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A Longitudinal Study of Conversations with Parents about Sex and Dating During College

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Abstract

Emerging adulthood is a time of sexual and romantic relationship development as well as change in the parent-child relationship. This study provides a longitudinal analysis of 30 young adults' (17 women, 13 men) sexual experiences, attitudes about sexuality and dating, and reported conversations with parents about sexuality and dating from the first and fourth years of college. Self-report questionnaires revealed increases in general closeness with parents, increases in sexual and dating experiences, and both more sexually permissive as well as more gender stereotyped attitudes. Qualitative analyses of individual interviews indicated a movement from unilateral and restrictive, sex-based topics to more reciprocal and relationship-focused conversations over time. Gender analyses revealed that young women reported more restrictive sex messages and young men more positive-sex messages. Participants also described increased openness and comfort in talking about sexual topics with both mothers and fathers from the first to fourth year of college. Overall, the results suggest that prior findings of increased mutuality with parents during the college years extend to the traditionally taboo topic of sexuality.

Keywords: parent-child conversations, emerging adulthood, sexual development, romantic relationship development

While there is great diversity in the lives of emerging adults, the majority of late adolescents who complete high school in the United States enroll in college in the fall immediately after high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Many of them also leave home at this time, often resulting in rapid increases in independence, as well as the need for both themselves and their parents to alter expectations and patterns of interaction. At the core of this developmental transition is the realization that the relationship is moving away from that of parent and child and toward that of two adults (Aquilino, 2006; Arnett, 1997). This study explores the dynamics of emerging adults' relationships with their parents through a mixed-method examination of changes in parent-child conversations about a notably "adult" topic, sexuality and dating, from the first to fourth year of college.

The period of emerging adulthood is characterized by distinctive social exploration in the arenas of love and sex (Collins & Van Dulmen, 2006; Lefkowitz & Gillen, 2006; Paul & White, 1990). Western societies generally anticipate that emerging adults will engage in multiple dating and sexual experiences, and young adults' activities and attitudes tend to reflect this expectation. For example, a recent national survey found that about half of 17-year-olds are sexually active, rising to over 90 percent for 24-year-olds (Mosher, Chandra, & Jones, 2005). Additionally, survey studies suggest that college students are more accepting of casual sex than are younger adolescents (Chara & Kuennen, 1994; Miller & Moore, 1990). Notably, however, emerging adults, like their younger counterparts, have been found to endorse a sexual double standard that allows men more sexual freedom than women (Crawford & Popp, 2003), for example, college males reporting greater willingness to engage in casual sex than college females (Chara & Kuennen, 1994; Knox, Sturdivant, & Zusman, 2001). These developing sexual experiences and attitudes are shaped not only by broad social institutions, such as religion and the media, but also within interpersonal relationships (Christopher, 2001). Examining how adolescents and emerging adults talk with close others about sexuality and dating, and the ways these conversations may change over time, can illuminate how they come to understand and make meaning of their developing sexual and relational experiences.

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Parent-child Relationships during Emerging Adulthood

Life course developmental theory posits that parent-child relationships during adolescence and young adulthood become both increasingly autonomous and mutual (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), and research generally has provided support for this pattern. During the transition to college, emerging adults generally tend to report positive growth in their relationships with parents (Lefkowitz, 2005; O'Connor, Allen, Bell, & Hauser, 1996; Rice & Mulkeen, 1995). For example, as adolescents move into emerging adulthood, relationships with their parents typically have evidenced stable or greater closeness and less conflict (Aquilino, 1997; Thornton, Orbuch, & Axinn, 1995; Van Wel, Ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2002), along with increasing mutuality and reciprocity (Wintre, Yaffe, & Crowley, 1995). In a retrospective study of college students, Lefkowitz (2005) found that the majority of participants reported positive changes in their relationships with parents, including greater closeness, more open communication, and increased mutuality. Themes of positive change in the overall quality of parent-child relationships were particularly apparent for students who had been at college longer.

Although parent-child relationships during emerging adulthood tend to improve in closeness and mutuality, some theories suggest that this pattern might be dependent on particular kinds of role transitions, such as attending college or moving away from home. For example, Dubas and Petersen (1996) found that 21-year-olds living at home or close to home reported poorer relationships with parents than did those who had moved further away. Additionally, Aquilino (1997) found that transitions to college or full-time employment, as well as cohabitation or marriage, were associated with closer, more supportive, and less conflicted parent-child relationships.

While changes in parent-child relationships during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood have been increasingly well-documented, longitudinal studies of this age period have been sparse. Furthermore, most research has examined overall qualities of parent-child relationships, despite indications that adolescents may be more inclined to approach parents about certain topics such as financial, educational, and career concerns rather than social activities or sex-related topics (Noller & Bagi, 1985; Reisch, et al., 2000; Sebald, 1986). Some research, however, suggests that during adolescence, patterns of parent-child communication about sexuality are related to their overall patterns of communication (Kotva & Schneider, 1990; Rosenthal, Senserrick, & Feldman, 2001). Therefore, it is likely that changes in parent-child conversations about sexuality during emerging adulthood not only can illuminate the process by which sexual and romantic relationships develop, but can also offer insight into changes in patterns of parent-child communication more generally.

Parent-child Communication about Sexuality

Studies have found that parent-child communication about sex and dating can importantly contribute to both adolescents' and young adults' sexual development and behavioral choices by offering advice about sexual safety, sexual abstinence, reproduction/menstruation, sexual intercourse, and dating behaviors (see review by DiIorio, Pluhar, & Belcher, 2003). Notably, this advice often varied with the gender of the adolescent, reflecting a sexual double standard. For example, messages to adolescent sons more often included information about sexual exploration and pleasure (Downie & Coates, 1999; Moore & Rosenthal, 1991) while messages to adolescent daughters were more often restrictive, stressing protective issues and the negative consequences of sexual activity (Downie & Coates, 1999; O'Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, & Watkins, 2001). In addition to gender, ethnicity also tends to contour parent-child cautions about sex. For example, Asian-American college students reported restrictive implicit messages from parents and infrequent conversations about sex-related topics (Kim & Ward, 2007). Latino mothers' conversations with adolescents also tended to focus on cautionary messages, though their conversations also included personal values and advice (Romo, Lefkowitz, Sigman, & Au, 2002).

Research has examined the quality of parent-child communications about sexuality, in particular, comfort and openness in such discussions. Openness to sexual communication has been found to be associated with more diverse discussions of sexuality (Dutra, Miller & Forehand, 1999), while embarrassment or discomfort on the part of the parent and the adolescent has been found to be negatively associated with their frequency of communicating about sex (Jaccard & Dittus, 1991). A recent cross-sectional study suggested that openness about sexuality increases from adolescence to emerging adulthood, in that emerging adults reported lying less to parents about several topics, including dating behaviors, than did adolescents (Jensen, Arnett, Feldman, & Cauffman, 2004). It is important to note that the frequency and quality of sexual communication depends on the gender of both the child and the parent. One of the most consistent findings related to communication frequency is that it varies by gender of the parent,

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such that mother-child communication is more frequent than father-child communication (DiIorio, et al., 2003). Research also suggests that both male and female adolescents are likely to discuss sex-based topics with mothers than fathers and that boys report greater comfort talking with fathers about sex-based topics than girls (DiIorio, Kelley, & Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999).

In summary, studies of changes in parent-child relationships during emerging adulthood have identified general trends towards increased closeness and mutuality (e.g., Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Lefkowitz, 2005), with scant but suggestive evidence that this increased openness also applies to discussions of sex and dating. Research has established that parents can be important sources of information and support about sexuality and dating during adolescence and young adulthood, but this phenomenon has not been examined from a longitudinal perspective. Additionally, most studies have relied on quantitative methods to assess relational or conversational changes, which tend to obscure and over-simplify the complexities of lived experience. The present study contributes to research on parent-child communication about sex and dating through a longitudinal, mixed-method exploration of salient conversational changes during the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood.

The Current Study

To connect the present study with prior work, our first goal was to survey longitudinal changes in participants' sexual experiences and attitudes during college and in overall parent-child closeness using quantitative measures. Based on prior research with college student populations, we expected increases in participants' sexual and romantic relationship experience and changes in their attitudes toward dating and sexuality. Namely, we hypothesized that participants would report more romantic and dating partners as well as more liberal sexual attitudes (Lefkowitz, 2005), increased sexual permissiveness (e.g. Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000) and continued gender-stereotyped attitudes (e.g., Chara & Kuennen, 1994) from the first to fourth year of college. We also anticipated that participants would indicate increased overall closeness with parents (e.g., Thornton, et al., 1995) and that overall parental closeness would be associated with greater openness with parents about sexual topics (e.g., Rosenthal, Senserrick, & Feldman, 2001).

The overall aim of this study was to embed sexual and romantic relationship development in the context of salient conversations with parents recalled during interviews in the first and fourth year of college, and to examine changes in their conversational patterns across this time period. Changes in conversational patterns were first examined by comparing *topics* of parent-child conversations at each age period, as well as the *quality* of these reported conversations with mothers and fathers. We then focused on the fourth year interview to explore how participants, *in their own words*, narrated changes in their conversations with parents throughout their college years.

Method

Participants

Participants were 30 college students (17 women, 13 men) who took part in the study during their first year and fourth year of college. They comprised a subset of participants from a larger study on sexual socialization (citations deleted for blind review). Fifty-six first-year college students (27 men and 29 women) participated in the study at the first assessment, 51 of whom were still enrolled at the university and were contacted to participate at the second assessment. The 30 students who participated at both assessments averaged 18.2 years of age at Time 1 (T1), and 21.1 years of age at Time 2 (T2). Almost all participants reported their sexual orientation as "exclusively heterosexual" at T1 (n =29) and T2 (n =26). One woman identified as bisexual at T1, and four women identified as bisexual at T2. All participants mainly had experience in heterosexual relationships. Participants' reported racial/ethnic backgrounds included European American (n = 15), Latino/a or Mexican heritage (n = 6), Asian American (n = 5), and bi-racial or multi-racial (n = 4).

Regarding participants' regional and familial backgrounds, 87% (n = 26) were raised in California. Language(s) spoken in the home was not assessed. Parents' education ranged from some high school to graduate degrees. Ten mothers and 13 fathers had obtained a graduate degree, eight mothers and seven fathers had a college degree, and 11 mothers and ten fathers had graduated from high school. Most participants came from dual-income families, such that all care-giving fathers were employed either full-time (n = 28) or part-time (n = 2) and the majority of mothers

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worked outside the home either full-time (n = 19) or part-time (n = 8) during the participants' childhoods. No differences on any of these demographic variables were found between participants who returned to participate in the study at T2 and those who did not.

Procedure

Participants at the first assessment volunteered for a two-hour interview and questionnaire study entitled "Communicating about Sexuality" during the 2003-2004 academic year. Participants were recruited from lower-division psychology courses at a public university in Central California, and received course credit for their participation. At this time, participants were asked to consent to be contacted for a follow-up study; all participants gave consent. Participants still enrolled at the university were then contacted via email in Spring 2007 and signed up to participate in another two-hour interview and questionnaire session. At the second assessment, participants were compensated $20 for their participation.

The one-on-one, semi-structured interviews took place in a private room at the university and lasted between 30 and 70 minutes. Questionnaires were administered following the interviews at both T1 and T2. Prior to being interviewed, participants were informed about the study procedures and provided written informed consent. The interviewers were European-American women several years older than the participants and consisted of the first author and two female research assistants at T1, and the first author only at T2. The research assistants were trained to be aware of the sensitivity of the topics discussed and to be responsive to any indications that the participants were uncomfortable with the questions.

Materials

Self-report questionnaire. A 60-item questionnaire gathered information about sexual behaviors, attitudes toward dating and relationships, and closeness in parent-child relationships. Four questions assessed aspects of participants' *sexual and dating experience*: "Have you ever had sexual intercourse?" "How many consensual, heterosexual partners have you had?" "How many dating relationships have you had that lasted over one month?" and "How satisfied are you with your current level of experience with dating and sexual relationships?" (1 = very unsatisfied, 3 = have no feelings either way, 5 = very satisfied).

Attitudes toward dating and relationships were measured with an abridged version of the *Attitudes Toward Dating and Relationships Measure* (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999). The 29 questions comprised five separate subscales: the Importance of Appearance (e.g., "In dating it is all about appearances," five items); Sex as Recreational (e.g., "Having sex should not necessarily imply commitment to that person"; six items); Men are Sex-Driven (e.g., "Men are mostly interested in women as potential sex partners and don't want to be 'just friends' with a woman"; eight items); Same-Sex Acceptance (e.g., "Homosexuality is a question of orientation, not morality"; five items); and Sex is for Marriage (e.g., "People who have sex before they're married typically regret it later"; five items). Participants responded to each statement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = disagree strongly, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = agree strongly). Reliability was adequate; alphas ranged from .72 to .86.

The parent subscale of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) was used to measure *closeness in the parent-child relationship*. The subscale consisted of 27 items (e.g., "My parents help me to understand myself better"; α at T1 = .88, α at T2 = .92). Participants responded to each statement on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = disagree strongly, 4 = agree strongly).

Semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data were drawn from two main portions of the T1 interviews, and from the full T2 interview. Questions elicited recollections of recent and salient interactions and conversations with parents about dating and sexuality, and included "What messages (both verbal and nonverbal) about sexuality did you hear from your parents when you were a teenager?" at T1, and "Can you tell me about a recent memorable conversation with your parents regarding sexuality during college?" at T2. Subsequent questions were asked to clarify and expand on participants' responses and to elicit specific examples. Follow-up questions also inquired about the openness and comfort of both the participant and parent regarding the reported conversations about sexuality. At both T1 and T2, participants predominantly focused on conversations from the past year; thus conversations discussed at T1 were typically from their senior year in high school or first few months of college, and

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conversations discussed at T2 were typically from the fourth year of college. At T2, participants were also given direct quotes from their T1 interview to review. Quotes were identified by the first author and included all statements the participants made about conversations with their parents at T1. In response to these quotes, participants were asked to compare their current conversations with parents to those discussed at T1.

Qualitative Analysis

Using a thematic analysis approach, which stresses the inductive development of analytic categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we first read the T1 and T2 interviews closely for emergent themes that surfaced during reports of parent-child conversations about sex and dating, and the quality of such conversations at each point in time.

The thematic analysis yielded eight *topics* of parent-child conversations that were the most frequent and salient at either T1 or T2. The topics, shown in Table 1 with narrative examples, were sexual safety, two kinds of restrictive messages (postponing sex until marriage and warnings to daughters about boys), two kinds of positive-sex messages (acceptability of sex before marriage and sex as good or natural), participants' dating relationships, participants' sexual experiences, and parents' sexual or relational histories. Each topic was coded as either present or absent in the interview. Interviews were coded by the first author and one undergraduate research assistant. Acceptable interrater reliability was obtained on all eight topics at both T1 and T2; Cohen's kappa coefficients are reported in Table 1.

In addition to assessing the topical content of memorable conversations with parents about sex and dating, the *overall quality in terms of openness and comfort* of these conversations was also assessed individually for mothers and fathers at each time period. Drawing from prior research (e.g., DiIorio, et al., 1999), conversations were coded as "open and comfortable" when participants reported that both the parent *and* the child felt relatively open, comfortable, and were not avoidant or overly embarrassed when discussing most sex-related topics. Interviews in which participants generally described infrequent, awkward, brief, and superficial conversations were coded as "not open and comfortable." Participants who described themselves as comfortable but their parent as uncomfortable (or vice versa) were coded as "not open and comfortable." Openness and comfort was determined by taking into account the participants' total statements and descriptions regarding conversations with both their mother and father about sex and dating in each interview, as well as the response to the explicit followup prompt concerning overall level of openness and comfort. Occasionally, participants described feeling more or less comfortable with specific topics than with others (e.g., abstract discussion of sexuality vs. discussion of specific acts and experiences). However, in all such cases, this was discussed as an overall quality (either open or not) with exceptions; thus, it was possible to do dichotomous coding. Inter-rater reliability for both openness and comfort with mothers and fathers was acceptable, as shown in Table 1.

Lastly, T2 interviews were coded for *participants' descriptions of the presence or absence of change* in their communication patterns with parents about sex and dating. After reviewing portions of their previous interviews, participants were asked to relate their current conversational style to that from high school. Responses to this inquiry were coded as either reporting "change" or "no change" in their conversational patterns with parents about sex and dating; all responses were coded into one of these two categories. Inter-rater reliability was acceptable, as shown in Table 1.

Results

Changes in Self-Ratings of Sexual and Dating Experience, Attitudes, and Closeness with Parents

A series of 2 x 2 mixed-model repeated measures ANOVAS assessed the effects of time and gender in self-ratings of sexual and relationship experience, attitudes towards dating and relationships, and closeness with parents. Although the focus of this study was on changes between the first and fourth year of college, analyses also examined possible gender differences. A main effect for gender was found regarding the view that men are sex-driven; women agreed more strongly than did men with these statements.[1] The only significant gender x time interaction found that at T1, men agreed more strongly than women that sex is recreational, a difference that dissipated by T2.[2]

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Changes across time in ratings of sexual and dating experience and satisfaction are shown in Table 2. Number of intercourse partners averaged around 2 people at T1, rising to around 4 people between T1 and T2, a marginally significant difference. With regard to individual sexual activity, 14 of the 30 participants had engaged in consensual heterosexual intercourse at T1, compared to 26 participants at T2. While same-sex experience was not assessed at T1, at T2, six participants (five women, one man) reported having engaged in sexual behavior with a person of the same sex, and two reported having been in a relationship with a person of the same-sex (both women). Average number of dating partners also revealed a marginally significant increase across the college years, from 1.57 at T1 to 2.34 between T1 and T2, although the magnitude of the difference was weak. Increases in sexual and dating experiences were accompanied by increases in ratings of satisfaction with these experiences, although the average rating at T2, 3.59 (SD = 1.2), was just slightly above the midpoint of the 5-point scale.

Attitudes toward specific aspects of dating and relationships generally became more open across the college years, such that there was a main effect of time for all five subscales of this measure. As shown in Table 2, acceptance of homosexuality, and of the view that sex is recreational, increased across time. Reflecting this increased openness to sexuality was a decrease across time in the view that sex is for marriage. Interestingly, accompanying these generally more liberal attitudes were increases over time in the endorsement of the importance of physical appearance and of the view that men are sex-driven. However, with the exception of acceptance of homosexuality, none of these average endorsements at T2 exceeded the mid-point on a 7-point scale.

In addition to general increases in sexual and dating experiences from the first to fourth year of college, as well as increased openness toward sexuality and awareness of men's sexual interest, were attendant increases in perceived closeness with parents. On a 4-point scale, average closeness ratings were 3.28 at T1 and 3.97 at T2, a near ceiling effect (see Table 2).

Topics of Conversations with Parents

We now turn to the heart of the study, which situated changes across time in sexual and dating experiences and attitudes in memorable conversations with parents. We first compared the prevalence of each conversational topic for the sample at T1 and T2. Change across time was assessed using likelihood ratio chi-square analyses. Table 3 shows the prevalence of each topic separately for males and females at each time period, along with the results of chi-square analyses and effect sizes for changes in prevalence over time. Unless otherwise noted, gender differences were not statistically significant. However, where significant, the effect sizes were moderate to strong (Rea & Parker, 1992).

Sexual safety. As can be seen in Table 3, sexual safety was the most prevalent topic in conversations with parents at T1. Messages about sexual safety emerged in approximately 70% of the interviews at T1, and were equally prevalent at T2. Overall, sexual safety was a staple of memorable conversations with parents; only two participants did not report discussing sexual safety at either time period.

At T1, conversations about sexual safety typically took the form of parents directing or warning the child to practice safe sex. For example, a young man described how his parents would offer warnings as he left the house to go out with friends or on dates:

> They just said to be careful if you decide to have sex. "Be careful, use protection." When I went out sometimes, they were like, "well you know, safe sex," but it was more of a joking thing. But at the same time I kind of understood they really meant it too.

While some of the safety conversations at T1 included specific comments about avoiding pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, most were general warnings or implicit encouragement to use protection when having sex.

Whereas sexual safety conversations at T1 usually were framed as directives or warnings, promotions of sexual safety at T2 more often emerged as curious inquiries or mild reminders. For example, a young man at T2 described a conversation with his parents about pregnancy that centered on whether or not he had talked about this issue with his new girlfriend:

> I remember a conversation I had with them at dinner. They were asking, you know, how serious the relationship was and if we've talked about what would happen if she was to get pregnant. And, you know, my mom was kinda like, "well, you know, have you talked about this, have you talked

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> about that? These are serious things, you know, you have to be careful, you have to protect yourself." I kinda wanted to feel awkward but the way that we were talking about it didn't make me feel awkward. I felt pretty comfortable, I could have said anything.

Like the above conversation, many of the memorable T2 discussions about sexual safety related safety to the daughter's or son's actual ongoing, rather than hypothetical, sexual relationships.

Restrictive sexual messages. As can be seen in Table 3, restrictive sex messages, in which parents either warned about 'boys' or advised postponing sex until marriage, were only reported by daughters. These restrictive messages to daughters, however, significantly decreased in prevalence at T2. At T1, the message to postpone sex until marriage was often described as emphatic. For example, one young woman explained how this message emerged while watching movies with her father:

> Sex before marriage - that was obviously a big NO. Like, if, like, we'd watch movies, and there'd be people having sex, and my dad would be like, "You can't do that, blah, blah. That's bad." Just kinda randomly in the middle of a movie he'd be voicing his opinion.

Reasons for daughters postponing sex until marriage typically included religion and cultural traditions. For example, one young woman said, "My parents are really traditional, they believe that like if you marry a person you have to stay with them your whole life, like we Catholics think marriage is the holy ceremony so if you're married with someone you're with them the whole rest of your life and sex is a way, since you love each other, sex is something holy, in a way". Another woman, a Filipina, explained that, "In the Philippines it's taboo for you to, like, mess around when you're not married. So that's what they want us to do here. You're supposed to save yourself for marriage".

The second restrictive sex message reported by women at T1 was warnings about boys or men. These warnings often referred to both physical and sexual danger. For example, a daughter reported that her father, "was always just like, 'No boys, bad, boys are bad,'" and another explained that her parents, "don't like me having a boyfriend 'cause they just assume that boys want to have sex with you when you go out with them, so they're just trying to protect me from that." Some parents specifically warned participants about rape. One woman explained that, "Everywhere we go they'll just always say 'be careful, because you know rape can happen anywhere in any country.'"

Boys and men were not only cast as physically and sexually dangerous, but also as hazardous to one's dreams for the future. This message sometimes emerged from the parent's own experience. For example, one daughter said of her mother, "She was a single parent, four daughters, so it's all girls, anything that has to do with a boy, it's like 'He's gonna ruin your life, he's going to stop your dreams, don't handicap yourself with a boyfriend.' So that's always been the message from her." The two kinds of restrictive messages often occurred in tandem, such that if parents warned daughters about boys, they also advised them to postpone having sex until marriage.

Although not all women who reported restrictive sex messages at T1 also reported these messages at T2, all women reporting such messages at T2 also reported similar messages at T1; for such women, restrictive sex messages from parents appeared to be a steady drumbeat across college. Unlike sexual safety messages, restrictive sex messages from parents were quite similar across time, only slightly amended for college. For example, one female participant explained at T2:

> She always has stated it, like, made a statement just like, "Be careful with men, like, cause you never know what kind of a person a guy is gonna be." And, like, she says that mostly about guys, just 'cause I'm in college too, and you're in a drinking environment, like, there's people drinking and doing drugs around you, like, they, they have lower inhibitions and stuff, you know.

Positive-sex messages. Whereas restrictive sex messages were aimed at daughters, positive sex messages were aimed more often at sons. As can be seen in Table 3, this gender difference was particularly apparent for messages that sex before marriage is acceptable.[3] Regardless of time period, discussions about the appropriateness of sex before marriage were usually framed as a parent showing acceptance that the son (or, less often, the daughter), was sexually active. For example, one male explained at T1:

> I knew my dad knew I was having sex and I knew he was fine with it. Because he knew I'm his son and he knew I would be safe and be cool. I'd never shown my dad any reason that I would be unsafe or stupid or like doing weird drugs while having unprotected sex with hookers and stuff.

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Another young man at T1 noted, "In high school, they started to tell me, 'You don't have to save it for marriage, but be careful about it.' They kind of understood the way that most kids are nowadays, so they didn't force it upon me." Notably, when describing how their parents promoted the acceptability of sex before marriage, most participants also said that their parents were not accepting of casual sex, or of sex outside of a committed relationship.

The other positive message, that sex is good or natural, was equally prevalent for men and women at T1, but declined for women at T2, while remaining fairly steady for men. At T1, a young woman described how her mother paired this positive sex message with a warning about sexual safety. She said her mother and aunts would tell her, "Don't listen to people who are telling you sex is a bad thing, you just need to learn to use protection. Make sure you are using adequate protection and there is nothing wrong with it, nothing you should be ashamed of." In contrast, a male participant, at both T1 and T2, recalled a much less cautionary conversation with his father when he was in middle school:

> I can remember one time we were fixing the bathroom tub and he was like, so "Ben, have you gotten head yet?" And I was in 8th grade, and said "No, actually." And he was like "Oh, it's fun." So he just definitely wanted to be one of the guys - that type of thing.

In general, parents who framed sex as good or natural seemed to be trying to relate to their children on a peer level, or to let their children know that while sex may not currently be developmentally appropriate, that later in life, sex is a normal and positive aspect of romantic relationships. Thus, not all "sex is natural" conversations included permission to have sex before marriage or at a young age. Also, as evidenced in the above excerpts, when positive-sex topics arose in conversations, they were often accompanied by messages of sexual safety. Notably, these two types of messages—sexual safety, and positive sex messages—were the only sexual messages that showed consistent base-rates across college.

Participants' dating relationships. Conversations with parents about one's own dating relationships increased markedly from the first to fourth year of college, averaging about 26% of the sample at T1 and 76% at T2. All participants who reported discussing dating relationships at T1 also reported discussing such relationships at T2, suggesting that such discussions, once broached, became routine.

At T1, these discussions included keeping parents abreast regarding one's dating status, parents giving advice for relationship problems, or a parent talking about what is involved in a good relationship. For example, a daughter at T1 described her mother's advice about relationships:

> I think she said that the main thing is always to be comfortable and to be happy in a relationship, you know, just more to make sure you have an emotional connection to somebody and that if you are going to be kissing someone or having oral sex or intercourse that you are comfortable enough to talk to them about things. And also that you're happy and make sure that the person treats you right, that they respect you, and you trust them and they trust you and there is honesty.

While only a handful of participants recalled talking with parents about their own dating relationships at T1, the large majority of participants did so at T2. Furthermore, at T2, conversations about this topic were much more varied and detailed, ranging from the status of their past, present and potential future relationships, problems in their current relationships, issues surrounding breaking up with a partner, and tips for improving a relationship. For example, one young woman said that she and her mother were very open about relationships, more like friends than mother and daughter, with the exception of talking about 'the sexual stuff':

> I talk with my mom, like, a lot. We're really open, like, pretty much about everything except, like, the sexual stuff. Once in awhile I'll be like, "Oh he was a really bad kisser" or something like that. She knows all about the guys and that kind of thing. We're like pretty close about stuff like that. She's the person that I would go to for that, like, her and maybe like one or two girlfriends so, I actually trust their advice, you know? We have a more 'friend' relationship than 'mother-daughter' so in that respect we can talk about stuff.

Frequently, conversations about one's relationships involved getting advice or support from parents. For example, a male participant described how his mother supported him when he was upset about his girlfriend leaving the country for several months:

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> I went to my mom and called her one day when I was in the car and I was just like really emotional. I really hadn't ever been that emotional before. I was like "I don't know what to do, I'm just so sad. I want to support her but at the same time I don't want her to go because I want her to be with me" and my mom was like, "I know it's going to be tough, but you guys love each other and I have complete confidence that you guys will remain faithful and still have a good relationship." She just told me to remember to communicate wisely, not to bother her too much, to give her her space. And she just said that she had confidence in me and she knew it was hard and to stick it out and just to come to her whenever I wanted to talk about it.

To participate in this type of conversation indicated that the son felt comfortable displaying emotional vulnerability with his mother, and that his mother had enough information about the history of his relationship to offer her support and advice. Thus, similar to changes in conversations with parents about sexual safety from T1 to T2, conversations about personal dating experiences became more grounded in actual relational experiences by T2. Also, parents' knowledge about their children's relationships tended to be much more extensive at T2, suggesting that ongoing conversations about the relationships were routine.

Participants' sexual experiences. Similar to discussions with parents regarding one's own dating relationships, discussions of one's own sexual experiences were about three times more prevalent at T2 than T1. Typically, these conversations included disclosure that one had engaged in sexual intercourse. For example, a son described a T2 conversation with his father about being sexually active. He said, "I was being dropped off at school at one point my freshman year, um, and my dad had asked me, you know, 'are you sexually active?' Um, and I said 'yeah.' And he was like, 'Oh, with Mary?' - who was my girlfriend - and I said, 'yep.' And he was like, 'Okay, are you using protection?' You know, that sort of thing."

Conversations about the child's sexuality, however, were sometimes quite oblique. For example, a daughter at T2 relayed a conversation with her mother on her way home from a school break during her third year of college. She described her mother's method of asking her if she was sexually active:

> This one time she picked me up from the airport and I was in the car and she started poking my belly asking, "Are you making babies?" And I was just like, "No, I'm not making babies. If you're asking if I'm sexually active, yes. But I'm not making babies." And then she just kind of like looked at me and like, kind of like stopped talking. I was, like, hung over from an airplane ride and all of a sudden she's poking my stomach being like "Are you pregnant, is there a baby in there?" I thought it funny how my mom paralleled 'sex' with 'making babies' versus 'sex for pleasure' or like sex for, like, to be intimate. She just thought automatically, "Oh you're making babies, you're going to ruin your life."

While participants might have told parents about having had sex, they typically did not report having conversations in which detailed sexual information was shared. Also, unlike conversations about personal dating relationships, conversations with parents about personal sexual experiences typically were not ongoing discussions.

Parents' sexual or relational history. As was true of discussions about the child's dating and sexual activity, discussions of parents' sexual or relational history were also considerably more prevalent by T2 (see Table 3). Also, similar to conversations about the participant's sexual experiences, discussions of parents' sexual or relationship experiences typically happened only once or twice. For example, a young man at T2 described how, on a drive home from a college break, "Dad just decided to divulge his history with my mom, so, um, he talked about the whole college years and how they met in college in freshmen or sophomore year and they were pretty much the first time either of them had really dated so they were pretty fresh at that point."

A few participants, however, described conversations about parents' histories as more ongoing. For example, a daughter at T2 described her mother's recent trend toward disclosure:

> She started sharing more with me about her own life in the last couple weeks, which has been really awkward. I guess we're trying out this new level of talking where, you know, she's also telling me about, you know, she just starting hanging out with a group of swingers. And, you know, it, she's never talked to me about her own sexuality before at all. So all of a sudden she's like, "So, I'm hanging out with, you know, this crowd of swingers." And so that was definitely

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> awkward. She, she seemed really excited. Um, so I tried to be very supportive of this. But at the same time I couldn't help, like, giggling. Just cause I've never talked about her sexuality. Um, but I want to be supportive of her and this new experience.

As exemplified in the above excerpt, some participants reported feeling awkward learning about their parents' current or past sexual exploits, while most reported finding it interesting or useful.

In summary, conversations about the importance of safe sex were frequent at both T1 and T2, although the tone of these messages was usually less directive and more curious at T2, when many of the participants were sexually active. Restrictive sexual messages – warnings about boys being dangerous and the directive to postpone sex until marriage – were only reported by daughters, whereas the message that sex before marriage is acceptable was primarily reported by sons. Also, while restrictive sexual messages to daughters decreased by T2, the message that sex before marriage is acceptable was prevalent for sons at both time periods. Finally, conversations with parents about one's own dating relationships and sexual experiences, as well as parents' sexual and relational histories, showed marked increases from T1 to T2, for both daughters and sons.

Gender Differences and Changes in Quality of Conversations

Several significant differences emerged regarding the openness and comfort of participants' reported conversations with their mothers and fathers (see Table 3). First, chi-square analyses indicated that a higher proportion of male (23%) than female participants (0%) reported openness with fathers at T1. This difference disappeared at T2, when similar proportions of male (69%) and female (41%) participants reported openness and comfort with fathers. With regard to conversations with mothers, similar proportions of male and female participants reported openness and comfort at each time period, averaging about 30% at T1, and 83% at T2. However, participants were more likely to report open and comfortable conversations with mothers than fathers at both time periods. At T1, 30% of the participants felt conversations were open and comfortable with mothers, versus 10% with fathers, χ^2 (1, N = 30) = 8.05, p = .005, Phi = 0.51; at T2, 83% reported open and comfortable conversations with mothers, versus 53% with fathers, χ^2 (1, N = 30) = 8.78, p = .003, Phi = 0.48.

Regarding changes in the quality of conversations over time, more participants reported open and comfortable conversations with mothers and fathers at T2 than at T1 (see Table 3). A minority of reported conversations with mothers about sex and dating at T1 were classified as being open and comfortable (30%), while the large majority were so classified at T2 (83%). A similar difference was found regarding conversations with fathers: 10% of participants were classified as being open and comfortable conversations at T1, while 53% were so classified at T2. Furthermore, all participants who described open conversations at T1 with either their mother or father also described open conversations with this parent at T2, suggesting that openness became routine.

Discomfort at T1 in talking with parents about sexuality was sometimes unilaterally attributed to the parent. However, some participants remarked on their own avoidance of this topic. For example, a female participant said that sex "wasn't something talked about in the house. If I brought it up she would talk to me, but I don't want to bring it up." While some participants did report engaging in open and comfortable conversations with their parents at T1, in general, conversations about sex were not reciprocal or "conversational," but more often consisted of brief, sporadic, and unidirectional statements from parent to child. As noted in the previous 'topics' section, many of these statements at T1 emphasized "being safe" and frequently emerged when the child was heading out of the house to meet up with friends or dating partners.

At T2, conversations with parents about sex and dating were generally framed as frequent, ongoing and mutual interactions. For example, describing how she frequently goes to her mother for support about relationship issues, one female participant at T2 said:

> Lately, we've been talking a lot about my overall relationship with this one guy I'm dating right now who, like, I'm just kind of having some issues with right now. And so she's just really supportive. I'm really open with my mom, not necessarily about sex in particular, but in relationships because she doesn't feel like I have a very healthy relationship example with her and my dad so she wants me to have something healthy.

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Perceived Changes in Conversations with Parents

When asked to compare their current conversations with parents about sex and dating to those from their T1 interview, 83% of participants (n = 25) reported changes in the ways in which they communicated with their parents about sex and dating. All of their descriptions of changes paralleled the quality changes reported earlier, in that the changes were in the direction of more open and comfortable relationships with their parents. For example, a male participant explained, "As I've gotten older, they've starting talking about – saying different things as I started having different experiences. And they were progressive, more in-depth. So they didn't necessarily change anything they said, they just added more as I got older and more mature. Things I would understand. They would just add to it, it was a building process."

At T2, participants' reports also paralleled the topic changes reported earlier in that they described recently having talked more with parents at about emotional and relational issues, rather than about logistics or precautions. For example, one female participant summarized, "My parents were open about talking about safe sex practices in high school and are now more open to talking about the emotional side of sexuality and sexual experiences as I've gotten older." Participants described how these conversations generally became more lenient, casual, and comfortable. For example, a young woman explained:

> Now my mom is a little more encouraging about dating. Before, she would say, "You shouldn't think about boys yet. You have to worry about getting into a good college so you can get a good job." But now that I'm in college she's a little more lenient. She said, "You know, I'm not really against it if you have a boyfriend."

Nine participants specifically attributed changes in openness to shifts in the dynamics of their relationship, in particular, that relationships with parents were now more like "peers" or more "equal." For example, a young woman explained at T1:

> I think my parents do know that I've had sex, but they're not gonna ask. My mom does ask me but I still deny it 'cause I think she would still get really mad at me. And, I don't know, like, I think it's my thing anyway, so she doesn't really need to know until later on, maybe, when she would accept me really as an adult, 'cause she still treats me, well, I mean, she's always going to treat me as a child. She doesn't look at me like a real adult.

At T2, the same woman explained how her increased maturity and role as more of an equal has opened up the communication between her and her parents:

> I think my freshman year my parents were still kind of up in parent mode talking down to me, I still felt talked down to, but I think now I feel we're more like on one-to-one basis when we talk about things so it's less like they're preaching to me more like we're having a conversation. Just with us, me and my parents both experiencing me in college and seeing I'm responsible and they trust me has like changed our views and how we talk about things.

Not living at home with parents was another reason that six participants gave for feeling more comfortable disclosing information about sexual behaviors or relationships. A male participant explained:

> Like in high school I was pretty, whenever they'd ask me about things like that you know, like "are you seeing anyone, blah, blah, blah." I would just kind of shrug it off, or, not really talk to them about it. But in college, maybe just 'cause you're a little more independent and you're kind of off on your own and you don't see them everyday, I don't know, I feel a little bit more comfortable talking to them about things like that.

Increased disclosure and comfort discussing sex and dating was also attributed to specific events that occurred during college that necessarily lead to conversations with their parents (n = 7). Events included sexual assault, abortion, and attempted suicide. For example, one young woman explained an increased openness in her relationship with her father resulted from her attempted suicide:

> I'm "full service" since I almost killed myself because he realized, oh shit, she was almost gone. So now he cares more. Like, it's so weird because I used to talk to him, like, a couple times a year, I'd see him maybe, like, once or twice a year. And now I talk to him a couple times a week. I'd say my mom's also taken a bit more maternal as of very lately, only because of the whole suicide thing.

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In summary, when participants reflected on notable changes in their conversations with their parents with regard to sexuality and dating in interviews conducted during the first and fourth year of college, the majority of participants described these conversations as becoming more in-depth, relationally-focused, and mutual. Catalysts for change included becoming more mature or responsible in the eyes of their parents, leaving home, and traumatic events that could not be hidden from parents.

Discussion

Using mixed methods, this longitudinal study situated increased engagement in dating and sexuality from high school through college in the context of increasingly routine, mutual and disclosing conversations with parents. As the child became actively engaged in dating and sexual behavior, conversations shifted from hypothetical prohibitions ("Don't get a girl pregnant," "Stay away from boys") and prescriptions ("Use safe sex") to discussing issues in actual and ongoing relationships. These personal disclosures were increasingly reciprocal, such that, for example, a mother might explain why she was attracted to her husband while the daughter would talk about her dissatisfactions with her boyfriend. Informants attributed these changes to increased equality in their relationships with their parents, and/or to specific events, such as an abortion, that lead to conversations about sexuality and dating. Notably, this expanding mutuality did not differ by the gender of the child or the parent. Instead, gender differences centered on messages specific to sexual activity, which were more restrictive for daughters than for sons, especially at Time 1.

Less conflict and greater openness with parents in general has been documented as a typical change throughout the young adult years (Aquilino, 1997; O'Connor, et al., 1996); notably this study extends these findings to the domain of conversations about sex and dating. Overall closeness in parent-child relationships increased from T1 to T2 (an effect that was large by conventional standards). Parent-child conversations about sex and dating also appeared to blossom across time, as conversations about both the participants' and parents' sexual and dating histories were discussed more frequently at the end of college (effects that were moderate in size by conventional standards). This finding is particularly interesting because it is not obvious that talking about sex and dating with parents would necessarily follow the trends of general relational development during emerging adulthood, which suggest overall increases in mutuality and disclosure (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985), because past studies have found both parents and adolescents to be more reluctant to discuss sex and dating than other topics (Riesch et al., 2000). Additionally, participants' explanations that living away from home facilitated open communication with parents personalizes prior survey findings that leaving home for college was associated with improved parent-child relationships (Aquilino, 1997; Dubas & Petersen, 1996; Lefkowitz, 2005). Furthermore, the present findings highlight the reciprocal nature of this change. In other words, greater disclosure and participation was dependent on both the parent becoming more comfortable with the discussions, as well as the young adult. This finding underscores the continuing trend of increased mutuality in parent-child relationships during young adulthood (Youniss & Smollar, 1985) and the dyadic nature of parent-child relationships, which often has been obscured in studies of parental sexual socialization practices (DiIorio, et al., 2003).

The quantitative findings that informants moved toward more permissive sexual values amid increasing endorsement of statements supporting gendered stereotypes (effects that were moderate to large by conventional standards) extend previous non-longitudinal research that has shown similar patterns of attitude changes among emerging adults (Crawford & Popp, 2003; Knox, Sturdivant, & Zusman, 2001; Lefkowitz, 2005). However, it is unclear how the increasingly gendered stereotyped attitudes reconciled with declining restrictive sexual messages for daughters and increased inclinations on the part of both daughters and sons to talk to their parents about their relationships. It is possible that declining messages from parents about postponing sex until marriage and warning about boys contributed to more permissive attitudes among the young adults. It is also possible that these attitude changes are more associated with the college and peer climate, than with the parent-child relationship, following research showing that both permissive and gender stereotyped sexual attitudes are prevalent among contemporary college students (Crawford & Popp, 2003; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000) despite .

Qualitative findings also extended prior, non-longitudinal research regarding both topics and quality of parent-child conversations about sexuality. First, while many past studies have identified sexual safety as a frequent topic of conversations among parents and adolescents (DiIorio et al., 2003), the present findings suggest that sexual safety is also a consistent topic of discussion throughout college. Next, the finding that female participants described more

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frequent restrictive sexual messages than male participants and that male participants described more positive sex messages also coincides with past research (Downie & Coates, 1999), suggesting that sexual double standards persist within parent-adolescent communication about sexuality. However, young women's conversations with parents evidenced less restrictive messages at T2 (with effects that were large by conventional standards)., suggesting that even the most restrictive parents of college-bound emerging adults relaxed their regulations eventually, perhaps to facilitate developmentally appropriate mutuality and autonomy in the parent-child relationship (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Interestingly, positive sex messages did not subsequently increase, potentially indicating a concern on the part of parents that discussions of sexual topics may encourage sexual activity, which has been noted by parents in past research (Fitzharris & Werner-Wilson, 2004). Lastly, the gendered analyses of openness and comfort in parent-child conversation support past research that indicated greater comfort overall with mothers than fathers (DiIorio, et al., 2003) and greater comfort and openness between sons and fathers than daughters and fathers (e.g. DiIorio, et al., 1999). However, the longitudinal analyses suggest that this difference disappears by the end of college, with similar proportions of young women and men reporting openness and comfort with fathers.

Despite the consistent patterns that were revealed through the thematic analysis, there was nonetheless considerable variability between participants' accounts. For example, while some participants reported slowly becoming more comfortable discussing aspects of their dating relationships with parents, other participants reported more abrupt changes. There was also variation in the frequency of conversations, such that some participants reported multiple telephone conversations each week about relational issues, while other participants indicated that these types of conversation were typically reserved for in-person exchanges during school breaks. Furthermore, a small number of participants never achieved a high level of openness and continued to experience infrequent and awkward interactions without any further discussion. These findings challenge the theoretical framework that parent-child relationships automatically become increasingly mutual and autonomous as children approach young adulthood. While the majority of participants' relationships with parents increased in autonomy and mutuality during this developmental period, some parent-child relationships maintained rigid hierarchies throughout college, while other parent-child relationships evidenced high levels of mutuality and autonomy before the child left for college. This variability in the developmental trajectories of parent-child relationships suggests the importance of differentiating life course theories of parent-child relational development to take into account individual and familial differences. One such difference concerns ethnicity. A few Asian-American and Mexican-American participants attributed their parents' restrictive messages, or discomfort talking about sex, to culturally-based values and/or to the perpetuation of intergenerational patterns, in which sex was a taboo topic with parents. These findings, although anecdotal, are consistent with other research concerning the role of ethnicity in parent-child communication about sex (Kim & Ward, 2007; Romo et al., 2002). Although our small sample did not allow for an analysis based on ethnicity, future research should systematically explore these potentially different conversational experiences based on participants' religious and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, while the uniformity in the interviewers' gender and racial backgrounds lended consistency to the interviews, we also recognize that this consistency may have rendered male participants and participants of color less comfortable sharing their experiences.

There are several other limitations to this sample and methodology. First, the findings would likely be different for young adults who are not in college and are either living at home or starting their own families (Dubas & Petersen, 1996). Indeed, participants themselves noted that being away from their parents at college facilitated their independence and changes in their parents' supervisory role regarding dating and sex. Additionally, this small sample may not necessarily generalize to college students as a population either; thus, broader examination of the qualitative findings through quantitative methods would contribute to our understanding of the applicability of these findings to other young adults and add a more nuanced understanding of the topics and qualities of these conversations and how they change over time. Lastly, the changes from the first to final year of college were so substantial that assessment at intermediary points would have enabled a better understanding of the processes by which change occurred.

Overall, this longitudinal study across the college years revealed patterns of change in parent-child conversations that entailed a movement from restrictive, sex-based topics to a greater focus on relationships. The consistent trend toward increased disclosure of personal sexual and dating experiences on the part of both emerging adults and their parents suggests that the increased closeness and mutuality found in studies of general relational changes even manifests within conversations about a traditionally taboo topic. Understanding both the typical patterns, as well as the variability, in participants' experiences can be useful information for parents curious about the ways in which

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other parent-child pairs navigate the notorious “sex talks” during adolescence and young adulthood. Knowing that, by the last year of college, almost all of the parents and young adults in this study eventually settled into more comfortable, open, and mutual discussions about sex and dating grounded in real experience is an important finding for developmental researchers and parents.

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Notes

1. Women (T1: M = 2.7, SD = 0.6; T2: M = 3.0, SD = 0.6) agreed more strongly than did men with statements that men are sex driven (T1: M = 1.9, SD = 0.4; T2: M = 2.5, SD = 0.6), $F(1, 28)=13.41$, $p < .001$.

2. For endorsements of statements that sex is recreational, men's mean at T1 was 2.6 (SD = 0.6) as compared to 1.9 (SD = 0.6) for the females. The men's mean at T2 was 3.2 (SD = 0.6) as compared to 3.3 (SD = 0.7) for women, $F(1, 28) = 5.46$, $p = .027$.

3. Men were more likely to report messages from parents that sex before marriages was acceptable; this was a marginally significant difference at T1 ($\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 3.06$, $p = .08$) and a significant difference at T2, $\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 4.92$, $p = .02$. Men were also marginally more likely to report discussing "sex as good or natural" at T1 $\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 2.82$, $p = .09$; there was not a significant difference at T2 for this topic ($p > .05$).

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Table 1

Coding Categories for Time 1 and Time 2 Interviews.

Coding category	Cohen's kappa T1	Cohen's kappa T2	Narrative Example
Sexual safety	1.00	.83	*[They said to] always carry a condom in your purse in case for protection.*
Restrictive sex messages:			
Warnings about 'boys'	.89	1.00	*[They said to] be careful around boys you don't know that well 'cause they might have the wrong intentions.*
Postponing sex until marriage	.92	1.00	*They always hoped we would stay virgins until we got married.*
Positive sex messages:			
Sex as good or natural	.91	1.00	*They told me sex is a natural occurrence and that everyone experiences it at some point.*
Acceptability of sex before Marriage	.61	.72	*They don't have any problem with sex before marriage; there has never been like a specific deadline or thing that has to happen before having sex.*
Participants' dating relationships	.64	.83	*The girl I dated freshman year, I talked about her a lot [with my parents] because I was really infatuated with her.*
Participants' sexual experience	.87	.87	*I was home for the summer and I think [my mom] asked me, 'did you ever sleep with him?' and I was like 'yeah' and [sic] she was like, 'did you think he was worth it?' and that kind of thing.*
Parents' sexual and relational Histories	.81	.72	*My mom has been a lot more open with me about her life. Like, she'll tell me certain things about my dad and their relationship*
Quality: Open and comfortable (Mother/Father)	.84/.84	.76/86	*I've always been open with them and they've always you know, they've known about my dating life, they know my boyfriends; I've never hidden anything from them.*
Participant reported change	N/A	.89	*"I do feel like it's closer now than even freshman year just because I'm definitely more mature and um, just independent and I call them more and stuff like that, so, I talk to them more, yeah."*

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Table 2

Longitudinal Comparisons of Sexual and Dating Experience, Attitudes Toward Dating and Relationship, and Closeness with Parents (N = 30).

Variable	Time 1		Time 2			Partial Eta
	Mean (Women/Men)	95% CI	Mean (Women/Men)	95% CI	*F*	Squared
Number of intercourse partners	1.77 (1.84/1.64)	0.93-3.07	3.99 (4.37/3.50)	1.86-6.12	3.67†	0.13
Number of dating partners [a]	1.57 (1.74/1.36)	0.97-2.18	2.34 (2.89/1.36)	1.54-3.14	4.00†	0.12
Dating and sexual satisfaction [b]	2.54 (2.53/2.55)	2.09-2.99	3.59 (3.37/3.82)	3.07-4.11	13.47***	0.32
Attitudes toward dating and relationships [c]						
Importance of Appearance	2.18 (2.26/2.09)	1.92-2.43	2.70 (2.81/2.60)	2.39-3.02	10.29**	0.30
Men are Sex-Driven	2.30 (2.70/1.90)	2.10-2.49	2.78 (3.00/2.55)	2.54-3.02	14.79**	0.35
Sex as Recreational	2.26 (2.05/2.60)	2.03-2.48	3.25 (3.27/3.23)	2.97-3.52	48.14***	0.64
Same-Sex Acceptance	3.63 (3.47/3.72)	3.39-3.87	4.58 (4.49/4.67)	4.36-4.80	85.26***	0.76
Sex is for Marriage	2.09 (2.10/2.03)	1.91-2.27	1.36 (1.56/1.16)	1.16-1.55	51.49***	0.66
Closeness with parents [d]	3.28 (3.06/3.50)	3.09-3.47	3.97 (3.77/4.17)	3.68-4.27	49.85***	0.65

Note. The *F*-statistic represents the main effect of time using a 2 (time) x 2 (gender) mixed-model repeated measures ANOVA. Partial Eta Squared represents the effect size. CI = Confidence Interval. † $p<.10$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p < .001$

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[a] Number of dating partners included only those lasting over 1 month.

[b] Ratings of satisfaction ranged from 1 = very unsatisfied to 5 = very satisfied.

[c] Attitudes toward dating subscales ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

[d] Ratings of closeness ranged from 1 = disagree strongly to 4 = agree strongly.

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Table 3

Percentage of Participants Referencing each Topic and Quality of Conversation at T2 and T2.

	Time 1				Time 2				Time 1 to Time 2	
	Female	Male	χ^2	Phi	Female	Male	χ^2	Phi	χ^2	Phi
Topics										
Sexual safety	65%	77%	0.52	0.13	76%	77%	0.01	0.01	0.08	0.02
Restrictive messages										
Warning about ‘boys’	29%	0%	4.59*	0.39	18%	0%	2.55	0.29	12.77***	0.75
Postponing sex until marriage	59%	0%	11.47***	0.62	23%	0%	3.53†	0.34	9.14**	0.55
Positive-sex messages										
Acceptability of sex before marriage	18%	46%	3.06†	0.23	18%	54%	4.92*	0.23	0.13	0.02
Sex as good or natural	29%	31%	0.06	0.01	12%	38%	2.82†	0.31	1.91	0.15
Participants’ dating relationships	29%	23%	0.15	0.07	65%	92%	3.17†	0.32	4.32*	0.33
Participants’ sexual experiences	18%	7%	0.63	0.14	59%	31%	2.33	0.28	6.81**	0.42
Parents’ sexual or relational history	29%	15%	0.81	0.16	59%	62%	0.02	0.03	7.87**	0.45
Quality: Openness and Comfort										
Mother	35%	23%	0.53	0.13	82%	84%	0.03	0.03	3.98*	0.29
Father	0%	23%	5.46*	0.38	41%	69%	2.37	0.28	4.06*	0.31

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Note: N = 30; 17 females, 13 males. Likelihood ratio chi-square statistics compared gender differences at T1 and T2 as well as T1 response frequencies to T2 response frequencies. The Phi statistic represents the effect size. † p<.10, * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p < .001