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The language of love: Romantic relationships in adolescence

Lauren Berger, Dana McMakin
and Wyndol Furman

Effective communication is often believed to be a hallmark of successful relationships. For example, married individuals in the United States maintain that communication is the single most important aspect of their relationship (Baucom *et al.*, 1990). Couples who communicate well also report higher satisfaction in their relationship, whereas distressed couples often lack good methods of communicating (Baucom *et al.*, 1990). In fact, communication is such a significant component of adult romantic relationships that researchers can accurately classify 80 percent of couples as being distressed or nondistressed by simply watching how they communicate about a conflict (Gottman *et al.*, 1977; Gottman, 1979; Weiss & Heyman, 1990). Additionally, couples' communication about positive events, such as each other's good news, is another important factor in determining long-term relationship satisfaction (Reiss & Gable, 2003). Taken together, these lines of research imply that relationship satisfaction is less determined by the sheer occurrence of conflict or positive events in the lives of couples, and more related to the ability of romantic partners to communicate successfully about important life issues.

Despite striking evidence for the importance of communication in adult couple relationships, scant research has examined communication in adolescent romantic relationships. Until recently, almost no work had been conducted on any aspect of adolescent romantic relationships. Researchers had shied away from studying romance in adolescence for several reasons: these relationships

are often short-lived and difficult to study, some researchers questioned how important these early romantic experiences were, and few theories existed to guide the work (Brown *et al.*, 1999).

Today, however, we know that romantic relationships are central to young peoples' day-to-day lives. In the context of heterosexual socialization, fifteen- to eighteen-year-old U.S. high school girls interact or talk with boys almost ten hours a week, and boys interact or talk with girls about five hours a week (Richards *et al.*, 1998). In addition, girls think about boys another eight hours a week, and boys think about girls an additional five to six hours. Of course, these numbers are only self-reported approximations; some of these interactions with the other sex are with potential (vs. actual) romantic partners and some with other-sex friends. These estimates also do not include same-sex attractions or recently developed, popular methods of communication such as the internet. Furthermore, we suspect that the availability of cell phones is likely to have increased the amount of contact among young people in recent years [see McKay *et al.*—chapter 11, this volume].

Although it is difficult to get a *precise* estimate of how often young people are communicating with romantic partners, the point is clear. Young people spend a large amount of time focused on romantic relationships.[2] Dating and romantic relationships are principal topics of conversation among young people and their peers (Eder, 1993), and high school students interact more frequently with romantic partners than they do with parents, siblings or friends (Laursen & Williams, 1997). Moreover, emotional feelings about romantic relationships occupy the forefront of young people's minds. Young people actually have strong positive emotions and strong negative emotions about the other sex more often than they do about same-sex peers, family or school (Larson *et al.*, 1999).

Although we know that communication occurs frequently between young people and their romantic partners, we know very little about how communication is characterized in these emerging relationships. In this chapter, we discuss what is known and what we still think needs to be done to increase understanding of romantic relationships in adolescence. Although we believe that our remarks are for the most part applicable to both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, we point out instances when they seem applicable to only heterosexual attraction. We want to note at the outset that our comments are also limited to romantic relationships in industrialized Western societies, and may be even more constrained to specific countries or ethnic groups. Unfortunately, we know remarkably little about cultural differences in adolescent romantic relationships, but we expect that they are likely to be substantial.

Our chapter is guided by a *behavioral systems* approach to studying close relationships (see Furman & Wehner, 1994). Behavioral systems theory posits that relationships can serve four primary functions: (a) affiliation, (b) sexual/reproductive needs, (c) attachment and (d) caregiving. Each of these functions can be met by several relationships, yet certain relationships tend to fulfill a young person's primary affiliative, sexual, attachment, or caregiving needs. Which relationship—parent, friend or romantic partner—serves as primary in these domains changes over the course of the lifespan. For example, parents are primary attachment figures in childhood, but romantic partners are individuals' primary attachment figures in adulthood (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994). We find this approach valuable because it provides a framework for defining the principal functions of close relationships, and for comparing and contrasting different types of relationships at different times in life.

We propose that communication plays a central role in the functioning of the four behavioral systems in adolescent romantic relationships. The quality and characteristics of communication between young people and their romantic partners may facilitate or inhibit the functioning of each of these domains. For example, just as open, supportive communication between parents and young people is related to a more secure parent attachment relationship (Kobak *et al.* 1993; see also Noller—chapter 12, this volume), sensitive, empathic communication is essential if young people are to serve as caregivers or sources of support for their romantic partners (Reis & Patrick, 1996).

In the sections that follow we explore communication in each of these four domains. We discuss how existing research about these behavioral systems informs our understanding of communication in adolescent romantic relationships, and we also make suggestions for further studies to explore. In addition, we consider how communication in adolescent romantic relationships compares to communication in young people's relationships with parents and friends. Similarly, we describe developmental changes in behavioral systems and discuss how such developmental changes may be associated with changes in young people's communication with romantic partners.

In addition to examining communication in behavioral systems, we also discuss communication regarding two other domains: (a) conflict and (b) relationship status. Conflict and relationship status are essential issues to be negotiated in the course of young people's relationships with romantic partners. Importantly, young people's ability to communicate and resolve these issues has implications for the functioning of the behavioral systems.

Behavioral systems and romantic relationships

Affiliation

Affiliation refers to the companionship and stimulation components of a relationship (Furman, 1998; Weiss, 1998). Affiliative behaviors include spending time together, engaging in joint activities, and sharing interests. Most of the time, affiliation involves having fun and is characterized by positive affect. To be able to affiliate effectively with a boyfriend or girlfriend, communication skills such as conversational and narrative skills are important. Instrumental communication skills, such as being able to assert one's wishes and negotiating a mutually satisfactory activity, are also significant. Because affiliative behaviors mainly occur when individuals are in a positive or at least neutral mood, communication may be relatively easy as compared to communication in other contexts. Affiliative topics of communication are not likely to be highly emotionally laden or sensitive. A positive mood also increases creativity and mental flexibility (Isen, 1999), which may improve the ability of young people to engage each other in conversation and determine mutually satisfactory activities. Anyone who can remember the sounds and scenes in a school cafeteria knows that affiliative communication is certainly creative, boisterous and engaging to those involved.

In middle childhood and early adolescence, young people learn and practice these skills in the context of same-sex friend and peer relations, which are the most salient affiliative relationships during these developmental periods. As heterosexual young people approach adolescence, they become more interested in the other sex and begin to interact and communicate with them more often. We know less about the developmental course for young gay, lesbian or bisexual people, but many of them engage in similar activities with other-sex peers prior to or as part of the process of learning about their sexual identity (Diamond *et al.*, 1999; see also O'Flynn—chapter 9, this volume). The first conversations between other-sex peers are likely to be somewhat awkward as most young people are relatively inexperienced with interacting with the other sex in these terms. As these interchanges become more practiced, however, young people may begin to turn to their boyfriend or girlfriend for companionship and affiliation. Such affiliative interactions are believed to characterize romantic relationships throughout the rest of adolescence and adulthood. Adult romantic partners who serve as companions and participate in shared novel and arousing activities report more satisfying relationship quality (Aron *et al.*, 2000).

Although affiliative interactions are characteristic of romantic relationships throughout the lifespan, developmental changes in the nature of affiliation occur as well. Specifically, young people usually first interact with the opposite sex in a mixed group context, and then begin dating in a group context, before finally forming more exclusive, dyadic romantic relationships (Connolly *et al.*, forth.). Accordingly, we would expect early communication with the opposite sex not necessarily to have a romantic or sexual intent, or at least that such intent would not be acted upon. Similarly, early communication occurs in a group context, and may have some of the characteristics of group conversations, whereas subsequent communications patterns would be expected to have characteristics of interpersonal interaction.

A description of affiliative interactions also illustrates the likely differences between affiliative interactions with romantic partners and other close figures, such as parents or friends. By preadolescence, parents are less frequent sources of companionship than peers, and affiliation between parents and teens continues to decline throughout the course of adolescence (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Larson & Richards, 1994). Moreover, relationships with parents are hierarchical in nature, whereas those with peers are egalitarian; thus, it is less likely that interactions with parents will have the reciprocity that is intrinsic to affiliative interchanges (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Accordingly, one would expect affiliative interactions and communication with romantic partners more closely to resemble communication with friends, as they are both peer relations. However, differences in young people's affiliative communication with friends and romantic partners may exist as well. For instance, same-sex peers are more likely to have similar interests and interactional styles in comparison to other-sex peers (Maccoby, 1990; 1998). Thus, young heterosexual people may face greater challenges in finding common interests and communicating with other-sex romantic partners than they would with same-sex friends. These issues may be less significant for young gay and lesbian people, although perhaps they are applicable to the degree that individuals of any sexual orientation are romantically attracted to the unknown or unfamiliar (Bem, 1996). Most adolescent romantic relationships are also shorter in length than friendships, and thus, the affiliative interactions may be somewhat different, at least in the early phases of the relationships.

Sexual behavior

Adolescence is of course marked by the onset of puberty and the emergence of more explicit sexual interest and sexual behavior. Adolescent romantic relationships are therefore a common context for erotic exploration and the activation of the sexual or reproductive behavioral system. The vast majority of research

on adolescent sexuality has focused on sexual behavior itself. Numerous studies have provided descriptive information about the frequency of sexual behavior and the biological and social factors associated with sexual activity, especially heterosexual intercourse. Yet, very little work has examined how young people communicate about sexual behavior in romantic relationships. We know remarkably little about communication regarding sexual interest, sexual behavior and sexual safety. Given the high rates of risky sexual behavior, pressure to engage in sexual behaviors, and forced sexual activity among young people (Halpern *et al.*, 2001), we would think it important for research to begin to address how young people communicate in this domain.

Romantic partners may use a variety of verbal or nonverbal strategies to communicate about sexual interest and sexual behavior. Christopher and Frandsen (1990), for example, identified four general strategies of sexual communication: (a) *emotional and physical closeness*, where partners touch and seek close proximity to convey sexual wishes; (b) *logic and reason*, which is used to limit sexual intimacy through rational arguments, insistence on a particular level of involvement, and compromise with the partner; (c) *antisocial acts* that involve threats, force and guilt induction; and (d) *pressure and manipulation*, which involve pressure, deception or using drugs or alcohol. One would imagine that using logic and reason—communicating directly about sexual intimacy and sexual limits— would be the most sensible strategy for negotiating sexual behavior, especially because young people sometimes disagree about how sexually involved they should become with each other (Christopher, 1996). Unfortunately, partners often disclose very little about sexual topics (Byers & Demmons, 1999) and rarely discuss their sexual desires and behaviors directly with each other (Cupach & Metts, 1991). Given limited, indirect communication about sexual activity, misunderstanding seems inevitable.

Given their inexperience with sexuality and the newness of romantic relationships in general, communicating about 'how far to go' or 'what I'm comfortable with' may be particularly awkward and challenging topics for young people to talk about. Young lesbian and gay people face the additional challenge of determining whether a same-sex peer is sexually attracted to them and whether it is even safe to disclose their sexual orientation and sexual interest [see O'Flynn—chapter 9, this volume]. Developmentally, one could imagine that for all young people, experiences of communicating about sexual behavior in one relationship or sexual encounter might affect their communication strategies about these issues in later relationships. More research is needed to explore developmental changes in communication about sex, as well as what individual characteristics of the relationship might promote or inhibit partners' open and healthy communication about sexual behavior.

In spite of our limited knowledge about young people's communication about sex with romantic partners, some work has addressed teens' communication about sexual behavior with parents and friends. For example, although we suspect that young people infrequently discuss sexual behaviors with romantic partners, we know that they talk about these topics with mothers and friends. On this basis, we would speculate that parental conversations with teens about sexual behavior most likely focus on information about sexual safety or abstinence as well as on sexual values. Supportive communication with parents about these sexual issues leads to more responsible sexual behavior (Friedman, 1989). Discussions about sexual values with parents may socialize teens and provide a context for learning how to communicate comfortably about sex with future partners. Nonetheless, these topics are understandably not always comfortable for parents to address. Mothers become more didactic and dominant when discussing dating or sexuality (Lefkowitz *et al.*, 1996; Lefkowitz *et al.*, 2000). Mothers of younger adolescents also focus more on communicating about dating, and it is not until later in adolescence that the topic of sex becomes more frequent (Lefkowitz *et al.*, 2002). Throughout adolescence, however, the topic of sexuality remains a difficult one for most parents and young people alike. Not surprisingly, young people increasingly turn to peers instead of parents to discuss sexual behavior as they get older (Lefkowitz *et al.*, 2000). Whereas conversations with parents may address sexual values and safety, communication with friends may include a more candid exchange about actual sexual behaviors, social norms of sexual behavior, and personal sexual limits.

Attachment

The function of the attachment behavioral system is to maintain feelings of emotional and physical safety and security. Communication plays a central role in two primary components of the attachment system: (a) seeking out the partner as a safe haven in times of hurt or distress and (b) using the partner as a secure base from which to explore new activities or plans (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994). Communication is critical to signaling the need for support from a romantic partner. For example, support seeking can involve nonverbal communication, such as seeking physical proximity to an attachment figure or appearing distressed, as well as verbal communication, such as self-disclosing personal feelings of sadness or distress. Communication also plays an important role in the secure base phenomenon, such as when an adolescent explores a new interest or activity, a partner can serve as a secure base by communicating encouragement and confidence.

Young people use romantic relationships as safe havens, and to a lesser degree as secure bases. Rates of intimate disclosure and support seeking from romantic partners increase substantially from preadolescence to adolescence and throughout the course of adolescence (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Similarly, the proportion of teens who use a romantic partner as a safe haven increases from middle childhood into early adolescence and increases further in middle adolescence (Hazan & Zeifmann, 1994). Thus, whereas romantic relationships in early adolescence are primarily affiliative in nature, the content of communication in romantic relationships in middle and late adolescence also contains emotional components, such as self-disclosure and support seeking. Young people in later adolescence are particularly likely to perceive romantic partners as individuals to turn to for support (Feiring, 1999).

One of the critical developmental tasks of adolescence entails gradually transferring attachment needs for emotional intimacy and support from parents to peer relationships (Buhrmester, 1996; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Hazan & Zeifman, 1994). During this transition, young people initially seek out same-sex close friends for support, but romantic partners increasingly begin to serve more of these functions as they get older (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). It is also important to remember that parents nonetheless remain primary attachment figures in teens' lives throughout adolescence. It is not usually until early adulthood that romantic partners become primary attachment figures and provide the most support of all types of relationships (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Hazan & Zeifman, 1994).[3]

Although it is clear that communication with romantic partners increasingly serves attachment functions over time, we know less about how characteristics of young people's communication with romantic partners differ from those of communication with friends and parents. Because of the hierarchical nature of relationships with parents (Youniss & Smollar, 1985), intimate disclosures are more likely to be one-sided with parents, but reciprocal with romantic partners and other peers. Also, young people are likely to seek out different people, depending on the nature of the concern. For instance, peers are more influential on status norms and identity issues, whereas parents are more influential with regards to future aspirations or school achievement (Brittain, 1963). We know of no literature which addresses the nature of concerns that young people may communicate to romantic partners; nor do we know much about when young people tend to seek out friends and when they seek support from romantic partners.

Caregiving

Caregiving refers to an individual's behaviors aimed at providing support and protection for a partner. The caregiving system is parallel and complementary to the attachment system. In effect, caregiving can be thought of as an individual's attempt to serve as an attachment figure for a romantic partner—to be a safe haven or a secure base. Communication skills such as sensitivity and responsiveness are essential to providing competent support for a romantic partner (Reis & Patrick, 1996). Such skills are clearly important because good caregiving and high levels of emotional support are associated with relationship satisfaction (Carnelley *et al.*, 1996; Feeney, 1996) and well-being (Burleson, 2003). Our anecdotal impression is that most—though not all—young people enjoy being a caregiver to their boyfriend or girlfriend.

In romantic relationships, support seeking behaviors that characterize the attachment system frequently elicit supportive behaviors that also characterize the caregiving system, and vice versa, such that attachment and caregiving systems in healthy relationships interact harmoniously (Bowlby, 1982). Thus, most of the comments about the attachment system are equally applicable to the caregiving system; that is, caregiving is characteristic of and valued in these relationships (Feiring, 1996; Hand & Furman, forth.), and the frequency and amount of caregiving or providing support in romantic relationships increases with age (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Eventually, a romantic partner is likely to be perceived as the most supportive person in the social network, although typically not until early adulthood (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

Having said this, attachment and caregiving are not always reciprocal. Throughout childhood, the parent is expected to have the caregiving role, and the child is the one who seeks out the safe haven or uses the parent as a secure base. In most circumstances, especially in Western societies, the child or adolescent is not expected to be a major caregiving figure for the parent. It is not until adolescence that teens begin to serve as caregiving figures for friends and romantic partners. In these relationships, young people not only begin turning to peers for emotional support, but also reciprocally provide caregiving for the other. In fact, a close friendship is often the first time that an individual has the opportunity to develop and use caregiving skills. Being able to provide support is likely to require substantial development in communication. After these skills are learned and implemented with close friends, young people may begin to use these skills in their romantic relationships—particularly when these relationships move beyond affiliation, and caregiving and attachment become more prominent.

The negotiation of romantic relationships

We believe a behavioral systems approach to adolescent romantic relationships permits an examination of some of the major functions that communication serves in these relationships. We also have discussed how developmental changes in behavioral systems relate to changes in the characteristics of adolescent romantic relationships and in the functions of communication. A critical issue to address is how young people negotiate these changes in the context of relationships. Transitioning from a primarily affiliative relationship to a partnership that involves attachment, caregiving and sexual components requires interpersonal negotiation, because partners' desires and expectations do not always coincide. In fact, it is inherent in all romantic relationships that individuals' needs will differ at some points, and these differences call for them to negotiate conflict. In the following two sections, we discuss: (a) how young people communicate about the status of their romantic relationships and (b) how they manage conflict. These topics are important events in the course of relationships because they have the capacity to bring partners closer together or to push them apart. Conflict and relationship negotiation also have implications for the functioning of the behavioral systems. For instance, it is commonly understood that open and successful communication about relationship issues is central to maintaining a secure attachment, providing supportive caregiving, talking openly about sexual behavior, and enjoying each other's companionship.

Relationship status

We refer to communication about relationship status as discussions that directly or indirectly address the nature of the relationship with a romantic partner. Of course, in the earliest stages of sexual or romantic interest, these conversations involve communicating sexual or romantic interest in the other person. Among younger teenagers, this communication often takes place via a third party informant (Schofield, 1982). For example, a middle school student may ask a friend to ask someone if she likes him. Also, friends may pass notes in class about who has crushes on whom, or who is being dropped as a partner. For younger teenagers with little or no relationship experience, communicating romantic interest may be particularly awkward. This task is probably even more challenging for young lesbian and gay people, who face the additional difficulty of communicating romantic desires within an environment that still harbors discrimination against same-sex relationships [see O'Flynn—chapter 9, this volume].

After having some experience in interacting with romantic peers, young people may communicate sexual or romantic interest using a variety of other means, ranging from sexual advances to asking the person to go somewhere or do something. If two people are successful at communicating about a mutual romantic or sexual interest, often the next step is determining the extent of each partner's investment in the emerging relationship and their expectations about the relationship. When goals correspond between two persons in a romantic relationship, it is easier to achieve desirable outcomes such as fulfilling attachment and caregiving needs (Wieselquist *et al.*, 1999). A failure to communicate clearly may lead to misunderstandings that disrupt the relationship. For instance, one person might consider spending a lot of time with a third person to be acceptable, whereas the partner may label it as cheating.

In the middle or later stages of young people's relationships with romantic partners, communication about status might also involve discussing a number of issues pertaining to the ongoing relationship: feelings about each other (e.g., 'Are we in love?'), satisfaction with the current state of the relationship (e.g., 'I really enjoy being with you.'), the partners' level of commitment (e.g., 'It's important that we make time to see each other.'), or expectations about the future status of the relationship (e.g., 'I could see myself marrying you.'). Like adults, young people also need to communicate a sense of where the romantic relationship falls in their social network. Conflicts may occur around the amount of time spent with friends, rather than with a partner (Zani, 1993). For heterosexual young people, other-sex friends can sometimes trigger feelings of jealousy (Roth & Parker, 2001). Obviously, the process of trying to end any relationship is often very difficult, especially when the partner wants to continue the relationship.

Although young people's communication about relationship status shares some commonalities with adults' communication about these issues, significant differences exist as well. Compared to adult relationships, the romantic relationships of many young people are typically much shorter in duration and less committed. Thus, issues that arise in longer-term relationships in adulthood may not be as applicable to many adolescent romantic relationships. For example, communication in the process of relationship dissolution is likely to be quite different for a long-term adult commitment, such as a marriage, versus a shorter-term adolescent relationship.

Young people's communication about relationship status with romantic partners also differs from their negotiation of relationship status in other types of relationships. They may have multiple friendships, but romantic relationships are typically exclusive. As a consequence, it appears that there is more attention to and communication about the nature of a romantic relationship; friendships may wax and wane without explicit discussion or decisions being made. These

ideas about communication regarding the status of the relationship are primarily speculative; as yet, we have little information about how often young people talk about relationship status with romantic partners, the strategies they use to communicate about these issues, or what types of strategies are related to more positive adolescent relationships.

Conflict resolution

Conflict is an issue that arises in all relationships, and adept communication plays a key role in its resolution. The capacity of young people to constructively resolve occasional conflicts and quarrels is linked to maintaining and solidifying friendships and romantic relationships (Laursen & Collins, 1994).

Not surprisingly, the specific communication skills involved in conflict negotiation in adolescent romantic relationships parallel those found in adult relationships. Young people report using compromise most often, distraction second most often, and avoidance third most often (Feldman & Gowen, 1998). Overt anger, violence, and social support are used less frequently. The use of compromise may be a particularly adaptive conflict negotiation strategy because it constructively addresses and resolves conflict, and serves the function of maintaining and perhaps even strengthening aspects of the relationship (Laursen & Collins, 1994).

The frequency of conflict in romantic relationships rises slightly over the course of adolescence (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). During adolescence, conflict with romantic partners is less frequent than with parents, but similar in frequency to that with friends. In early adulthood, conflict with romantic partners is as common as with parents, and more frequent than with friends (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). We know less about developmental changes in particular strategies of conflict resolution, although there is some suggestion that using compromise with romantic partners increases with age (Feldman & Gowen, 1998). This increase in compromise may occur because these relationships are likely to be longer in length and more intimate later on. Thus, young people in more serious relationships may rely on compromise more often because they have more at stake to lose.

The development of communication skills in conflict resolution may first begin to develop in the context of conflict negotiation with friends and parents; for instance, young adults' patterns of conflict resolution with parents and romantic partners are related to one another (Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998). If anything, we might also expect the link between conflict resolution in friendships and romantic relationships to be stronger, as these are both voluntary, egalitarian relationships with peers. At the same time, conflict resolution in

romantic relationships may be somewhat distinct, partly because romantic relationships carry an inherent risk of loss that seems greater than in other peer relationships or in parent-adolescent relationships. In support of this idea, young adults report using more constructive conflict negotiation tactics with romantic partners than with best friends (Creasey *et al.*, 1999). At the same time, young people also said that they engaged in more negative escalation and negativity, suggesting that these relationships are also more volatile.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented a behavioral systems approach to examining the primary functions of adolescent romantic relationships. We believe that this is a promising and valuable framework because it anchors an exploration of communication to the underlying functions that it serves in these relationships. Considering communication in the context of behavioral systems also facilitates comparisons of communication with parents, friends, and romantic partners. Similarly, it moves beyond an effort merely to describe characteristics of adolescent romantic relationships and, instead, encourages us to think about adolescent romantic communication from a developmental perspective. Although we know that communication is perhaps the most critical component of adult romantic relationship satisfaction, we know almost nothing about how communication abilities and values develop from early adolescence to adulthood.

In this chapter, we have principally focused on the general characteristics of communication in adolescent romantic relationships. This approach is intended as a starting point, but is not meant to imply that individual differences aren't equally as important. Factors such as gender, culture, sexual orientation, and psychological characteristics also need to be considered to understand the characteristics and qualities of teens' communication with romantic figures. It is our intent that this chapter will serve as a springboard for further research on communication in adolescent relationships.

Notes

1. Preparation of this manuscript was supported by Grant 50106 from the National Institute of Mental Health (Wyndol Furman as principal investigator).
2. Editors: It is also true to say that young people (especially young women) are constantly positioned by frequent media depictions of 'teen love' and young (typically heterosexual) desire. In the year leading up to this book these were

just a few of the more popular titles: *Mean Girls*, *How to Deal*, *Chasing Liberty*, *Alex and Emma*, *13 Going on 30*, *Jersey Girl*, *Sleepover*, and *A Cinderella Story*.

3. Editors: This extended transition from parental to romantic partner is often delayed these days by factors such as prolonged economic dependence (see Chisholm & Hurrelmann, 1995; Mortimer & Larson, 2002—cited in Thurlow & Williams—chapter 1, this volume).

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