10. Daily Emotional and Behavioral Interactions in Young Men's and Young Women's Single and Multiple Partner Relationships

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Abstract:

Purpose: Public health risk reduction efforts commonly focus on avoiding multiple-partner relationships, as they can be associated with increased sexual risk behaviors (e.g. inconsistent condom-use). During adolescence, however, young people normatively participate in different romantic/sexual relationships – some of which occur simultaneously (e.g. dating two people). Since emerging relationships support learning to manage emotional and behavioral aspects of sexuality, it is possible that different types of relationships confer specific developmental skills. We compared day-to-day emotional and behavioral interaction differences between adolescent women's and men's single and multiple partner relationships.

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Articles:

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Methods: Data were drawn from two distinct longitudinal sexual health cohort studies of middle-to-late adolescent women (AW: N=385, 14-17 years) and men (AM: N=72, 14-17 years) residing in areas of high rates of unintended pregnancy and STIs. Participants completed daily diaries measuring partner-specific affect and sexual behavior (up to five “partners” in one diary). We classified each diary period as associated with single or multiple (2+) partners; we then compared daily emotions and behaviors across these classifications. Daily partnered-behaviors (all: no/yes) were: kissing/holding hands (AM-study only), touching partners' genitals, partner touching genitals, receiving or giving oral sex, vaginal sex, anal sex and condom use during
vaginal sex and/or anal sex. Daily emotions were: sexual-interest (single, 5-pt item), feeling in-
love (single, 5-pt item), partner-support (4-items, α=0.93), partner-negativity (5-items, α=0.83),
and relationship-satisfaction and sexual-satisfaction (both single, 5-pt item; in AM study only).
Generalized estimating equation (GEE) logistic regression analyzed differences in daily
partnered-behavior frequency; GEE ordinal or linear regression examined differences in mean
levels in daily emotions (Stata v.13). All models controlled for age/race; single-partner was the
referent in all models.

**Results:** The majority of all day-to-day partnered interactions were associated with a single
partner (AW's: 72%; AM: 88%); when multiple partners were reported, the modal number was
two. AM's daily reports of kissing and hand-holding (OR=8.33-9.08) were eight-to-nine times
more frequent with single compared to multiple-partners. Both AW's and AM's giving/receiving
genital touching (AW: OR=2.63-2.71; AM: OR=3.74-3.78) and giving/receiving oral sex (AW:
OR=2.27-2.45; AM: OR=2.86-3.78) occurred between three and four times more often with
single-partners. Vaginal sex was about three times as frequent with single-partners among (AW:
OR=3.20; AM: OR=2.82). Condom use during vaginal sex was significantly more likely when
AW reported multiple-partners (OR=0.45). Neither anal sex nor condom use during anal sex
were significantly associated with partner type. AW and AM noted significantly higher levels of
love (OR=1.38-1.56) and partner support (OR=2.08-4.66), but lower levels of sexual interest
(OR=0.51-0.59), on days with single partners. Single-partner interactions were associated with
AM's significantly higher relationship satisfaction.

**Conclusions:** Adolescent men's and women's partnered behaviors – both “lighter” (e.g. genital
touching) and more involved (e.g. vaginal sex) – occurred significantly more often with single-
partners. Moreover, single-partner interactions were associated with higher levels of relationally-
oriented emotions, while multiple-partner days were linked to sexual-interest. Our data support a
model of normative sexual development in which varying relationship contexts may help young
men and women learn to balance the complex emotions and behaviors associated with
adult sexuality.

**Sources of Support**

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