

This article examines adolescent sexuality within the context of a life course developmental model and considers the causal interrelationships of sexual behavior with dating, courtship, and planning for marriage. Data from a sample of 18-year-old men and women document the importance of dating and courtship development on the initiation of intimate heterosexual relations. Young people who begin to date at an early age also tend to develop steady relationships relatively early and continue to date more frequently. Both the timing of the initiation of dating and the development of steady dating relationships have substantial implications for the development of sexual relations. Young women and men who begin dating early and who develop steady relations early are more likely to be sexually experienced, to have had sexual relations with more partners, to be more sexually active during their late teenage years, and to have more permissive attitudes concerning premarital sex. Among those who experience sexual intercourse, those who had their first experience at a relatively young age had the most partners and had intercourse more frequently when they were 18.

The Courtship Process and Adolescent Sexuality*

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This article examines adolescent sexual attitudes and behavior within a lifecourse developmental framework that takes into account the tempo of dating, going steady, and courtship. The article investigates the temporal interrelationships among the timing of first dating, first going steady, and first sexual intercourse. These timing variables, along with indicators of current levels of dating and courtship involvement are also used to predict the sexual experiences of young people when they are 18 years old. The analysis is conducted within a multivariate framework that permits the dynamics of the process to be examined while also allowing controls for other variables that may be important in determining the behavior and attitudes of young people.

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LIFECOURSE DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

The development of sexuality and the formation of heterosexual relationships are important features of the maturation process of young men and women (Chilman, 1980). The physiological development of young people takes place within a structure of social definitions, cultural expectations, and normative rules and sanctions. The social matrix defines appropriate relationships between young men and women as they mature and make the transition to adulthood. In Western societies, peer groups tend to be segregated along gender lines at young ages, but as young people mature, gender-based barriers become more permeable and opposite-gender relationships become increasingly important. A major component of this process is the formation of close relationships between young women and men. Thus, during the adolescent and young adult years dating and courtship are important elements of the maturation process and, for most people, result in the formation of new families through marriage and childbearing within the marital bond.

It is important to place adolescent sexuality and childbearing within this physical and social development process. The breaking down of the barriers between the genders and the development of intimate heterosexual relationships is usually a slow, experimental, but cumulative process. As the biological and social clocks tick onward, young people increasingly relate with those of the opposite sex, although the trajectory is often unevenly upward. Young people become increasingly experienced in dating, the amount of time young couples spend together increases, and often the courtship process intensifies. This emotional and romantic involvement is often accompanied by, and intensified by, expanding levels of sexual involvement (Gagnon, 1977).

There are, of course, norms and values governing the expression of sexuality among unmarried couples. A common theme in the literature concerning norms about premarital sex is the idea that the acceptable level of sexual involvement is directly related to the level of social and psychological commitment and involvement present in the relationship. As social and psychological commitment moves from lacking affection, to strong affection, to love, and to engagement for marriage, the level of sexual involvement permitted by many Americans expands (Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1977; Reiss, 1960, 1964, 1967). This connection of premarital sex standards with the level of emotional commitment provides a natural linkage between the levels of sexual and emotional involvement. As a young woman and man become increasingly involved with each other

emotionally, the range of sexual experience that is normatively acceptable for them expands. At the same time, as a young couple becomes more emotionally committed to each other and experiences certain levels of sexual involvement, the momentum for expanded sexual involvement and the redefinition of premarital sexual standards to permit more intensive involvement increases. As young people gain experience with one level of involvement, their confidence and abilities grow and prepare them for more intensive sexual involvement. Although some young people can and do proceed through the hierarchy of sexual behavior from kissing to coitus very rapidly, for others the process involves experimentation and the passage of time. And, although the rapid increase in adolescent experience with intercourse recently has placed great emphasis on the number of people moving entirely through the hierarchy to intercourse before marriage, there are still significant fractions of Americans who experience first coitus after marriage (Bachrach & Horn, 1985).

Lurking in the background of this emotional and sexual development process are the issues of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Although American young people are notorious for the level of risk-taking they are willing to accept in this area, many of them do deal directly with the issue of contraception. It is likely, however, that the adoption of contraception also contains a developmental component. As the emotional commitment of the relationship increases and as the frequency of sexual intercourse rises, the urgency and ability of individuals to respond to the expanded likelihood of conception are also likely to increase.

Of course, there is a great deal of variation in the speed and outcome of this developmental process. Depending upon personal characteristics, including such things as the tempo of physiological development, interpersonal skills, and personal values concerning sexuality, young people can move quickly or slowly through the dating and courtship process. These same factors can also greatly influence the level of sexual intimacy experienced before marriage, with some people experiencing intercourse before marriage and others waiting until after marriage. In addition, for those who become sexually active before marriage, conception may intervene in the process, posing the problem of what to do about an unintended pregnancy.

The social and cultural definitions and norms governing this developmental process are undergoing dramatic change in the United States. Accompanying the changes in the roles of adult men and women have been shifts in the relationships between young men and women. Of particular importance here is the greater freedom young women appar-

ently have today to be active initiators of the dating and courtship process. At the same time, there have been changes in the meaning of dating, going steady, and courtship. Standards governing premarital sexual conduct have also been relaxed significantly in recent years (Opinion Roundup, 1982; Thornton, 1989). Finally, all of these changes have been accompanied by an important separation of the reproductive process from marriage with increased sexual involvement, pregnancy, and childbearing occurring outside of wedlock (Thornton & Freedman, 1983).

EMPIRICAL HYPOTHESES

The developmental framework for considering adolescent courtship and sexuality leads to several concrete hypotheses amenable to empirical testing. It is likely that young men and women who become involved in the courtship process early will experience sexual intercourse earlier than others. Empirically, this reasoning leads to the expectation of positive intercorrelations among age at first date, age at first steady dating, and age at first intercourse.

Also implied by this framework is the expectation that age at initiating dating, steady relationships, and first intercourse will have an impact on subsequent levels of sexual involvement. Specifically, we expect that early dating, early going steady, and early sexual involvement will be associated with a larger number of sexual partners because those who begin early have more opportunity and time for developing relationships with others.

It is likely that young people who experience first dating, first going steady, and first intercourse relatively early in their teen years will proceed along the developmental path toward marriage and marriage-like relationships at younger ages than others. Thus, at any particular point in the life course, these individuals will have more frequent and more intensive dating and courtship relationships than those who initiate dating and courtship later. This perspective suggests the empirical expectation that development of early relationships will be related to higher levels of courtship and sexual involvement throughout the teenage years.

Of course, time and opportunity are not the only factors that link early dating and early sexual experience to subsequent sexual experience. It is likely that early heterosexual relationships will be related to more frequent sexual intercourse later in the life course even when the type of social and emotional commitment in relationships are the same. This may occur

because those with earlier and more experience have accumulated social skills and expectations that include sexual expression in the dating and courtship experience.

Although the hypotheses just outlined have been stated in developmental or life course terms, with early experiences influencing subsequent behavior and experiences, the developmental framework also suggests cross-sectional relationships. One such expectation is similar to a proposition presented and refined by Reiss and his colleagues—that couples who date frequently, who have steady relationships, and who are seriously contemplating marriage will have more permissive attitudes towards premarital sex as compared to those with less intense courtship involvement (Reiss, 1967; Reiss & Miller, 1979). A related expectation growing from this reasoning is that among such couples sexual experience will be more frequent, an expectation consistent with data reported by Zelnik, Kantner, & Ford (1981).

The possibility of selectivity should also be mentioned. There may be some enduring characteristics of individuals during their teenage years that lead to greater emotional and sexual intimacy at several points in the life course. If true, any correlation between behavior at two points in the life course could reflect this preexisting factor rather than the effect of early experience on subsequent behavior.

Although the theoretical rationales for expecting a strong association between adolescent sexual experience and early dating and early steady dating are clear, the empirical evidence is less straightforward. In a recent empirical article investigating this issue, Miller, McCoy, & Olson (1986) report that previous empirical findings have been inconsistent. Their own empirical analysis, however, shows that early dating and early steady dating have positive relationships to subsequent sexual attitudes and behavior, findings that are consistent with the theoretical expectations outlined earlier.

DATA AND METHODS

The data used in this analysis come from a probability sample of children selected from the birth records of the Detroit metropolitan area in July 1961. Approximately equal numbers of first, second, and fourth-born White children were selected using stratified simple random sampling procedures. Their mothers were first interviewed in the winter of 1962 with subsequent interviews conducted in the fall of 1962 and in

1963, 1966, 1977, and 1980. The children born in 1961 were interviewed in 1980 when they were 18 years old. Most of the interviews with the children were conducted in person. The data about the children's dating and marriage plans as well as their sexual attitudes and experience were obtained through a self-administered questionnaire.

The response rates over the years have been high (Freedman, Thornton, & Camburn, 1980; Thornton, Freedman, & Camburn, 1982). In 1980, interviews were obtained with both mother and child in 916 families, representing 85% of those families interviewed in 1962 in which both the mother and child were alive in 1980. The families interviewed in 1980 are very similar to those originally interviewed in 1962 on such characteristics as education, religion, parity, and income, indicating that sample attrition has not affected the representativeness of the sample. Sons or daughters who had been married by 1980 or who were living in a cohabiting relationship in 1980 were not included in the analysis, but at age 18 they represent only a small fraction of the sample.

Because the primary focus of the present analysis concerns the linkages between adolescent sexuality and dating and courtship, most of the data for this analysis come from the 1980 interview with the child born in 1961. Some data from the mother's interviews are included as controls in the multivariate analyses.

MEASUREMENT OF PREMARITAL SEXUAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR

Attitudes about the appropriateness of sexual intercourse before marriage were ascertained from both mothers and children in 1980. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: "Young people should *not* have sex before marriage" and "premarital sex is alright for a young couple planning to get married." Response categories were "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree." For analysis, both items were ordered on a 5-point scale with "uncertain" or "depends" responses coded at the midpoint. The variables were coded so that high values reflect approval of premarital sex and low values indicate disapproval, and then the variables were summed to form a premarital sex attitude index with scores ranging from 2 through 10.

The young adults were asked if they had ever had sexual intercourse (ever had intercourse)? Those who answered "yes" were asked the following questions: "How many different partners have you ever had intercourse with" (number of partners); "How old were you when you had

sexual intercourse the first time" (age at first intercourse); and "How many times have you had intercourse in the last four weeks" (recent frequency). All analysis of the number of partners variable was conducted using both the entire sample and using a sample consisting only of respondents with sexual intercourse experience. This procedure permits the decomposition of number of partners into two components: the fraction ever experiencing sexual intercourse, and among those with intercourse experience, the number of partners.

MEASUREMENT OF DATING AND COURTSHIP

Three different aspects of the courtship process were measured: dating, steady relationships, and marriage plans. The five questions used in this analysis are outlined below:

1. "How old were you the first time you went out on a date?" (age at first date). The categories for the respondent were never went out, 13 or younger, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.
2. "In the *last 4 weeks*, about how many times have you gone out on a date?" (recent dates). The categories for this question were no dates, 1 or 2, 3 or 4, 5 or 6, 7 or 8, 9 or 10, 11 or more.
3. "In the last 4 weeks when you have gone out, has it usually been with different girls/boys or has it always been the same girl/boy?" (recent steady). Response categories included never went out, different girls/boys, and same girl/boy.
4. "How old were you the first time you went steady?" (age at first steady). The response categories were never went steady, 13 or younger, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.
5. "Are you dating anyone now who you plan to marry?" (plan to marry). Although the response categories were "yes" or "no," a small number of respondents indicated probably or maybe. As they represented a very small fraction of the sample, they were eliminated from the analysis of this particular question.

UNIVARIATE DISTRIBUTIONS

The distribution of responses to the questions concerning dating, courtship, and sexual experience is summarized in Table 1. Those data indicate a relatively rapid initiation of dating relationships during the teenage years. A sizeable minority of young men and women reported the initiation of dating before age 14, and nearly 90% of both males and females reported dating before reaching their 17th birthday. The develop-

TABLE 1
Percentage Distribution of
Adolescent Dating, Courtship, and Sexuality Variables^a

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Age at first date		
13 or younger	21.2	8.6
14	17.9	16.2
15	21.2	33.6
16	29.5	29.3
17-18	7.2	10.0
No dates	3.0	2.4
Total	100.0	100.0
Age at first steady		
14 or younger	19.4	18.3
15	11.5	14.3
16	19.6	20.5
17	17.6	19.3
18	4.6	5.2
No steady	27.2	22.4
Total	100.0	100.0
Recent steady		
Never went out	22.8	18.8
Different boy/girl	28.0	21.7
Same boy/girl	49.2	59.5
Total	100.0	100.0
Recent dates		
0	25.4	20.0
1-2	24.3	16.2
3-4	18.2	16.7
5-6	10.1	12.4
7-8	7.0	11.0
9-10	3.5	8.1
11 or more	11.6	15.5
Total	100.0	100.0
Plan to marry		
Yes	27.1	37.9
No	72.9	62.1
Total	100.0	100.0
Premarital sex attitude index		
Disapprove 2-3	5.7	13.1
4-5	10.2	14.3
6-7	13.7	15.0
8-9	61.4	52.1
Approve 10	9.1	5.5
Total	100.0	100.0

TABLE 1 Continued

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Ever had intercourse		
Yes	63.4	54.0
No ^b	36.6	46.0
Total	100.0	100.0
Age at first intercourse		
15 or younger	21.7	8.5
16	15.4	10.7
17	17.0	18.6
18	9.3	15.7
Never ^b	36.7	46.5
Total	100.0	100.0
Number of partners		
Never had intercourse ^b	36.8	46.8
1 partner	19.5	22.7
2-3 partners	17.7	19.5
4-5 partners	9.1	4.9
6 or more partners	16.6	6.1
Total	100.0	100.0
Recent frequency		
Had intercourse 0 times	62.0	66.1
1-2 times	16.7	11.3
3-7 times	14.7	14.1
8 times	6.6	8.5
Total	100.0	100.0

a. The number of respondents in the analysis sample is 882, 461 males and 421 females. This excludes ever-married respondents and respondents who reported ever having cohabited. The number of cases available for analyses for individual variables may be smaller, however, because of missing data, with the minimum number being 850.

b. The best estimate of the percentage never having intercourse is provided by the variable ever had intercourse. The percentage who never had intercourse is higher for the age at first intercourse and number of partners variables because of the exclusion of respondents who did not report number of partners or age at first intercourse.

ment of steady relationships, on average, does not seem to lag far behind the initiation of dating. Nearly one fifth of the young men and women in the sample reported going steady before age 15, and only about one fourth of these 18-year-olds reported never having a steady relationship. Also, only about one fourth or one fifth of these young people had not dated during the four weeks immediately preceding the interview. In addition, over one fourth of the young men and over one third of the young women said they were currently dating someone they planned to marry.

The data about sexuality demonstrate considerable acceptance of premarital sex among these young men and women. Over 70% of the men and nearly 60% of the women fell into one of the three most approving categories on the scale. Sixty-three percent of the young men and 54% of the young women reported experiencing sexual intercourse. The initiation of first intercourse also proceeds fairly rapidly during the teenage years with significant minorities of both gender groups reporting sex before age 17. Over 30% of both males and females reported sexual intercourse in the 4 weeks immediately preceding the interview.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG DATING, COURTSHIP, AND SEXUALITY

Dating and going steady are often successive points along a developmental trajectory, and age at first going steady is strongly and positively related to age at first date (data not shown in tables). For example, among the girls starting to date at age 14 or younger, about two thirds reported going steady before their 16th birthdays, and only 8% of these girls said they had never gone steady before the interview was conducted at age 18. In contrast, about one third of the girls beginning to date between ages 16 and 18 had still not gone steady by the time of the interview.

To see how the timing of first date and first going steady influences the timing of first sexual intercourse, the sample was divided into groups based on age at first date and age at first going steady. Age-specific probabilities of experiencing first sexual intercourse were computed separately for the various groups. A summary of this analysis is reported in Table 2. Note that the age-specific probabilities (q) listed there are conditional in that they indicate the probability of previously inexperienced individuals experiencing first intercourse during the specific year of age listed. Also listed are cumulative probabilities of experiencing first sexual intercourse through a given age (Q), which is equivalent to the proportion of all persons who have experienced sexual intercourse before the next birthday.

The data in Table 2 clearly substantiate the temporal connections between first dating and first intercourse. For both males and females, the probabilities of first intercourse during the early and middle teens are strongly and inversely correlated with age at first date. This can be seen by focusing on the first rows of panels A and B of Table 2. Over one half of the young men who began dating at age 13 or younger had experienced

TABLE 2
Age Specific (*q*) and Cumulative Probabilities (*Q*)
of First Sexual Intercourse, by Age at First Date,
Age at First Going Steady, and Gender

Age Interval ^a	13 or younger		14		15		16		17 or 18		No Dates	
	q ^b	Q ^c	q	Q	q	Q	q	Q	q	Q	q	Q
A. Males—Age at First Date												
13 or younger	.17	.17	.03	.03	.03	.03	.02	.02	.03	.03	.00	.00
14	.23	.37	.06	.09	.03	.06	.00	.02	.00	.03	.00	.00
15	.27	.53	.20	.28	.11	.17	.02	.04	.03	.06	.08	.08
16	.27	.66	.24	.45	.24	.37	.18	.21	.03	.09	.00	.08
17	.25	.74	.39	.66	.31	.56	.28	.43	.10	.19	.00	.08
18	.25	.80	.33	.78	.22	.65	.15	.52	.23	.38	.00	.08
<i>N</i>	94		80		94		129		32		13	
B. Females—Age at First Date												
13 or younger	.12	.12	.02	.02	.00	.00	.01	.01	.00	.00	.00	.00
14	.07	.18	.06	.08	.01	.01	.00	.01	.00	.00	.00	.00
15	.15	.30	.11	.18	.07	.07	.01	.02	.00	.00	.00	.00
16	.22	.45	.24	.38	.13	.19	.08	.09	.02	.02	.00	.00
17	.28	.60	.37	.60	.26	.40	.20	.27	.15	.16	.00	.00
18	.54	.82	.35	.74	.24	.55	.27	.46	.14	.28	.00	.00
<i>N</i>	33		66		139		122		42		10	
Age Interval	14 or younger		15		16		17		18		No Steady	
	q	Q	q	Q	q	Q	q	Q	q	Q	q	Q
C. Males—Age at First Steady												
13 or younger	.14	.14	.08	.08	.06	.06	.01	.01	.00	.00	.02	.02
14	.19	.31	.08	.15	.04	.09	.04	.05	.00	.00	.02	.03
15	.22	.46	.24	.36	.14	.21	.06	.10	.10	.10	.04	.08
16	.24	.59	.27	.53	.32	.47	.19	.27	.17	.25	.09	.16
17	.43	.76	.32	.68	.37	.67	.38	.55	.20	.40	.11	.25
18	.10	.79	.18	.74	.35	.78	.40	.73	.33	.60	.09	.31
<i>N</i>	85		53		87		77		20		120	
D. Females—Age at First Steady												
13 or younger	.05	.05	.02	.02	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.01	.01
14	.10	.15	.00	.02	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.01
15	.16	.28	.14	.15	.02	.02	.01	.01	.00	.00	.01	.02
16	.19	.41	.24	.35	.16	.18	.05	.06	.10	.10	.03	.05
17	.32	.60	.33	.57	.33	.45	.25	.30	.11	.20	.07	.12
18	.33	.73	.42	.75	.26	.60	.41	.59	.50	.60	.01	.13
<i>N</i>	75		60		84		80		20		93	

NOTE: Chi-square tests of significance were conducted within rows of the table. Of the 24 tests, 22 were significant at the .05 level. The remaining two were statistically significant at probabilities of .18 and .06, respectively (row 6 of panel A and row 1 of panel D).

(continued)

first intercourse by age 15 or younger as compared to less than 10% of those beginning dating at age 16 or later. Similar differentials exist for the young women, with about 30% of those reporting dating by age 13 or younger having had experienced sexual intercourse by age 15 or younger, whereas almost none of the girls who started dating at age 16 or older had experienced first intercourse by age 15 or younger. Also note that as those who waited to begin dating reached the age of their first date, their annual probabilities of experiencing first intercourse increase dramatically. However, the proportion who had ever experienced sexual intercourse by age 18 was much lower for those who began dating later than for those who began dating earlier.

Age at first going steady also is related to the initiation of sexual intercourse. Those who had not developed their first steady relationship early had much lower probabilities of initiating sexual intercourse when they were young teenagers. At the time of initiation of a first steady dating relationship, the probabilities of experiencing first sexual intercourse increased dramatically, and they increased even more in the year or two immediately following a first steady relationship. In fact, the increase in the annual probabilities of experiencing first intercourse subsequent to first going steady is so high that the proportion of those who had ever had intercourse by age 18 is nearly as high for those who developed a steady relationship in their late teens as it is for those who developed such relationships in their early teens. Thus these data clearly show the role of a steady dating relationship in the process leading to first intercourse.

Further insights into the dynamics of the developmental process are provided by the data in Table 3 where the conditional annual probabilities of first intercourse are presented simultaneously — by the most advanced dating relationship experienced by the beginning of the period in question (no dating, dating but not going steady and going steady), and by whether or not a first dating or first steady relationship was reported during the particular year under examination. The importance of the transition to dating can be observed by comparing rows 1 and 2 of Table 3. Almost none of the young men and women with no dating experience before and during a specific year experience intercourse during the year, whereas

a. This is the age interval for which the listed probabilities occur. The age intervals listed refer to the time from the birthday listed to the day immediately preceding the next birthday. However, 18 refers to the period from age 18 only to the date of interview, which occurred between age 18-1/2 and 18-3/4 for most respondents.

b. This is the probability of a person experiencing first intercourse in the age interval listed, given that first intercourse had not already occurred.

c. This is the probability that a person has experienced first intercourse during the age interval listed or before.

TABLE 3
The Relation of Transition to First Dating and First Going Steady to First Intercourse, by Age and Gender

Dating and steady status	Age Specific Probabilities of First Intercourse (q) During Year Between Birthdays ^a									
	14 to 15		15 to 16		16 to 17		17 to 18		18 to 18-1/2 ^b	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
No dates before this year; no first date during this year	.01	.00	.02	.01	.03	.02	.00	.00	.00	.00
No dates before this year; first date but not first steady during this year	.05	.00	.10	.04	.12	.06	.07	.09	.09	.00
No dates before this year; first steady during this year	.07	.09	.17	.10	.38	.09	.11	.11	.09	.00
Had dated but not gone steady before this year; no first steady during this year	.15	.00	.18	.00	.20	.05	.15	.09	.10	.02
Had dated but not gone steady before this year; first steady during this year	.40	c	.33	.19	.29	.20	.43	.24	.33	.47
Had gone steady before this year	.22	.10	.22	.16	.25	.21	.38	.33	.29	.35

NOTE: Chi-square tests of significance were conducted within columns of the table to determine if each relationship between dating patterns and sexual experience was statistically significant. All were statistically significant at the .01 level.

- a. This probability is conditioned on not having sexual intercourse prior to the period in question.
- b. Age 18-1/2 denotes the time of the interview, which occurred sometime between age 18-1/2 and age 18-3/4 for most respondents.
- c. Not calculated because of the number of cases being less than 10 in this specific cell.

those who begin dating during the year have noticeable, though still moderate, probabilities of first intercourse; those who go from no dating to going steady in a year have yet higher probabilities of experiencing sexual intercourse during the year. The importance of the going steady transition is demonstrated further by comparisons across rows 4, 5, and 6. Among respondents who had dated but not gone steady before a specific period, the probabilities of initiating sexual experience are consistently lower for those who do not begin going steady during the period than for those who begin a steady relationship. Also, the probabilities of initiating sexual intercourse during any given year are consistently higher for those who had gone steady before that year than they are for those who had dated before that year but had still not gone steady through the year (compare rows 6 and 4).¹

In Table 4, attention is shifted from the temporal interconnections among age at first date, age at first steady, and age at first intercourse to an examination of the relationships of these experiences to subsequent sexual behavior. In addition, Table 4 summarizes the relationships of dating and courtship experience during the 4 weeks immediately preceding the interview in 1980 with sexual experience and attitudes during the same time period. The data presented in Table 4 are generally consistent with the theoretical orientations motivating this research in that almost all of the dating and courtship variables have substantial and statistically significant relationships with premarital sex attitudes and experience.

Table 4 shows that the tempo of the initiation of dating relationships is strongly related to attitudes towards premarital sex, ever experiencing sexual intercourse, the number of sexual partners, and recent sexual experience. For example, the women who had first dated before age 14 had, on average, 2.7 sexual partners, whereas the women waiting until 17 or 18 to begin dating only had .6 partners, on average. Further, all of these associations are statistically significant and, with two exceptions, monotonic across all age groups.

The development of steady dating relationships is also related to adolescent sexuality at age 18. Young people who have never established a steady dating relationship are much less approving of premarital sex and have considerably less sexual experience than others. However, among those who have had a steady dating relationship, age at first going steady has a mixed relationship with the premarital sex variables. The age component of the age at first steady variable has only a modest and somewhat irregular relationship both with premarital sex attitudes and

TABLE 4
Means of Sexuality Variables, by Dating and Courtship Variables

Variables	Number of Cases ^b		Premarital Sex Attitude Index		Ever Had Intercourse		Number of Partners		Number of Partners ^c		Recent Frequency	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Age at first date												
13 or younger	94	36	7.9	7.3	.81	.83	3.5	2.7	4.4	3.3	2.6	2.6
14	82	68	7.6	7.5	.78	.74	2.4	1.7	3.1	2.3	1.4	2.5
15	96	140	7.3	6.7	.66	.55	2.0	1.4	3.1	2.5	1.6	1.4
16	132	123	7.1	6.4	.52	.47	1.2	.8	2.3	1.7	.8	1.1
17-18	33	42	6.8	5.2	.39	.29	.9	.6	2.3	2.0	.9	.7
No dates	14	10	4.7	5.3	.08	.00	.1	.0	—	—	.0	.0
Eta			.28**	.28**	.34**	.34**	.43**	.35**	.38**	.29**	.29**	.26**
Age at first steady												
14 or younger	86	77	7.7	7.4	.79	.74	3.3	2.1	4.1	2.8	2.4	2.2
15	53	60	7.5	6.7	.74	.75	2.7	1.8	3.6	2.9	1.9	2.2
16	89	86	7.4	6.7	.78	.60	2.5	1.2	3.1	2.4	1.8	1.7
17	81	81	7.2	6.6	.73	.59	1.8	1.0	2.5	2.0	1.8	1.3
18	20	22	7.5	6.8	.62	.62	1.6	1.2	2.8	1.8	.9	2.2
No steady	123	93	6.8	5.7	.32	.13	.8	.3	2.6	2.0	.2	.2
Eta			.16*	.25**	.41**	.46**	.40**	.37**	.32**	.26**	.35**	.30**
Age at first intercourse												
15 or younger	95	35	8.1	7.7	—	—	4.9	4.0	4.9	4.0	3.3	3.7
16	68	44	7.6	7.8	—	—	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.0	2.2	3.9
17	74	77	8.0	7.8	—	—	2.4	2.1	2.4	2.1	1.7	2.6
18	41	65	7.9	7.5	—	—	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.4	1.1	1.7
Never	160	191	6.2	5.3	—	—	0.0	0.0	—	—	0.0	0.0
Eta			.42**	.53**	—	—	.68**	.54**	.68**	.54**	.68**	.54**

(continued)

TABLE 4 Continued

Variables	Number of Cases ^b		Premarital Sex Attitude Index		Ever Had Intercourse		Number of Partners ^a		Recent Frequency			
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females		
Recent dates												
None	115	83	6.8	6.1	.43	.25	1.4	.7	3.2	2.7	.5	.3
1 - 2	108	68	7.5	6.7	.54	.54	1.6	1.4	3.0	2.6	.5	.6
3 - 4	82	70	7.0	6.1	.65	.49	2.0	1.0	3.1	2.1	1.2	1.0
5 - 10	92	132	7.7	6.8	.82	.65	2.8	1.4	3.4	2.2	2.6	1.9
11 or more	53	65	7.8	7.2	.92	.74	3.2	1.7	3.4	2.3	3.9	3.7
Eta			.20**	.17*	.36**	.33**	.30**	.21**	.08	.13	.49**	.45**
Recent steady												
Never went out	103	78	6.7	6.1	.38	.24	1.1	.6	3.0	2.5	.2	.1
Different boy/girl	125	91	7.6	6.6	.71	.47	3.0	1.3	4.1	2.9	1.5	.7
Same boy/girl	222	250	7.4	6.7	.71	.66	1.9	1.4	2.7	2.2	2.0	2.2
Eta			.18**	.10	.29**	.33**	.29**	.19**	.31**	.17*	.30**	.35**
Plan to marry												
Yes	121	155	7.3	7.0	.80	.74	2.2	1.5	2.7	2.0	2.9	2.8
No	323	253	7.3	6.3	.56	.42	1.9	1.1	3.4	2.6	.8	.7
Eta			.05	.14*	.24**	.32**	.17**	.11	.22**	.19*	.41**	.40**

a. For this variable the analysis excludes all respondents with no sexual partners.

b. The number of respondents shown is for the attitude analysis, and because of missing data the number of cases for the other variables may differ somewhat from that number. Also the number of cases is significantly lower when the analysis of *number of partners* is limited to those with sexual intercourse experience.

c. Eta not shown because some of the shared variance occurs definitionally; persons with no experience of sexual intercourse will also have zero partners and zero recent frequency.

*Relationship significant at .05 level; **relationship significant at .01 level.

ever experiencing sexual intercourse, but the relationships with number of partners and recent sexual experience are more substantial and regular.

The strong relationships of age at first date to ever having intercourse and number of partners could be interpreted simply as the result of earlier daters having more time and opportunities for experiencing sexual intercourse, including with multiple partners. That is, both ever experiencing sex and the number of partners can be thought of as cumulative variables summarizing lifetime experience, and, as such, should be almost mechanically related to the amount of time elapsed since the first dating experience. The strong relationships of ages at first date and first steady to current attitudes and current sexual experience, however, cannot be interpreted using such a simple time explanation because these sexual variables do not measure lifetime experience but attitudes at the time of the interview and sexual experience immediately prior to the interview. It seems likely that as young people date and form relationships with those of the opposite sex, their skills, confidence, and level of intimacy increase significantly. Those who initiate dating earliest have the most opportunity for developing the skills and expectations that lead them to more sexual experience at any particular point in their lives.

The data in the third panel of Table 4 provide further support for this cumulative developmental framework. Those who have first sexual intercourse at a young age have had more sexual partners and have had more recent sexual experience than others. Undoubtedly, at least part of the effect of age at first intercourse on number of partners is due to early initiators having more time between first intercourse and the interview to have experience with additional partners. However, this differential time span cannot directly explain the higher current frequency among those who experienced first intercourse at a young age. It seems likely that the earlier experience allowed more opportunity to date and have sexual experience with others later, which translated into more sexual experience during the 4 weeks immediately prior to the interview.

The relationship between age at first intercourse and premarital adolescent sexual attitudes, however, is not consistent with this cumulative developmental framework. Although those who have never had sexual intercourse express significantly less approval of premarital sex than others, among those who have had sexual intercourse, age at first experience has no marked impact on current attitudes.

Current dating and courtship involvement are also strongly related to adolescent sexual attitudes and experience. Frequent dating during the weeks immediately preceding the interview is positively related to ap-

proval of premarital sex and the frequency of sexual intercourse during the same period. The recent frequency of dating is also strongly and positively related to whether sexual intercourse was ever experienced and to the number of sexual partners. This relationship, however, is more difficult to interpret than the others because current dating behavior is being related in this case to cumulative lifetime sexual experience. In addition, number of recent dates does not have a statistically significant relationship with number of partners once those with no intercourse experience are removed from the analysis.

As one would expect, dating different partners during the last 4 weeks is related to the number of partners one has ever had and to the amount of recent sexual intercourse, but in different directions. Recently having multiple dating partners is associated with more lifetime sexual partners, especially among those who are sexually experienced, whereas recent dating that is limited to one person leads to more sexual encounters during the time immediately preceding the interview.

The last panel of Table 4 documents a very significant relationship between the proximity of marriage and sexual experience. Although we have no way of telling whether the reported marital plans will be actualized, having a courting relationship where there are some thoughts of marriage is positively related to sexual experience. Such young men and women are much more likely to have experienced sexual intercourse and have, on average, had substantially more sexual intercourse during the 4 weeks immediately preceding the interview than others. In fact, of those reporting they were dating someone they planned to marry, about three fourths of the young women and four fifths of the young men had experienced sexual intercourse. In addition, the mean number of encounters in the 4 weeks preceding the interview was nearly three per person for this group. These data clearly indicate that sexual intercourse is an important aspect of the courtship process for most couples anticipating the possibility of marriage with someone they are currently dating.

Also note that although those planning to marry have had sexual intercourse with more partners altogether than others, this relationship is entirely due to these individuals being much more likely than others to have experienced sexual intercourse at all and not due to the sexually experienced among them having more partners. In fact, among the sexually experienced, those who have established a relationship they expect will lead to marriage have actually had fewer partners than others. Thus development of an exclusive relationship with the possibility of

marriage is associated with more frequent sexual intercourse but with fewer partners.

EXPLAINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EARLY EXPERIENCES AND CURRENT BEHAVIOR

General theoretical mechanisms that could relate early dating and sexual experience to sexual experience later in the teenage years were outlined earlier. One mechanism is that early dating, early going steady, and early sexual experience lead to a more rapid development of the courtship process and that those who initiated heterosexual relationships earlier would have more intensive courtship relationships at any point in time. Because of the strong relationship of current courtship involvement on current sexual experience documented in Table 4, young people with early dating and sexual experience would also have more sexual experience at any point in time. A second mechanism is that early heterosexual relationships will be related to more frequent sexual intercourse later in the life course, even when the type of social and emotional commitment in relationships are the same. This could occur at least partially because those who begin dating and going steady early and who have experienced early first intercourse have had sexual intercourse with more partners than have others. This greater experience probably provides individuals with more expectations to include sexual expression in the dating and courtship experience.

The relationships of age at first date, age at first steady, and age at first intercourse to current dating and courtship behavior are summarized in Table 5. Among both young men and young women there is a modest association between age at first date and recent dates: Those who began dating after age 16 are somewhat more likely to have dated relatively infrequently during the 4 weeks prior to the interview, whereas those who began dating earlier are overrepresented among the frequent recent daters. For the young women, there is a negative association between age at first date and both dating the same person recently and having a dating relationship with someone whom they plan to marry. However, for the young men there is no easily interpretable relationship between age at first date and dating the same woman recently or dating someone whom they plan to marry.

In terms of age at first steady and age at first intercourse, the important distinctions are between those who had never gone steady and all others

TABLE 5
**The Relationships of Age at First Date, First Steady, and
 First Intercourse to Recent Dating and Courtship Involvement**

Recent Dating and Courtship	Panel A: Age at First Date										
	Males				Females						
	13 or Younger	14	15	16	17-18	13 or Younger	14	15	16	17-18	
Recent dates											
0	15.6	18.3	20.6	29.6	36.4	13.9	11.8	14.9	18.7	41.5	
1-2	25.0	22.0	23.7	26.7	30.3	16.7	10.3	19.9	16.3	17.1	
3-4	14.6	18.3	21.6	20.0	18.2	2.8	14.7	19.9	18.7	19.5	
5-10	24.0	28.0	22.7	16.3	12.1	52.8	39.7	29.8	30.9	14.6	
11 or more	20.8	13.4	11.3	7.4	3.0	13.9	23.5	15.6	15.4	7.3	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Recent steady											
No dating	12.5	14.6	18.6	26.7	36.4	11.1	11.8	13.5	17.9	38.1	
Different boy/girl	41.7	30.5	27.8	25.2	6.1	22.2	17.6	24.8	21.1	23.8	
Same boy/girl	45.8	54.9	53.6	48.1	57.6	66.7	70.6	61.7	61.0	38.1	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Plan to Marry											
Yes	27.7	27.2	32.3	27.3	21.2	48.4	47.7	40.7	33.9	26.2	
No	72.3	72.8	67.7	72.7	78.8	51.6	52.3	59.3	66.1	73.8	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	

Recent Dating and Courtship		Panel B: Age at First Steady										
		Males					Females					
		14 or Younger	15	16	17	18	No Steady	14 or Younger	15	16	17	18
Recent dates												
0	15.9	15.1	25.6	14.8	14.3	45.2	22.1	13.3	9.3	7.5	9.1	45.7
1-2	21.6	24.5	20.0	18.5	23.8	33.1	14.3	13.3	16.3	17.5	9.1	20.2
3-4	22.7	15.1	17.8	21.0	28.6	12.9	15.6	15.0	15.1	17.5	18.2	19.1
5-10	22.7	32.1	21.1	29.6	19.0	8.1	35.1	38.3	33.7	41.3	36.4	12.8
11 or more	17.0	13.2	15.6	16.0	14.3	0.8	13.0	20.0	25.6	16.3	27.3	2.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Recent steady												
No dating	15.9	9.4	16.7	13.6	14.3	45.2	20.8	11.7	8.1	7.4	4.5	44.7
Different boy/girl	34.1	34.0	30.0	14.8	19.0	29.8	6.5	21.7	29.1	21.0	4.5	31.9
Same boy/girl	50.0	56.6	53.3	71.6	66.7	25.0	72.7	66.7	62.8	71.6	90.9	23.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Plan to marry												
Yes	30.7	24.5	36.8	48.7	40.0	3.2	52.8	47.5	39.3	48.1	72.7	2.2
No	69.3	75.5	63.2	51.3	60.0	96.8	47.2	52.5	60.7	51.9	27.3	97.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(continued)

TABLE 5 Continued

	Panel C: Age at First Intercourse									
	Males					Females				
	15 or Younger	16	17	18	Never	15 or Younger	16	17	18	Never
<i>Recent Dating and Courtship</i>										
Recent dates										
0	22.1	16.2	14.7	12.2	39.5	14.3	9.1	10.5	6.2	33.0
1-2	14.7	23.5	21.3	31.7	30.9	14.3	11.4	22.4	15.4	16.2
3-4	15.8	19.1	21.3	19.5	17.3	8.6	9.1	13.2	26.2	18.3
5-10	30.5	25.0	26.7	22.0	9.9	42.9	43.2	30.3	36.9	23.6
11 or more	16.8	16.2	16.0	14.6	2.5	20.0	27.3	23.7	15.4	8.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Recent steady										
No dating	17.9	11.8	13.3	7.3	38.9	11.4	9.1	9.1	6.2	31.4
Different boy/girl	36.8	36.8	26.7	24.4	22.2	11.4	18.2	19.5	23.1	25.1
Same boy/girl	45.3	51.5	60.0	68.3	38.9	77.1	72.7	71.4	70.8	43.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Plan to marry										
Yes	28.7	26.9	37.5	53.7	14.2	51.4	54.8	42.1	59.7	21.0
No	71.3	73.1	62.5	46.3	85.8	48.6	45.2	57.9	40.3	79.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

NOTE: Chi-square tests of significance were conducted separately for males and females for each of the listed cross-tabulations. All relationships were statistically significant at the .05 level except for the relationship between age at first date and plan to marry for males.

and between those who had never had intercourse and all others (Panels B and C of Table 5). Both those who have never gone steady and those who have never had intercourse are overrepresented among those who never dated during the 4 weeks preceding the interview and underrepresented among the frequent daters. In addition, people in these two categories are considerably less likely than others to have dated the same person in the 4 weeks preceding the interview and to be dating someone they plan to marry.

However, within the categories of age at first steady and age at first intercourse, there is no support for the expectation that at age 18 early transitions to initiating steady relationships or to sexual experience are related to frequent dating, dating only one person, or dating someone with plans of marriage. If anything, there is a tendency for young men who had a first steady relationship or who had first intercourse at ages 17 or 18, as compared to others, to be dating the same woman recently and to report that they were currently dating someone they plan to marry. Strong courtship involvement of those initiating steady relationships or first intercourse at ages 17 and 18, however, is not as apparent among the young women.²

The role of current dating and courtship behavior in accounting for the impact of age at first date and age at first steady on current sexual experience is addressed empirically in Table 6 where several multivariate equations predicting sexual experience in the 4 weeks preceding the interview are summarized. For the purpose of this analysis, two measures of current courtship and dating involvement are used: recent dates and a combination of recent steady and plan to marry. The second variable was defined as a four-category variable: not going out in the past 4 weeks; going out, but with different individuals; going out with the same person; and dating someone the person plans to marry. Also, three dependent variables were used in this analysis: recent frequency, a variable defined and described earlier, and two of its components — (a) whether the respondent experienced sexual intercourse in the 4 weeks before the interview and (b) the frequency of intercourse among those who experienced sexual intercourse during the 4-week period. Multiplication of the two component variables together equals the original recent frequency variable.

The multivariate analysis is accomplished using multiple classification analysis (MCA), a form of dummy variable regression. For each of the analyses of the effects of age at first date reported in Table 6, age at first date is included in the MCA equations along with recent dates and the variable combining recent steady and planning to marry. Similarly, for

TABLE 6
**Multiple Classification Analysis of the Effects of Age at First Date and
 Age at First Steady on Sexual Experience During the 4 Weeks Preceding the Interview**

Dating Variables	Continuous Measure ^a		Dichotomous Measure ^b		Continuous Measure For Sexually Active ^c					
	N	Unadjusted Adjustment 1 ^e	Unadjusted Adjustment 2 ^f	Unadjusted Adjustment 1	Unadjusted Adjustment 2	N	Unadjusted Adjustment 1	Unadjusted Adjustment 2		
A. Total Sample										
Age at first date										
13 or younger	123	2.56	2.36	2.20	.53	.49	.44	.485	4.84	
14	145	1.92	1.62	1.56	.49	.43	.41	3.92	3.87	
15	233	1.48	1.39	1.43	.36	.34	.36	4.05	4.04	
16	251	.92	1.03	1.09	.28	.30	.31	3.30	3.35	
Not before 17	98	.54	1.17	1.21	.15	.30	.31	3.53	3.39	
Eta/beta ^g		.26**	.18**	.15**	.25**	.15**	.10*	.21**	.20**	.20**
Age at first steady										
14 or younger	157	2.31	2.11	2.07	.50	.46	.44	4.64	4.78	4.88
15	111	2.03	1.79	1.72	.50	.45	.44	4.02	4.11	4.08
16	171	1.73	1.43	1.42	.38	.33	.33	4.55	4.16	4.10
17	156	1.53	1.18	1.22	.46	.38	.40	3.37	3.28	3.24
Not before 18	255	.39	1.03	1.07	.14	.26	.28	2.75	3.19	3.21
Eta/beta		.30**	.16**	.15**	.30**	.16**	.14**	.26**	.24**	.25**

TABLE 6 Continued

Dating Variables	Continuous Measure ^a		Dichotomous Measure ^b		Continuous Measure For Sexually Active ^c						
	N	Unadjusted ^d	Adjustment 1 ^e	Unadjusted	Adjustment 1	Unadjusted	Adjustment 1	Adjustment 2			
Age at first steady											
14 or younger	74	2.23	2.07	2.01	.45	.41	.40	33	5.00	5.10	5.17
15	58	2.17	1.91	1.91	.50	.45	.43	29	4.34	4.35	4.43
16	84	1.68	1.36	1.38	.35	.30	.30	29	4.86	4.39	4.45
17	79	1.25	.97	.95	.37	.30	.31	29	3.41	3.51	3.28
Not before 18	113	.52	1.20	1.24	.16	.29	.30	18	3.28	3.69	3.73
Eta/beta		.26**	.16**	.15**	.26**	.13*	.11		.27*	.22*	.26*

C. Females

- a. This is the recent frequency variable as originally defined with values ranging from 0 to 8.
- b. This is a dichotomization of the recent frequency variable with categories one to eight all scored to equal 1.
- c. The recent frequency variable but with all people reporting zero dropped from analysis.
- d. The means of the dependent variables within categories of the age variables with no controls for other variables.
- e. The means of the dependent variables within categories of the age variables adjusted for the effects of recent dates and a variable combining recent steady and plan to marry. Effects of age at first date and age at first steady are estimated in separate equations.
- f. The means of the dependent variables adjusted for the effects of recent dates and a variable combining recent steady and plan to marry plus gender and mother's education, age at marriage, pregnancy status at marriage, marital history, number of children, religion, and religiosity. Effects of the two age variables are estimated in separate equations.
- g. Eta is the measure of association used in standard analysis of variance; it indicates the square root of the reduction of variance measured around the unadjusted subgroup means instead of around the total mean. Beta is a comparable measure of reduction of variance, but it measures the reduction associated with the adjusted subgroup means rather than the unadjusted subgroup means.

*Statistically significant at the .05 level; **statistically significant at the .01 level.

each analysis of the effects of age at first steady, the two control variables are included in the equation along with age at first steady. Note that the effects of age at first steady and age at first date are not estimated simultaneously in the same MCA equations. Because the purpose of Table 6 is to focus on the effects of age at first date and age at first steady controlling the effects of current dating and courtship, only the data summarizing the two age variables are shown in Table 6. The effects of current dating and courtship on the dependent variable were summarized in detail in Table 4, and the multivariate analysis changes those results only slightly. In order to check the possibility that the observed relationships could be due to other characteristics of the family, each of the analyses outlined above was repeated with controls for gender and the mother's education, age at marriage, pregnancy status at marriage, marital history, number of children, religion, and religiosity. The results from the analysis with this expanded set of controls is labeled as Adjustment 2 in Table 6 and the analysis with the smaller set of controls is labeled as Adjustment 1.

The timing of initiating dating is strongly and inversely related to recent frequency and each of its components. The proportion of young men and women reporting sexual intercourse during the 4 weeks preceding the interview decreases monotonically with age at initiating dating, and among those who reported sexual intercourse, the frequency decreases with age at first date, although the pattern is not monotonic. The combination of these two factors produces a very large and monotonic relation of age at first date to the overall variable, recent frequency; average coital frequency for those who first dated by age 13 was over 4 times as large as for those who had not dated before age 17.

The multivariate analysis clearly suggests that some of the impact of early dating on recent frequency operates through current levels of courtship and dating. With the introduction of controls for the two current dating and courtship variables, the difference in the percentage reporting intercourse between those beginning dating at age 13 or younger and those who had not dated before age 17 is reduced from 38 percentage points to 19 percentage points. With the Adjustment 2 controls, the difference is reduced further to 13 percentage points. Of course, the 13% difference that remains suggests that the factors considered here are not the entire explanation of the differential in reporting sexual intercourse by age at first date. In addition, the introduction of controls changes very little the effect of age at first date on recent frequency among those who reported any sexual intercourse during the 4 weeks preceding the interview.

The pattern of relationships for age at first steady is less straightforward. Among respondents who had not gone steady before age 18, many of whom had never gone steady, the fraction reporting sexual intercourse during the 4 weeks preceding the interview is quite small, and among those in this group who reported sexual intercourse, the average frequency was smaller than for those who had gone steady before age 18. However, with the introduction of controls for current dating and courtship, the differences between this group and the other groups are substantially reduced, suggesting that a substantial part of the distinct behavior of those who had not gone steady before age 18 is due to their current lack of dating and courtship involvement. The difference is reduced somewhat further with the introduction of controls for familial characteristics. However, this group still maintains its distinct position relative to the other groups even with the extensive controls of Adjustment 2. For those who reported going steady before age 18, without controls there is a slight U-shaped relationship between age at first steady and reporting any sexual intercourse during the preceding period. But even with the slight U-shaped relationship, those who reported going steady at age 15 or younger have higher fractions reporting any sexual intercourse than those first going steady at 16 or 17, and that difference is accentuated somewhat by controlling current dating and courtship. Also, among those who reported sexual intercourse during the preceding 4 weeks, there was a tendency for those who first went steady early to have greater frequency of intercourse than for those who first went steady later, and this difference is also accentuated by the controls for current levels of dating and courtship. Thus current patterns of dating and courtship seem to mask rather than to explain the true effect of age at first going steady among those who started before age 18. Clearly, some explanation other than current dating and courtship patterns is needed to account for the differences in recent sexual experience among those who first went steady before age 18.

A similar analysis was conducted of the impact of current dating and courtship levels in explaining the relationship of age at first intercourse to recent sexual experience. However, in this analysis the sample was limited to those respondents who had ever experienced sexual intercourse. In addition, this analysis explicitly considered the possibility that age at first intercourse was related to current frequency because of the impact of age at first intercourse on number of partners. This possibility was suggested by the strong association documented in Table 4 between age at first intercourse and number of partners. This analysis was conducted by entering number of partners into the equations predicting the three

variables summarizing recent sexual experience and evaluating the extent to which the introduction of this variable reduced the observed effects of age at first intercourse.

One weakness of this analysis deserves mention. Ideally, the measure of number of partners used in this analysis should include only partners before the 4 weeks preceding the interview to preclude any chance of including the dependent variable within the measurement of the control variable. Because our data collection asked about all sexual partners, including those of the last 4 weeks, this strategy cannot be followed. The result will be that the control for the number of partners will be too strong and probably result in an underestimate of the effect of age at first intercourse on current sexual experience.

Age at first intercourse is clearly and strongly associated with recent frequency and both of its component variables (Table 7). Those who experienced first intercourse before age 16 are more likely to report sexual experience during the 4 weeks immediately preceding the interview. And among the sexually active, the frequency of sexual intercourse is markedly higher among those who experienced first intercourse at a younger age. In addition, the introduction of the two variables summarizing current dating and courtship magnifies the observed relationships rather than attenuating them.

Although current dating and courtship provide no explanation of the impact of age at first intercourse on current sexual experience, the number of partners does help to explain the influence of age because when the number of partners is added to the equations, the observed effects of age are reduced markedly although not eliminated. Apparently, young people who experience sexual intercourse at a fairly young age have more time and opportunity to have sex with additional partners (see Table 4), which, in turn, leads to more current sexual activity. In fact, only about one half of the respondents reporting one sexual partner reported intercourse during the 4 weeks preceding the interview as compared to about 80% who had had six or more partners. Similarly, among the currently sexually active, the current average frequency of sexual intercourse was higher among those with more lifetime partners (data not shown in tables). However, the number of lifetime partners is not the total explanation of the impact of age at first intercourse on current sexual experience because the observed impact of age at first intercourse on recent frequency remains substantial even with controls for number of partners (Table 7). In addition, the introduction of controls for gender and family characteristics

TABLE 7
 Multiple Classification Analysis of the Effects of
 Age at First Intercourse On Sexual Experience During the 4 Weeks Preceding the Interview^a

Age at First Intercourse	Continuous Measure ^b			Dichotomous Measure ^c			Continuous Measure ^d for Sexually Active ^j							
	Unadjusted ^f	Adjusted ^f	Adjust- ment 2 ^g	Unad- justed	Adjust- ment 1	Adjust- ment 2	Unad- justed	Adjust- ment 1	Adjust- ment 2	Adjust- ment 3				
15 or younger	128	3.38	3.54	3.00	3.10	.73	.76	.65	.68	.93	4.65	4.84	4.59	4.79
16	111	2.87	2.87	2.89	2.94	.68	.68	.67	.67	75	4.25	4.30	4.36	4.49
17	150	2.11	2.16	2.37	2.35	.56	.57	.60	.60	84	3.76	3.68	3.84	3.72
18	106	1.45	1.19	1.53	1.38	.51	.46	.54	.54	54	2.85	2.59	2.69	2.33
Eta/beta ⁱ		.26**	.31**	.21**	.24**	.19**	.24**	.13**	.15**		.24**	.31**	.26**	.34**
A. Total Sample														
15 or younger	94	3.27	3.32	2.95	2.98	.73	.75	.65	.68	69	4.45	4.61	4.53	4.69
16	68	2.22	2.38	2.53	2.57	.60	.62	.65	.65	41	3.68	3.84	3.91	4.06
17	75	1.69	1.62	1.92	1.96	.52	.56	.56	.56	39	3.26	2.99	3.17	2.96
18	41	1.12	.90	.95	.73	.46	.43	.51	.47	19	2.42	2.04	1.80	1.38
Eta/beta		.30**	.34**	.27**	.29**	.22**	.26**	.16*	.20*		.27**	.35**	.35**	.43**
B. Males														

C. Females

15 or younger	34	3.68	3.75	3.08	3.25	.71	.72	.62	.64	24	5.21	5.09	4.74	4.89
16	43	3.91	3.66	3.20	3.19	.79	.77	.71	.70	34	4.94	4.95	4.57	4.88
17	75	2.52	2.72	2.91	2.81	.60	.64	.66	.65	45	4.20	4.33	4.57	4.39
18	65	1.66	1.56	1.99	2.02	.54	.50	.57	.58	35	3.09	3.00	3.29	3.12
Eta/beta		.30**	.30**	.18*	.17	.20**	.21**	.11	.09		.31**	.31**	.22*	.27*

a. This analysis is limited to those who have ever had sex.

b. This is the recent frequency variable as originally defined with values ranging from 0 to 8.

c. This is a dichotomization of the recent frequency variable with categories one to eight all scored to equal 1.

d. The recent frequency variable but with all people reporting zero dropped from analysis.

e. The means of the dependent variables within categories of the age variables with no controls for other variables.

f. The means of the dependent variables within categories of the age variable adjusted for the effects of recent dates and a variable combining recent steady and plan to marry.

g. The means of the dependent variables within categories of age at first intercourse adjusted for recent dates, a variable combining recent steady and plan to marry, and number of partners.

h. Same analysis as for Adjustment 2 except that gender and mother's education, age at marriage, pregnancy status at marriage, marital history, number of children, religion, and religiosity are also added to the equations.

i. Eta is the measure of association used in standard analysis of variance; it indicates the square root of the reduction of variance measured around the unadjusted subgroup means instead of around the total mean. Beta is a comparable measure of reduction of variance, but it measures the reduction associated with the adjusted subgroup means rather than the unadjusted subgroup means.

*Statistically significant at .05 level; **statistically significant at .01 level.

accentuates rather than attenuates the observed impact of age at first intercourse.

SUMMARY

This article analyzes adolescent sexuality among young white women and men within a physiological and social developmental process. Individuals enter the teenage years as children and exit them as young adults. On the physiological side, teenagers reach their full stature during these years and experience sexual maturation. Social development is equally dramatic: In a few short years the barriers between the genders become permeable, and young men and women begin to date and court with the eventual outcome for most being marriage and the initiation of childbearing.

The data presented in this article document the impact of dating and courtship development on the initiation of intimate heterosexual relations. Very few young people experience sexual intercourse before they begin to date, but as they initiate dating, the transition to sexual experience begins. However, it is only after young people develop a "steady" dating relationship that the transition to sexual experience becomes rapid. And, as young people begin to think about the possibility of marriage, sexual intercourse often becomes a frequent element of the relationship.

The tempo of this social developmental process is very important. Young people who begin to date at an early age also tend to develop steady relationships early and continue to date more frequently. Both the timing of the initiation of dating and the development of steady dating relationships have substantial implications for the initiation of sexual relations. Young men and women who begin dating early and who develop steady relations early are more likely to be sexually experienced, to have had sexual relations with more partners, to be more sexually active during their late teenage years, and to have more permissive attitudes concerning premarital sex.

These data are clearly consistent with a developmental model suggesting that as members of a couple become increasingly involved with each other emotionally, the range of sexual experience that is normatively acceptable expands. And, as young women and men gain experience with one level of involvement, they become prepared for more intensive sexual involvement. Of course, the earlier the dating and courtship process begins, the more time and opportunity young people have to experience

sexual intercourse. And, for those who experience sexual intercourse early in the teenage years, there is more time and opportunity for developing sexual relations with other partners.

Although many of the empirical relationships documented in this article can be explained straightforwardly in terms of the tempo of dating and courtship and associated opportunities for sexual experience, several important relationships cannot be explained easily in terms of time and opportunity. The most important of these are the strong inverse relationships of age at first date, age at first steady, and age at first intercourse to sexual experience at age 18. Those who begin dating young, who begin going steady young, and who experience first sexual intercourse young are much more sexually active at age 18 than others. Although some of these relationships can be partially explained by the level of dating and courtship involvement at age 18, current levels of dating and courtship are not the primary explanation of the relationships. In addition, the number of sexual partners can account for some of the influence of age at first intercourse on frequency of intercourse at age 18, but the association of age at first intercourse to sexual experience at age 18 is still substantial even with the effect of number of sexual partners controlled.

The data show, then, that those who develop early dating and sexual relationships are more likely than others to include sexual experience within whatever level of dating and courtship relationship they might have. That is, given a level of dating and courtship relationship at age 18, those who dated early, went steady early, and had early sexual experience were the most sexually active at age 18.

Although our data do not permit the testing of alternative explanations of these empirical findings, several alternatives present themselves. One possibility is that early and more frequent dating, early and frequent steady dating, and early and frequent sexual experience give individuals experience and confidence in heterosexual relations that lead to more frequent sexual experience later in life. The strong effect of number of sexual partners on sexual experience at age 18 and the role of number of partners in explaining the effect of timing of first intercourse on sexual behavior at age 18 is consistent with this view. Another possible explanation focuses on the selectivity of young people into early dating, courtship, and sexual relationships. It seems rather unlikely that the processes of initiating dating, going steady, and sexual intercourse are random with respect to the level of social skills, to the amount of personal confidence, the degree of personal attraction, and the extent of sexual drives. On the contrary, it seems likely that those with social skills, personal confidence,

physical attractiveness, and high sexual motivation would both begin the dating and courtship process earlier and proceed more rapidly through the developmental process (Udry, 1988; Udry, Talbert, & Morris, 1986). If these individual characteristics are fairly stable over time, they could help to account for the correlations of early dating and sexual transitions to the degree of sexual expression later in the life course.

Thus, although the placement of adolescent sexuality within a developmental framework that includes the processes of dating, courtship, and planning for marriage is useful, the data examined in this article raises additional questions about the important causal determinants of the process. Given the magnitude of the unexplained relationships between the tempo of initiating dating and sexual relations and the level of subsequent sexual experience, these issues merit future theoretical and empirical attention.

NOTES

1. Chi-square tests of statistical significance were estimated for several specific contrasts between specific rows of the table. Two of the eight comparisons of sexual experience between those in rows one and two of Table 3 are statistically significant at the .05 level; for rows one versus three, 6 of 8 are statistically significant; for rows four versus five, it is 6 of 9; and for rows four versus six, it is 6 of 10.

2. Among those who had ever gone steady only the relationships between age at first steady and recent steady for females and between age at first steady and plan to marry were significant at the .05 level using a chi-square test. Among those who had ever had sexual intercourse, only the relationship between age at first intercourse and plan to marry for males was statistically significant at the .05 level.

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