SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AND RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT*

Rodney M. Cate, Edgar Long, Jeffrey J. Angera, and Kirsten K. Draper**

The present study examined the connection between having sexual intercourse with a premarital partner for the first time and the effect on the subsequent relationship. This questionnaire study surveyed 447 college students concerning personal factors and characteristics of their relationships with their premarital partners. The results indicated that several factors were related to the effect on the relationship. Quality of the relationship as a sexual decision factor was the best predictor of positive effect on the relationship. Suggestions for research on premarital sexuality are discussed as well as implications for intervention programs in family life education and high school and university human sexuality programs, and with premarital couples.

Prior to the late 1960s, premarital sexual activity was not readily accepted or acknowledged by the general public. Since then, attitudes and behavior concerning premarital sexuality have become less restrictive (Robinson, Ziss, Ganza, & Katz, 1991). However, this trend does not necessarily mean that the majority of people have become irresponsible and promiscuous in their sexual expression. Recently there has been movement toward less permissive attitudes, approximating the attitudes of 1965 (Robinson et al., 1991). However, the number of people engaging or not engaging in intercourse tells nothing about the role of sexual intercourse in the development of individuals and their relationships. At least one study (Harvey, Flanary, & Morgan, 1986) found that a person’s first sexual experience was a very salient lifetime event. Others (Baxter & Bullis, 1986) have reported that first intercourse with a partner was perceived as an event that increased commitment to the partner. There is also indirect evidence that qualities of the premarital relationship may affect the impact on the relationship of having first intercourse with a particular partner. Peplau, Rubin, and Hill (1977) found that having first intercourse with a partner after the relationship had progressed to higher versus lower levels of commitment was predictive of increased levels of love, closeness, and probability of marrying the partner. These findings suggest that it is important to better understand the role of sexuality in premarital relationships.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

The development of close relationships is influenced by many different factors (Huston & Robins, 1982; Kelley et al., 1983). The close relationships model (Kelley et al., 1983) suggests that interactive, cognitive, and affective factors in relationships can be a function of: (a) personal characteristics (e.g., personality, gender, attitudes, etc.); (b) subjective conditions arising from interaction between premarital partners and also with their social networks (commitment, love, relationship quality, sex guilt, etc.); and (c) the external context (e.g., circumstances, etc.), as well as other factors.

Personal Factors

Gender, sexual permissiveness, and sex guilt have been shown to play a role in sexuality. Men and women may differ in their attitudes about sex. Men often view sex as a physical, pleasurable act, while women tend to view sex as an act to increase emotional closeness (Leigh, 1989). Similarly, men tend to have more permissive attitudes towards sex than women, although their attitudes are becoming more similar (Robinson et al., 1991). Given the fact that women are more likely to view intercourse as an indicator of emotional closeness, the authors hypothesized that women will report that having sexual intercourse for the first time with a partner had a more positive effect on the relationship than for men (Hypothesis 1).

The second personal characteristic, sexual permissiveness, has been shown to play a role in the decision to engage in sexual intercourse. Findings from one study (Bell & Chaskes, 1970) showed highly religious participants were less sexually active and maintained less permissive attitudes than respondents low on religiosity. Similarly, Spanier (1976) found that the more religious people were, the less likely they were to engage in sexual intercourse. Therefore, when those who are less permissive about sexuality actually have intercourse, a behavior that is contrary to their beliefs, the distress generated from betraying a core belief could induce a negative effect on the relationship. Thus, the authors hypothesized that the less permissive attitudes one holds, the less positive the impact of first sexual intercourse with the partner on the relationship (Hypothesis 2).

The third personal factor is that of sex guilt. Sex guilt occurs when people...
connect sexual behavior with feelings of guilt (Mosher, 1961). Several studies have demonstrated that the sexual behavior of both genders is significantly related to levels of sex guilt, though more so for women than men. Specifically, individuals with high sex guilt tend to have fewer sexual experiences than those with lower levels of sex guilt (D'Augelli & Cross, 1975; Gunderson & McCary, 1979). However, there are those who do decide to engage in sexual intercourse despite their high levels of guilt. Such individuals may experience a dissonance between their behavior and their values. Such cognitive dissonance has been shown to have negative effects on various aspects of relationships (Lewis, Gibbons, & Gerrard, 1986). Based on these findings, it is expected that the higher the level of guilt after having intercourse with the partner for the first time, the less positive the impact on the relationship (Hypothesis 3).

Subjective Conditions

Three subjective conditions are proposed to be related to the effect of first intercourse with a partner on the development of the relationship: feelings of pressure/obligation to engage in intercourse, relationship quality as a sexual decision factor, and sexual satisfaction. Feelings of pressure and obligation to engage in sexual activity come from many directions. For example, sexual pressure may come from a partner or may stem from outside factors such as the peer group. Men tend to be the initiator of sexual pressure within the premarital dyad, while women control the level of intimacy in the sexual encounter (Christopher & Frandsen, 1990). However, both males and females can feel pressured to engage in unwanted intercourse. In one study over 90% of both males and females reported that they had experienced unwanted sexual activity (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988).

Also, pressure may be felt from outside the dyadic relationship. For example, men are more oriented toward sex than women and seek more approval from others for their sexual behavior (Clayton, 1972). This difference may stem from perceptions of increased acceptance of sexual activity by male peer groups, whereas females tend to fear disapproval from their peers for their sexual behavior (Clayton, 1972). Thus, perceptions of peer group behavior may play a significant role in perceived pressure to engage in sexual intercourse. Those who feel highly influenced by perceived pressure or obligation may feel that the decision to have intercourse has been imposed on them. Consequently, the greater the extent to which people report that their sexual decision was influenced by pressure/obligation to engage in intercourse for the first time with the partner, the less positive the impact on the relationship (Hypothesis 4).

Second, the role of relationship quality in sexual interaction has been widely examined in research. Contrary to general belief, current trends show that the increase in premarital sexual activity is most prevalent among couples who feel affection for and commitment to their partner (Sherwin & Corbett, 1985). However, there are gender differences in the role relationship quality plays in the decision to have intercourse. For example, in one study, 95% of women, compared to 40% of men, stated that affection or emotional involvement was an important precursor to sexual involvement (Carroll, Volk, & Hyde, 1985).

In another study, Peplau et al. (1977) found no difference between couples who engaged in sex early in their relationship and those who waited longer in terms of relationship stability. The Peplau et al. (1977) findings suggest that having intercourse in and of itself did not influence the stability of the relationship. It may be that using relationship quality as a sexual decision factor had greater impact than intercourse itself on the subsequent relationship, although other explanations are possible. Rather than looking at how general relationship quality relates to general relationship development, it may be beneficial to examine the association between the extent to which people consider relationship quality in their decision to have intercourse with a partner and the effect of initial intercourse on the relationship. Specific assessment of the role of relationship quality as a sexual decision factor rather than general relationship quality should yield more information about how sexual intercourse influences relationship development. In other words, the assumption is that when people make informed decisions concerning sexuality, more positive relationship outcomes will follow. Thus, Hypothesis 5 states that the more that people base their decision to have intercourse on the quality of the relationship, the greater the positive impact of first intercourse with the partner on the relationship's subsequent development.

Third, some research gives clues concerning the potential connection between sexual satisfaction and relationship development. Metts and Cupach (1989) found that sexual satisfaction was positively related to premarital couples' frequency and quality of communication in relationships. Also, other research (Pinney, Gerrard, & Denney, 1987) showed that sexual satisfaction in premarital is partially comprised of satisfaction with the partner. This suggests that the more satisfied people are with the initial sexual experience with a partner, the more positive the effect on the relationship (Hypothesis 6). On the other hand, because men may be more physically oriented to the sexual aspect of relationships than women (Carroll et al., 1985), the expectation is that the correlation between satisfaction with first intercourse with their partners and the effect on the relationship will be higher for males than females (Hypothesis 7).

Circumstances

Circumstantial factors have been found to play a part in the sexual decision making process (Christopher & Cate, 1985). These outside influences may include the use of drugs and alcohol, a special occasion such as a birthday, and the absence of roommates or parents from the home which creates an opportunity for sexual intimacy. Alcohol and drug consumption lowers inhibitions and may affect the sexual decision-making process. Due to lowered inhibitions, couples might engage in sexual behavior that they might otherwise avoid. In turn, they may attribute this behavior to the effects of alcohol or circumstances rather than claiming responsibility for their own actions (Lang, Searles, Lauerman, & Adesso, 1980). Thus, the authors propose that the extent to which the decision to have initial intercourse with the partner is due to circumstantial reasons, the less positive effect intercourse will have on the relationship (Hypothesis 8).

METHOD

Sample

Participants in the present study were 447 college student volunteers from a large northwestern public university who were asked to respond to a questionnaire about dating relationships. Of these students, 366 (82%) had engaged in sexual intercourse with a previous or present partner. Those who had never engaged in sexual intercourse were instructed to answer the questions as they thought they might if in the future they had sexual intercourse. Participants were instructed to answer the questionnaire based on their first inter-
course experience with their present partner or their most recent partner if they had not had sexual intercourse in their current relationship. The group of sexually inexperienced participants and those with missing data on the variables of interest were eliminated from the study. Consequently, the group retained for analysis consisted of 302 participants. Females represented 61% and males 39% of the sample. The group had participants from each class of students (freshmen, 30%; sophomore, 26%; junior, 15%; senior, 26%). The participants were primarily white (90%), with only a small minority representing other ethnic groups (Asian, 4%; African-American, 3%; Hispanic, 1%; and Native American, 1%). The mean age of the undergraduates was 20.43 years. Forty-one percent of the students were casually dating, while 44% were seriously dating, 9% engaged, and 6% cohabiting.

Measurement of Variables

Sexual permissiveness. This variable was measured using the Sexual Attitude Scale (Hudson, Murphy, & Nurius, 1983). This self-report scale has 25 items that measure the extent to which a person adheres to a permissive orientation toward human sexual expression. Sample items included: "I think people indulge in sex too much."; "Sex education should be restricted to the home." Items were answered on a 5-point response scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). Items were reversed for scoring purposes such that low scores indicated lower permissiveness. The scale was found to be internally consistent (alpha = .94) in this study. Good construct, factorial, and concurrent validity were established in a previous study (Hudson et al., 1983).

Sexual satisfaction. This factor was measured with a single item asking respondents to indicate how satisfied they were with initial sexual intercourse with their most recent partner. Responses were answered on a 7-point scale (1 = Not at all satisfied, 7 = Extremely satisfied).

Sex guilt. Sex guilt was assessed using a single item asking how guilty the participants felt after they first had intercourse with their most recent partner. The response format was on a 5-point scale (0 = No guilt at all, 4 = Extreme guilt).

Obligation/pressure. Obligation/pressure to engage in sexual activity was measured with the 6-item subscale of the Inventory of Sexual Decision Factors (ISDF; Christopher & Cate, 1984). This subscale assesses the extent to which obligation/pressure was important in the decision to engage in intercourse with their partner for the first time. Representative items included: "How much you felt pressured by your partner for intercourse."; "The number of friends that were engaging in sexual intercourse." Respondents indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = Not important at all, 7 = Very important) the importance of each of the items in their decision. The subscale exhibited good internal consistency in the present study (alpha = .72) and predictive validity in an earlier study (Christopher & Cate, 1984).

Relationship quality as a sexual decision factor. The quality of the relationship as a sexual decision factor was measured with the 14-item positive affect/communication subscale of the ISDF (Christopher & Cate, 1984). This subscale measures the extent to which people reported that various aspects of relationship quality were important in their decision to have first intercourse with their partner. Sample items include: "How much you loved your partner."; "How important the degree of commitment was between you and your partner at the time of first intercourse."; "How much you discussed the meaning of sexual intercourse with your partner.". Participants responded on a 7-point scale (1 = Not at all important, 7 = Very important). This subscale had excellent internal consistency (alpha = .91) in the present study and predictive validity in an earlier study (Christopher & Cate, 1984).

Effect on the relationship. This variable was defined as the extent to which the relationship improved or worsened after having intercourse with the partner for the first time. This variable was measured with a single item that asked participants to indicate the degree to which the relationship got better or worse after initial intercourse with the most recent partner. Responses were made on a 5-point scale (1 = Got much worse; 5 = Got much better).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlations (one-tailed) and t tests (one-tailed) where appropriate. In addition, ordinary least-squares regression was employed to identify those factors used in the study that best predicted the effect of first intercourse on relationships. Given the high incidence of gender differences in research on sexuality, analyses were done separately for females and males.

Personal Factors

Results of the correlational analysis showed strong support for personal factors being important in predicting the effect of first intercourse with a partner on the premarital relationship. These findings highlight the importance of understanding those personal characteristics that people bring to their sexual interactions, as well as having implications for socialization, education, and intervention.

As expected, women reported that having intercourse with their partner for the first time had a more positive effect on their relationship than it did for men (Hypothesis 1: Ms = 3.95 and 3.64, t = -2.84, df = 300, p < .003). This supports the earlier argument that women are more likely than men to connect the sexual side of a relationship with the emotional side.

As predicted, the less the sexual permissiveness of men, the less positive the effect on the relationship (Hypothesis 2: see Table 1). On the other hand, this relationship was not significant for women. The reason for this gender difference is unclear. It may be that because women tend to tie the emotional aspects of relationships to the sexual aspects, the emotional overtones generated by engaging in intercourse may override any attitudinal objections. On the other hand, the current results revealed a significant relationship for women between sexual permissiveness and sexual satisfaction with the initial intercourse experience with the partner. As sexual permissiveness declined for women, sexual satisfaction also decreased. This was not the case for men. Because women tend to be less sexually permissive than men (Bailey, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1987), they may view having intercourse as more of a violation of their beliefs and values than men, leading to a subsequent negative impact on sexual satisfaction. This reduction in sexual satisfaction could then lead to a less positive effect on the relationship for these women.

As hypothesized, the higher the reported guilt at having intercourse for the first time with the partner, the less positive the effect on the relationship for both men and women (Hypothesis 3: see Table 1). This finding lends further support to the important role of guilt in premarital sexuality. The significant correlation between sexual permissiveness and guilt for both women (r = .37, p < .001) and men (r = .17, p < .03) suggested that guilt may be heightened by lower permissiveness, which then may have adversely affected the relationship.
Table 1.
**Intercorrelations Among Variables in the Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Satisfaction</th>
<th>Guilt</th>
<th>Obligation/Pressure</th>
<th>Circumstances</th>
<th>Quality of Relationship</th>
<th>Sexual Permissiveness</th>
<th>Effect on Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>-0.35***</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.35***</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.23***</td>
<td>0.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation/Pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.17*</td>
<td>-0.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumstances</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.43***</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.37***</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Quality as Decision Factor</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.30***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Permissiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.24***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Numbers in italics represent females; numbers not italicized represent males.  
*p < .05; **p < .005; ***p < .001

**Subjective Conditions**

The findings concerning subjective conditions showed the importance of factors related to conditions that arise out of interaction in relationships in influencing relationship development. A majority of the hypotheses related to subjective conditions were supported.

Analyses of the current data showed that the greater the feelings of obligation and pressure to engage in intercourse with a partner the first time, the less positive the effect on the subsequent relationship for females only (Hypothesis 4; see Table 1). It may be that feeling obligated or pressured to have intercourse leads to guilt, which results in negative consequences for the development of the relationship. This explanation was supported by the data, which showed that as feelings of obligation/pressure increased, guilt also increased for females ($r = .35, p < .001$). This correlation was also significant for men, but was much lower ($r = .15, p < .05$). This gender difference may be due to relatively more reluctance by women to engage in first intercourse than men. A previous study (Peplau et al., 1977) showed that when men, in contrast with women, had the opportunity to have intercourse in an ongoing relationship, they almost always did so. Obviously, if females tend to feel pressured to act contrary to their desires, yet engage in intercourse, they may experience more guilt than men. This likely would lead to a less positive effect on the relationship for these women.

The findings showed that the greater the extent that people considered the quality of their relationship in their decision to have intercourse for the first time with their partner, the more positive the impact on the developing relationship for both women and men (Hypothesis 5; see Table 1). This finding, in conjunction with others, implies that when people base their sexual decisions on factors that pertain to the nature of the relationship, rather than on feelings of pressure or obligation, the relationship is more likely to benefit.

The findings also showed that quality of the physical aspect of first intercourse with a partner was predictive of positive impact on the subsequent relationship. For both genders, as satisfaction with first intercourse with the partner increased, the positive effect on the relationship increased (Hypothesis 6; see Table 1). This finding, in conjunction with others in this study, demonstrates the connectedness of the physical and emotional aspects of developing relationships.

Contrary to expectation, no differences were found between males and females in the correlation between physical satisfaction and effect on the relationship (Hypothesis 7; see Table 1). Two lines of reasoning might explain this finding. It may be that women and men are more similar in their socio-sexual relationships than is generally recognized. In contrast, the positive effect on the relationship of having intercourse with a partner for the first time may be equal for the genders, but for different reasons. Relative to women, men may view sexual satisfaction as indicative of future sexual rewards, and consequently increase their involvement in the relationship. On the other hand, women may view sexual satisfaction as being indicative of emotional closeness, and thus increase their involvement.

**Circumstantial Factors**

The extent that circumstantial reasons were used for having intercourse with a partner for the first time was not related to effect on the relationship. In contrast to earlier reasoning, it may be that attributing one's decision to have intercourse with a partner to circumstantial factors may allow people to dissociate themselves from any personal responsibility. Thus, people might not see the event as relevant to the future of their relationships.

**Regression Analyses**

The findings discussed above shed light on those factors that predict the extent to which first intercourse with a partner affects the development of a relationship. However, as can be seen from the correlations in Table 1, many of the variables used in the study were correlated with each other. Consequently, two ordinary least-squares regression analyses (one for each gender) were performed to examine which of the variables used in the study were the best predictors (i.e., accounted for unique variance) of the effect on relationships (see Table 2). For females, the best predictors were quality of the relationship as a sexual decision factor and the sexual satisfaction of the first intercourse experience with the partner (see Table 2). For males, the best predictors of effect on the relationship were the quality of the relationship as a sexual decision factor, sexual satisfaction of the first intercourse experience with the partner, and sexual permissiveness. A primary predictor for both males and females was the extent to which the quality of the relationship was a factor in the decision to have intercourse with a partner. The overall pattern of the simple correlations and the regressions (five of the seven predictor variables showed similar findings by gender) suggests that there are probably more similarities than differences in how intercourse affects relationship development for men and women. More specifically, the majority of unique predictors in this study for both women and men were relationally oriented (sexual satisfaction and quality...
of the relationship as a sexual decision factor. Consequently, the differences in female and male sexuality generally may be overplayed.

**STUDY LIMITATIONS**

Certain caution should be taken when interpreting the results of this study. First, university students do not represent a cross section of American young adults in premarital relationships. Consequently, generalizability of the results is somewhat limited. Second, since all of the data in the study were collected from the same participants via several self-report instruments, the possibility exists that some of the correlations are inflated due to common method variance. However, a factor analysis showed that the effect on relationship variable loaded on a single factor, with the predictors loading together on a different factor. Consequently, it is likely that the problem of common method variance is minimal. Third, due to insufficient information, the authors were unable to control for the time between participants' reports of their intercourse experience and collection of the data. Thus, the possibility exists that participants' affective states at the time of data collection may bias their retrospection concerning the effect of intercourse on their relationships. Finally, the dependent variable, effect on the relationship, was tapped with a single item. This did not allow for determination of reliability. The reliability of a measure places a ceiling on the correlation between it and the predictors. Future researchers will need to develop a more complex assessment of this construct.

**IMPLICATIONS**

**Implications for Research**

This study's findings have implications for those who work in various types of intervention programs, i.e., clinical intervention with premarital couples, family life education, and high school/university family studies and human sexuality programs. However, researchers have noted the gap between research findings and application of those findings to intervention settings (Olson, 1976; Schwartz & Breunlin, 1983; Williams, 1991; Wynne, 1983). In order to assist premarital partners in developing more satisfying relationships, the findings can be applied to make people aware of the ways that their sexual interaction is related to the ongoing development of their relationships.

First, the current findings showed that when initial sexual intercourse with a partner was satisfying, the effect on the relationship was positive for both males and females. Similarly, individuals who reported that before engaging in intercourse they considered the quality of their relationship with their partners (i.e., that they loved their partner, were committed to each other, and had discussed the meaning of sexual intercourse) were likely to have relationships where the effect of intercourse was perceived as a positive event. Thus, for both males and females satisfaction with the experience, as well as characteristics of the relationship at the time of first intercourse, are important in the development of a positive relationship. The stereotypical ideas about male and female sexual scripts prevalent in this culture are that females tend to believe that sexual intercourse is legitimized only in the context of a loving relationship, whereas males may believe that sex should not be constrained by relationship and emotional factors. The current findings suggest that the development of a satisfying relationship is affected by relationship factors for both genders. Clinicians and educators should design programs that assure that both genders are aware of the importance that relationship factors make in the sexual decision making process and thus in the development of a satisfying relationship. One strategy for maximizing the likelihood that intercourse will have a positive effect on the relationship is to help individuals develop competent decision making and problem solving skills in their dating relationships. Obviously this skill training would need to include decision making and problem solving regarding the sexual dimensions of the relationship.

The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP; Renick, Blumberg, & Markman, 1992) is one such program that seeks to improve communication about sexual issues in the relationship. Couples who participate in PREP have been shown to maintain high levels of relationship satisfaction and communication, whereas those not involved in PREP exhibit a higher incidence of sexual problems (Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Storaasli, 1988). The present study lends credence to the necessity of such programs and sex education that teaches problem solving and decision making skills.

A second set of findings from this study has implications for intervention. Several factors regarding first premarital sexual intercourse with a partner were negatively related to the effect on the relationship. Premarital relationships developed in a negative fashion when women felt pressured at first intercourse with their partners. This may be espe-
cially problematic given that males may use pressure strategies that encourage intercourse to the point of lying about their motivation for sex, while females are more likely to use strategies that avoid intercourse (Christopher & Frandsen, 1988, 1990; Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1985; LaPlante, McCormick, & Brannigan, 1980; Mosher & Anderson, 1986). Intervention with premarital couples may need to help males more than females understand the negative consequences of pressuring women for intercourse. In other words, the notion that "boys will be boys: all they want is sex," has some very negative implications for the development of a satisfying relationship.

Two programs have been developed that teach people how to deal with pressure to engage in sexual intercourse: Postponing Sexual Involvement (Howard & McCabe, 1990) and the Reducing the Risk Program (Kirby, Barth, Leland, & Fetro, 1991). The Postponing Sexual Involvement Program targets 8th-grade students in a series of five sessions facilitated by 11th- and 12th-grade students. The Reducing the Risk Curriculum is geared toward 10th-grade students and taught by high school health instructors over 15 class periods. Both programs place an emphasis upon the acquisition and practice of skills needed to successfully resist pressure to become sexually involved and have been effective in inducing behavioral changes. The results of such programs may also help to secure relationships where sex has positive rather than negative effects on the developing relationship.

A third implication of the study's findings is that education and primary prevention need to incorporate a discussion of the individual's personal value system in the sexual decision making process. The effect that first sexual intercourse had on the relationship seemed to be at least partially determined by the value system (i.e., level of permissiveness) of the individuals involved. Sex education must be concerned with more than merely preventing pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases, although these issues are important. Individuals should be encouraged to make sexual decisions that are congruent with their own sexual values, thus increasing the possibility of higher quality relationships. Therefore, goals of sex education programs must include helping individuals understand their own values and how to interact with their sexual partners in ways that do not impede the development of a satisfying relationship.

Finally, this study illustrates that there are numerous factors about premarital sexual interaction that affect premarital relationship development in both positive and negative ways. However, the factors studied account for only a small portion of the variance in the development of premarital relationships. Future research needs to examine other factors related to premarital sexuality and relationship development. Understanding this type of premarital interaction is especially salient given the fact that several studies demonstrate that the way couples relate to each other before marriage is a good predictor of later married life (Kelly et al., 1985; Markman, 1979, 1981).

REFERENCES

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