-disclosure, and perceived partner caring, which may account for why these relationships often continue after episodes of violence (Giordano, Sotto, Manning, & Longmore, 2010).

Not only has research been conducted on risk factors, but also several programs have been developed to prevent or reduce adolescent dating violence. A meta-analysis of school-based programs revealed that they lead to increases in knowledge about teen dating violence and less acceptance of teen dating violence. Changes in dating violence were less apparent, although relatively few studies had examined such changes (De La Rue, Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2016).

### **Future Directions**

A number of topics have been received relatively little attention and would be important issues to examine in future research. These include research on sexual minorities' relationships and same-sex relationships, biological processes, the media and romantic relationships, and culture. The following sections summarize our current state of knowledge regarding these issues.

### **Sexual Minorities and Same-sex Relationships**

In the last decade, the amount of research on LGBT youth has increased significantly (see Diamond, Bonner, & Dickson, 2015). Most of this work has focused on sexual attraction, behavior, or identity; little attention has been given to LGBT's romantic relationships per se. Today, more LGB youth have same-sex romantic relationships than before (see Russell, Watson, & Muraco, 2012); the precise proportions of LBG youth who have such relationships varies, however, as a function of the location of the sample, how it was recruited (e.g. community-based vs. through organizations for LGBT youth), and how recent the data were collected. Little is known about the characteristics of these relationships, although it appears that male same-sex relationships

may be more likely to develop from sexual encounters, whereas female same-sex relationships may be more likely to develop from friendships and may be closer and more intimate.

Many LGB youth report having other-sex romantic relationships as well; such relationships may provide a means of exploring their sexual identity or a way of concealing their same-sex attraction (see Russell, et al., 2012). The fact that many LGB youth have or have had other-sex romantic relationship also illustrates why it is important to not equate one's sexual identity with the gender of one's romantic partner. Moreover, the largest group of individuals who report same-sex attractions are individuals who describe themselves as mostly heterosexual; individuals with exclusive same-sex attractions are much less common than individuals with nonexclusive attractions (see Diamond, et al. 2015). Moreover, sexual behavior in adolescence does not appear to be a reliable predictor of sexual orientation in adulthood; indeed, most sexual minorities, especially women, report substantial changes in their sexual attractions, behavior and identity over time (see Diamond, et al., 2015). Clearly, much remains to be learned about the development of same-sex relationships.

### **Genetic Influences**

Limited work has examined gene and gene by environment influences on youth's romantic relationships. Recently Boyce and Ellis (2005) proposed some individuals may be programmed by their genes to be more sensitive to environmental influences than others are (Ellis, Boyce, Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van Ijzendoorn, M. H. (2011). Evidence of such differential susceptibility is reflected by gene by environmental Cinteractions. Research on GABRA2, a gene associated with externalizing problems, is

consistent with this idea. For youth who had experienced harsh parenting, those with GABRA2 minor alleles displayed more aggression toward their romantic partner than those with GABRA2 major alleles did. For youth who had experienced supportive parenting, those with GABRA2 minor alleles displayed less aggression toward their romantic partner than those with GABRA2 major alleles did (Simons, et al., 2013). In another study, however, little evidence was found for either gene or gene by environment influences on late adolescent romantic attachment styles (Fraley et al., 2013). Clearly, more work using twin studies and molecular genetic techniques is needed. Twin studies would also provide information about nonshared environments as discrepancies between monozygotic twins may stem from nonshared environmental influences.

### **Media**

Youth devote a substantial amount of their time to media use. Indeed, a significant amount of research has examined sexual behavior and media influences (see Diamond, et al., 2015). However, half the time individuals are depicted having sexual intercourse on network television, they are not in a romantic relationship (Kunkel, Eyal, Finnerty, Biely, & Donnerstein, 2005); thus, the research on sexual behavior and the media does not really provide us a good picture of media influences on sexual behavior in romantic relationships. Work on the depiction of other aspects of romantic relationships on television is limited as well.

The Internet and smart phones now provide new means of communicating with their romantic partners, yet we know little about new media and romantic relationships. About 15% of adolescents' romantic relationships are initiated online (Blunt-Vinti, Wheldon, McFarlane, Brogan, & Buhi, 2016); interestingly, online relationships that



transition into in person relationship tend to be less sexually and romantically satisfying than those that are initiated in person.

Qualitative research suggests that new media may influence the nature of romantic relationships in a number of ways (Itō et al., 2010). Social network sites may increase opportunities for meeting potential romantic partners, which may be particularly important for GLBT youth. Because the media allows one to readily be in frequent, if not constant, contact with a partner, individuals may expect partners to always be available. One can carefully compose messages before sending them, but once sent, a lasting record of the communication may exist. Communications are also often readily accessible by friends and partners (and sometimes parents). Romantic partners, particularly suspicious or jealous partners, may find it relatively easy to learn what their partners are doing. At the same time, misperceptions are likely to be quite common, as the channels of communication in digital media are often limited. Finally, relationships can be ended quite indirectly, though it may be relatively easy to keep track of or even stalk an ex-partner. As one can see from these qualitative descriptions, the new media may have a significant impact on romantic relationships, but the existing quantitative work has been limited and has focused on young adults' relationships, not adolescents'.

Some empirical work has examined "sexting" or sending nude or nearly nude images via electronic media. In a 2010 national survey in the United States 2.5% of preadolescents and adolescents reported sexting and 7% said they received one (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2012). Youth also use electronic media in ways that promote sexual health. For example, approximately half of adolescents use electronic technology discuss sexual health with their partners. Sexually active youth

who use such technology to discuss condoms or birth control are over three times more likely to consistently use condoms than those who do not discuss such topics electronically (Widman, Nesi, Choukas-Bradley, & Prinstein, 2014).

### **Culture**

. As noted previously many contemporary studies are relatively representative in terms of at least race and ethnicity. Many of these studies, however, did not examine the different racial/ethnic subgroups in the sample, and may simply have controlled for any differences. Some studies have been conducted on a specific ethnic or racial groups, most typically African-American or Latinos. The topics, however, have been relatively disparate, making it difficult to integrate findings into a coherent picture.

Similarly, most research has been conducted in North America and secondarily in Europe and the work that has been done in other societies has examined different, relatively unrelated topics. Moreover, most investigators, particularly those in North America and Europe, do not discuss how their society's culture could influence their results. In fact, even such descriptions will not be sufficient to understand the role of cultural influences; work is needed that explicitly measures culture processes. For example, one study examined the influence of being socialized in Westernized contexts by comparing late adolescent Indian youth in homeland single-sex colleges, Indian youth in coeducational colleges in India, and Indian youth whose parents had immigrated to Canada (Dhariwal & Connolly, 2013). Those attending college in Canada engaged in more romantic activities and had more autonomy in choosing their partner. Those attending coeducational schools in India had more autonomy than those in single-sex schools. The three groups also differed in their consumption of social and western media,

the number of other-sex friends, and their friends' expectations regarding how autonomous their decision making should be. When the differences in media consumption and friendship were taken into account, the group differences in romantic activities and autonomy were no longer present. Thus, the exposure to Western media and friendships may promote acculturation and the greater romantic involvement of youth in such contexts. Further research such as this is needed, particularly work on how processes such as racism or ethnic identity influence romantic relationships.

### **Conclusions**

At the time the first edition of this handbook was published, the study of romantic relationships had just begun to blossom, having essentially started in the decade before. Happily, further progress has been made in the decade or so since that time. The conclusions drawn from early cross-sectional research has been strengthened by studies from a number of long-standing longitudinal projects. Sophisticated analytic tools, such as multi-level modeling and the numerous forms of structural equation modeling, are more commonly used, shedding new light on old issues. As a consequence, our understanding of the developmental course(s) of romantic relationships is greater. We also have a better picture of the role of parents, peers, and early romantic relationships on romantic relationships. Work on romantic relationships and adjustment has also flourished; indeed, the topic of adolescent dating violence has gone from being virtually ignored to perhaps the most studied topic in the field. At the same time, a number of topics that are beginning to be studied more extensively in other areas of peer relations remain relatively neglected with regard to youths' romantic relationships. Such topics include the role of biological processes, media and culture, as well as studies of LGBT

youth and same-sex relationships. Perhaps by the time a third edition of this Handbook would be expected to appear, we will have a better understanding of these topics as well as continue to deepen our understanding of the traditional topics in the field.

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