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**ADOLESCENT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS
AND ALCOHOL USE**

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ADOLESCENT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND ALCOHOL USE

Few studies have examined the influence of romantic partners' alcohol use on teens' own levels of drinking. This study evaluates the influence of romantic partners' drinking on the levels of alcohol use frequency and alcohol-related problems among 937 current/recently dating youth aged 12 to 19 years. We assess whether the adolescent's current/most recent dating partner's alcohol use was significantly related to the adolescent's own use and alcohol-related problems. Cross-sectional and longitudinal models, the latter controlling for wave 1 alcohol use frequency reported by the respondent, indicate that the level of romantic partner's alcohol use is related significantly to adolescent respondents' self-reported alcohol use frequency and alcohol-related problems. Interaction analyses suggest that the magnitude of the association between respondent and partner's alcohol use frequency varied by age, gender, and ethnicity. Overall, results suggest that future research should continue to examine the influence of romantic partners' alcohol use among adolescents.

ADOLESCENT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND ALCOHOL USE

Introduction

Family and peer relations are important for understanding adolescents' initiation and continued use of alcohol (D'Amico and McCarthy 2006; Kandel 1996; Kandel and Andrews 1987; Wilks, Callan, and Austin 1989). This is consistent with examining alcohol use and abuse within the context of social development (e.g., Leonard and Mudar 2003). That is, social processes associated with different developmental stages of the life course are highlighted as potential triggers for risk behaviors such as underage drinking. A hallmark of the adolescent period is interest in the opposite sex (Sullivan 1953). While previous studies have indicated teens are at greater risk of substance abuse when they spend more time with their boyfriend or girlfriend and have sexually active peers (CASA 2004), little is known regarding the role of the romantic partner's own drinking behavior on adolescent's use of alcohol. The lack of knowledge regarding adolescent dating partner's influence on drinking is critical since alcohol use during adolescence is predictive of alcohol use frequency and alcohol-related problems during young adulthood for both males and females (Duncan et al. 1997).

During adolescence, as teens become interested and involved in dating, romantic relationships gain in importance as young people transition through this period. Despite the salience of dating relationships during adolescence, romantic partners as key influences on levels of adolescents' alcohol use have not been systematically investigated. When compared to family and friendship bonds, the tendency to neglect the social influence of romantic partners may reflect the idea that adolescent dating relationships are superficial and transitory (see e.g., Merten 1996) (Brown, Feiring, and Furman 1999). In contrast to early depictions of superficial dating relationships among adolescents, however, recent studies have documented the importance of

early romantic relationships as a part of normative development (e.g., Furman and Hand 2006; Furman and Shaffer 2003; Giordano, Longmore, and Manning 2006). For instance, recent investigations have documented the influence of dating partners, net of parent and peer influence, in domains such as academic achievement (Giordano et al. forthcoming) and delinquency (Haynie et al. 2005). Thus, the objective of the current study is to determine whether dating partners' alcohol use is related to adolescents' alcohol use frequency and the incidence of alcohol related problems, once the well-documented influence of parents and peers has been controlled.

Furthermore, it is important to determine whether age, gender, and race/ethnicity influence romantic partner effects on drinking behaviors (Carver, Joyner, and Udry 2003; Giordano et al. 2006; SAMHSA 2006). Certainly these have been shown to influence dating experiences as well as levels of drinking during the adolescent period. For example, according to recent prevalence reports, adolescent males, more than females report drinking in the last month (SAMHSA 2006). Prior research has documented some variations in minority youths' romantic experiences (Coates 1999; Giordano, Manning, and Longmore 2005). Prevalence studies have also documented the association between race/ethnicity and alcohol use. For instance, as reported by SAMSHA (2006), white youth aged 12 to 20 years report higher levels of alcohol use (32.3 percent), followed by Hispanic (25.9 percent) and African American youth (19.0 percent). Therefore, a secondary objective of the current analysis is to determine whether the connections between romantic partners' and respondents' alcohol use vary by age, gender, and race/ethnicity.

Background

Within the sociological literature on social influence processes, it is generally assumed that others similar to oneself will be most pivotal as sources of reference and influence. Empirical

investigations have also indicated that individuals tend to select romantic partners (as well as friends) on the basis of an initial similarity. For instance, both selection and socialization have been shown to contribute to the levels of homophily typically observed within friendship dyads (Kandel 1978) or groups (Cairns and Cairns 1994; Ryan 2001). Yet, as Giordano (1995) notes, symbolic interaction theorists have highlighted that relationships based in elements of difference or contrast also promote much interest, and can be seen as providing a developmental ‘challenge’ (see e.g., Cooley 1902[1970]; Mead 1934; Simmel 1950). Similar to childhood friendships, adolescent romantic relationships are characterized by frequent interaction, communication, feelings of loyalty, and caring. Adolescent romantic relationships also provide a context for a novel form of intimacy as compared to peer relationships developed in childhood.

Although opposite-sex romantic relationships are considered a subset of peer friendships, dating relationships differ in their level of emotionality and are therefore not entirely similar in their dynamics to those found within same-gender friendships. As researchers within the sociology of emotions tradition have theorized, emotions can be conceptualized as providing additional ‘energy’ or motivation for various lines of action (Collins 2004; Engdahl 2004). Thus, relationships that involve such an emotional dimension can potentially develop as a meaningful and potentially consequential source of reference and influence. While Merten (1996) contended that many going steady relationships were relatively shallow and superficial, recent research suggests that these early relationships vary considerably in length and levels of engagement (Carver et al. 2003). Dating partners have been found to influence both prosocial and antisocial behaviors during adolescence (e.g., Haynie et al. 2005; Giordano et al. forthcoming), suggesting the unique influential role of romantic partners on drinking behavior.

While we expect an imperfect relationship between drinking levels of respondents and those of their romantic partners, our working hypothesis is that to the degree that a significant relationship exists, this association likely derives from elements of selection as well as influence (even after other individual and social factors have been taken into account). In terms of selection, individuals may seek out others who are relatively similar to themselves in their attitudes toward/involvement in drinking behaviors. In addition, similarity on other characteristics may also serve to increase concordance among romantic partners (e.g., socioeconomic circumstances and physical proximity are important factors in the development of interpersonal relationships (Youniss and Smolar 1987). Thus, we briefly examine well-documented sources of influence on adolescent alcohol use (family and friends), and then suggest romantic partners as sources of proximal influence on alcohol use among adolescents.

Family Influence

Literature across social science and health disciplines has documented that the family plays a crucial role in the development of adolescents' drinking and other substance use attitudes and behaviors. For instance, prior research has shown that family structure, socioeconomic status, and parental involvement are related to a range of alcohol outcomes for children and adolescents (Kandel 1996). Studies have also generally shown that adolescents who live in two-parent homes tend to be less likely to report alcohol use compared with adolescents who live in one-parent homes (Bjarnason et al. 2003). Yet some studies support only modest links between socio-economic status in childhood and alcohol use in later life (Wiles et al. 2007). Recent research has also focused on parenting processes such as parental monitoring and supervision in relation to alcohol use (Chassin and Handley 2006; Fromme 2006). As Fromme (2006) notes, having parents who are less involved in their adolescents' social lives (e.g., not attending

parental school activities and their children's school activities), has been linked to greater alcohol consumption. Higher levels of parental involvement have also been shown to lessen the effect of peer influence on alcohol use (Wood et al. 2004). Given the robust link between parental influence and adolescent drinking behavior, the current analysis includes an assessment of parents' self-reported alcohol and other drug use.

Friend Influence

In general, a tendency to select friends on the basis of similar characteristics sets into motion identification processes, that along with frequent contact, maximize the likelihood that influence will occur (Epstein and Karweit 1983; Giordano et al. forthcoming; Kandel 1978; Noller 1994; Youniss and Smoller 1985). With regard to alcohol use, research suggests that friends' orientation toward alcohol use does appear to influence individuals' own drinking behavior (Curran, Stice, and Chassin 1997; Jaccard, Blanton, and Dodge 2005; Prinstein, Boergers, and Spirito 2001; Schulenberg et al. 1999). For example, scholars have explored the relationship between close friends' attitudes toward alcohol on the individual's drinking over specific durations, and found that adolescents' levels of alcohol use declined or increased over the duration depending on their friends' alcohol use. Following three waves of students annually, Schulenberg et al. (1999) found early peer influences on drinking to originate with selection, which later contributed to differential socialization. More recently, Jaccard et al. (2005) found significant, albeit small, effects for close friend binge drinking on adolescent's binge drinking net of selection effects and parallel events. Previous studies also suggest that having friends who are prosocial is associated with a decrease in problem use of substance use and violent behavior (Prinstein et al. 2001). Overall, then, research suggests that adolescent's alcohol use has an impact on the type of friends selected (e.g., Sieving, Perry, and Williams 2000) and social

selection (e.g., Farrell and Danish 1993; Fisher and Bauman 1988). Adolescents also change their alcohol consumption to be consistent with friends (social influence). It is likely that both social processes are operating in tandem to influence levels of alcohol use and alcohol-related problems among adolescents (Dishion and Owen 2002).

Romantic Relationships

Few investigations have focused on the unique role of romantic partners as reference others on levels of drinking among adolescents; therefore, we turn to the adult relationships literature to provide a general basis for exploring whether and to what degree romantic partners may influence alcohol use. Research on adults suggests that partner/spouse drinking influences respondents' drinking and substance use (Duncan et al. 2006; Leonard and Homish 2005; Leonard and Mudar 2003). For example, marriage and cohabitation are associated with decreases in alcohol, particularly among men (Duncan et al. 2006). Leonard and Mudar (2003) examined the longitudinal relationships among adult drinking, partner drinking, and peer drinking over the transition to marriage. Husbands' premarital drinking predicted wives' drinking one year later, indicating partner influences. A similar influence of male friends and romantic partners on female substance use behavior has also been indicated by research with heroin and marijuana (Eaves 2004; Leonard and Homish 2005). Although prior work suggests that husbands and wives influence each other in terms of cessation, obviously the relationship context and dynamics vary considerably between adolescent and adult populations.

Some research focused on young adult and college student populations suggests that romantic partners can be sources of influence on drinking behavior among adolescents (Abrahamson 2004; Young et al. 2005). For instance, focus group responses from college women indicates that women's excessive focus on dating/capturing male attention often

exacerbates heavy episodic drinking (Young et al. 2005). As Young et al. (2005) note, women may drink heavily (i.e., “drinking like a guy”) to appear more sexually appealing to their male peers. Results of the focus group interviews also indicated that women who drank heavily did so to achieve an appearance of power in opposite-sex peer relationships, but without endangering traditional gender roles. Focus group interviews conducted among young Swedish men and women also suggest the significance of alcohol in initiating opposite-sex social and sexual relationships (e.g., Abrahamson 2004). As Abrahamson (2004:23) states, alcohol use provides an important context for relationships: “where there is alcohol, there is also the potential of being confirmed as a sexual being...” for young women and men.

In summary, although research among young adults indicates that experiences involving the opposite sex are implicated in alcohol use for young men and women (Abrahamson 2004; Young et al. 2005), few studies have explored the relationship context among non-college student populations. In addition, many studies focused on psychosocial processes (e.g., motivations for use) and alcohol and other drug use, but few have focused on dating partners’ influence on drinking levels among adolescents. The purpose of the current investigation is to explore whether dating partners contribute to our knowledge of adolescents’ own use, once the more heavily investigated impact of parents and peers has been taken into account.

Current Investigation

Our primary objective is to examine the relationship between adolescents’ drinking and that of their current/recent dating partner’s drinking. Specifically, we hypothesize that dating partners’ alcohol use will be significantly associated with (a) the respondent’s own frequency of alcohol use and (b) alcohol-related problems. It is important to consider both alcohol frequency and related problems because frequency of alcohol use alone may not be indicative of a full

range of drinking behavior. Because parents and peers factors are known to influence adolescent drinking frequency and alcohol-related problems, friends' alcohol use and parents' reported alcohol and other drug use are included as controls in our analysis in addition to several demographic variables (e.g., family structure, parental education, parental monitoring, letter grades).

Prior work has also demonstrated that a range of demographic factors influence youth's alcohol use (Kandel 1996; Kandel and Andrews 1987; Wilks et al. 1989). Therefore, our secondary objective is to examine age, gender, and race/ethnicity as potential moderating influences on the association between partners' alcohol use and respondents' own alcohol use frequency and alcohol-related problems. First, we expect that the association between the partner's alcohol use and the respondent's own drinking will be stronger for older as contrasted with younger respondents, since romantic relationships are described generally as becoming more important and intimate with age. Second, we expect that the association between the respondent's own alcohol use frequency and alcohol-related problems will be significant for both males and females; however some prior literature leads to the expectation that romantic partners will have a larger influence on female drinking patterns. For instance, the criminological literature has focused on the role of male influence in the genesis of female involvement in various antisocial behaviors (see e.g., Richie 1996). Recent investigations of adolescent peer influence on alcohol use further suggest that male peers influence female levels of drinking (e.g., Gaughan 2006). Finally, research in the adolescence tradition has emphasized that female adolescents often become highly invested in and preoccupied with the world of romance, an emphasis that suggests the possibility of traditionally gendered effects of the romantic partner. On the other hand, the literature on adult desistance from problem behaviors such as crime has

highlighted a strong role of females as an important source of social control and influence on the behavior of their male [marriage] partners (Laub and Sampson 2003). Although romantic relationships during adolescence are not as long-lasting and consequential as marital unions, some of the same dynamics could be involved in any observed romantic partner effects. Indeed, recent analysis of adolescents' perceptions of feelings of love for the romantic partner did not reveal strong gender differences in these positive feelings (Giordano et al. 2006), and boys were more likely than their female counterparts to indicate that they had changed things about themselves due to influence from the romantic partner.

It is also expected that adolescent's race/ethnicity conditions the association between dating partner and respondent alcohol use. Previous work indicates that African American youth reported somewhat less intense peer relations and perceived pressure from friends, and also scored somewhat lower on indices of romantic involvement with dating partners compared to white adolescents (Giordano, Cernkovich, and DeMaris 1993; Giordano et al. 2005; Larson et al. 2001). Conversely, African American youths scored higher on family attachment. Following from these general findings, we expect that romantic partners' levels of use will be more strongly linked to the respondents' use for white adolescents. Because few comparable studies have explored the nature of Hispanic adolescents' peer and romantic ties, it is premature to specify a hypothesis about the role of ethnicity on romantic partner-alcohol use connections.

Methods

Data

We rely on data derived from structured interviews conducted in connection with the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (n = 1,321). The sample was drawn from the 2000 enrollment records for all youths in the 7th, 9th, and 11th grades residing in Lucas County, Ohio. This

included 62 schools across 7 school districts. The sampling design includes oversamples of African American and Hispanic adolescents, and school attendance was not required for inclusion in the sample. Most interviews took place in the respondent's home and preloaded laptops were used to administer the interview. At the same time, parents (generally mothers) completed a questionnaire that included information about their parenting practices. A second wave of interviews with adolescents was conducted approximately one year later (n = 1,177, 89 percent of the first wave).

Results indicate that at wave 1, 971 adolescents reported either a current or most recent romantic partner, while 231 teens (17.55 percent of the sample) had not yet dated and were considered non-daters. Dating status was determined from a question that began with a simple definition of dating: "Now we are interested in your own experiences with dating and the opposite sex. When we ask about 'dating' we mean when you like a guy [girl], and he/she likes you back. This does not have to mean going on a formal date." We note that this definition differs from that used in Add Health, which asks about "a special romantic relationship." Accordingly, our percentages of daters are slightly higher, but are similar by age to levels reported by Furman and Hand in another longitudinal investigation of romantic relationships based on the Add Health data (see Furman and Hand 2006 for a more detailed discussion of issues of definition and measurement of dating status).

Our analysis is limited to African American, white, and Hispanic adolescents who had dated (n = 956). Of the subgroup of current and recent daters 98 percent of respondents had complete data on partner, friend, and parent alcohol use variables. We restrict this analysis to respondents without missing data in the cross-sectional analyses (n = 937), and those from within this group of current/recent daters who were successfully located and reinterviewed in the second interview

wave ($n = 818$). The longitudinal analyses were further restricted to adolescents who were in high school at the time of the second interview ($n = 537$). As a preliminary step in our analyses, we also examined the self-reported alcohol use of wave 1 non-daters compared with those reported by young people who had entered the dating world. These analyses indicate a strong negative relationship ($r = -.19, p < .001$) at the zero order, with non-daters reporting significantly lower levels of alcohol frequency (.15) than current/recent daters (.76). This suggests that a focus on the effect of dating partner's alcohol use among both current and recent daters is needed.

Measures

Respondent Alcohol Use (asked at waves 1 and 2). We measured respondents' alcohol use with the questions: "In the past 12 months, how often have you drunk alcohol?" and "In the past 12 months, how often have you been drunk in a public place?" The items were scored on a scale ranging from 0 (never) to 8 (more than once a day), and a mean score was calculated, indicating frequency of alcohol use and drunkenness (alpha wave 1 = .69, wave 2 = .72)

Alcohol-related Problems (asked at waves 1 and 2). We measured alcohol-related problems with the following six questions: "In the past 12 months, how often have you experienced these things because of drinking (not felt so good, unable to do job, hit a family member, gotten into a fight, problems with friends, problems with partner)?" The items were scored on a scale ranging from 0 (never) to 7 (almost daily), and summed across the six items. The summed scores were then recoded to a dichotomous dummy variable, indicating either the presence (1) or absence (0) of alcohol-related problems.

Dating Partner's Alcohol Use. Although drinking may occur outside the purview of romantic partners, the current study is guided by theory emphasizing social modeling and

interaction. Thus, we measured dating partner's alcohol use with two questions from the respondent: "To your knowledge, during the last 12 months, how often has ___ drunk alcohol?" and "How often has ___ been drunk in a public place?" The items were scored similar to respondent alcohol use ($\alpha = .80$).

Friends' Alcohol Use. We assessed friends' alcohol use with two questions with a response format similar to respondent and dating partner's alcohol use: "Sometimes teens do things that could get them into trouble. The next questions ask how often your friends have done one of the following in the last 12 months: 'How often have your friends drunk alcohol?' and 'Been drunk in a public place?'" ($\alpha = .79$).

Parents' Substance Use. The parent's level of substance use is measured with four items drawn from the parents' own questionnaire responses, and includes the following behaviors: (1) used alcohol to get drunk; (2) gone out partying with a spouse or partner; (3) gone out to party with friends and (4) used drugs to get high. Each variable is measured on a five point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 7 (almost daily). Responses to these four items were averaged to create an index of parental alcohol and other drug use ($\alpha = .65$).

Control Variables. *Age* is calculated from the respondent's reported birth date and is coded as a continuous variable. *Gender* is a dummy variable with male as the reference group.

Race/ethnicity is coded into three mutually exclusive categories: white, African American, and Hispanic.

Respondent Letter Grade, a measure of academic achievement is assessed with the question: "What grades did you get in school this year?" The item was scored on a scale ranging from 1 (mostly F's) to 9 (mostly A's). *Family Structure* is measured from the respondent's response to the question: "During the past 12 months, who were you living with most of the time?" The

response categories are single parents, biological parents, stepparent and other parent households. For multivariate analyses, we create three dummy variables with both biological parents as the contrast category. *Parental Education* is measured as reported by the parent. For multivariate analyses, parent's education is measured with three dummy variables with 12 years of education as the contrast category.

Parental Monitoring, a general measure of adolescent's perceptions of parenting includes the following prompt and items: "Tell me how often your parents let you make your own decisions about (1) the time you must be home on weekend nights; (2) the people you hang around with, what you wear; (3) your social life; (4) who you can date, and (6) how often you can date." The responses for each item ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). Responses are averaged to create an index of parental monitoring ($\alpha = .83$).

Analytic Strategy

Our analyses rely on waves 1 and 2 of the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study. Cross-sectional analyses assess whether romantic partners' alcohol use is associated significantly with the respondent's own use (frequency and drunkenness) using OLS regression models. Similar results are obtained with tobit models. Our analysis of problem alcohol use relies on logistic regression models and we report the odds ratio of ever reporting alcohol use. We follow a similar modeling strategy for both dependent variables. We first examine the zero order relationship between partner alcohol use on respondent alcohol use. We subsequently include measures of friends' alcohol use (as measured by frequency of alcohol use and drunkenness within the past 12 months) as well as an index of the parents' levels of substance use within the past 12 months. This permits an assessment of the relative impact of the individual's own behaviors and attitudes and those of partners, peers and parents. Next we estimate full models

that include demographic characteristics, parents' education, family structure and parental monitoring. These analyses allow us to determine whether romantic partner's alcohol use contributes to an understanding of the adolescent's alcohol use, once these traditional predictors have been taken into account. We also estimated models in which romantic partners' alcohol use is introduced last in the sequence, and calculate a nested F test to determine whether knowledge of the partner's alcohol use adds significantly to the explained variation in respondents' alcohol use. Finally, we introduce a series of interaction terms to determine whether the pattern of observed effects is similar for adolescents of different ages, gender and race/ethnicity. Longitudinal analyses are conducted in a similar fashion, but include wave 1 alcohol use reported by the respondent as an additional control in models that predict wave 2 alcohol use. Thus, the cross-sectional analyses provide an overall portrait of levels of concordance at a given point in time, while the longitudinal analysis essentially models change in the respondent's alcohol use as predicted by wave 1 partner's use (controlling for the respondent's own wave 1 alcohol use).

Results

Distribution of Variables

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, ranges, and frequencies for the total sample for waves 1 and 2. The average age of the sample is 15.37 years, and slightly over fifty percent of the sample is female. Within the current/recent dating sample, at wave 1, 23 percent are African American, 7 percent Hispanic, and 70 percent white. Just under half the sample (48.97 percent) reported living with both biological parents, while nearly a quarter of the sample (23.55 percent) reported living with one parent. A majority of parents reported some college education (or higher) and adolescents reported average levels of parental monitoring. The average level of

respondent alcohol use ($M = .72$, $SD = 4.00$) reflects that approximately half the sample (51.3 percent) reported that they had drunk alcohol in the past 12 months, but that a majority of the sample (85.9 percent) reported no instances of public drunkenness during the same period. Of the adolescents who reported ever using alcohol or an incident of public drunkenness within the past 12 months ($n = 477$), only 8.28 percent reported one or more alcohol-related problems. The final set of columns in Table 1 present the sample characteristics for the longitudinal analysis.

[Table 1 about here]

Frequency of Alcohol Use

Next we consider the regression analysis of the partner's alcohol use and other covariates on adolescents' self-reports of current levels of alcohol use controlling for respondents' wave 1 alcohol use. These analyses are restricted to wave 1 current/recent daters. Cross sectional results shown in Table 2 indicate that the romantic partner's alcohol use is significantly associated with the adolescent's own level of alcohol use (Model 1). Teens who have romantic partners with higher alcohol use are themselves more likely to report higher levels of alcohol use. Next we estimated a model including the measures of friends' and parents' levels of alcohol use (Model 2). The respondents' own level of alcohol use is significantly related to both friends' alcohol use and parental substance use, and partner's alcohol remains significant as a predictor. Both partner's alcohol and friends' alcohol use remain significant when demographic controls (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, family structure, parental education, parental monitoring) are entered into the model (Model 3). Results from a nested F test suggest that the addition of partner alcohol use to Model 3 contributes significantly to variations in respondents' frequency of alcohol use (1, 933) ($F = 110.97$, $p < .001$). Although parental substance use loses significance

as a predictor of respondents' own alcohol use, results do indicate that parental substance use trends towards significance ($p < .10$).

The control variables operate in the expected direction. Older adolescents report higher levels of alcohol use and African Americans self-report lower levels of alcohol use than white and Hispanic youth. While bivariate analyses (not shown) indicated that respondent letter grades, family structure, parental education, and parental monitoring were related to adolescent alcohol use, these variables are not significant in the multivariate model. Therefore, results of the full model suggest the salience of the effects of age, gender, and ethnicity/race on respondents' report of own alcohol use, net of the effects of additional background variables.

[Table 2 about here]

Alcohol-related Problems

The next series of models (Table 3) presents logistic regression coefficients predicting the respondents' reports of having experienced one or more problems involving the use of alcohol. Zero-order results suggest that respondents who report higher levels of partner's alcohol use, on average, are more likely to have experienced alcohol-related problems with dating partners, peers, family, and/or were unable to perform work due to their alcohol use within the last year (model 1). The second model adds friends' alcohol use and partner alcohol use and shows that the association between partner alcohol use and alcohol-related problems remains statistically significant. Friends' alcohol use and parental alcohol/drug use are also positively related to problematic alcohol use. Model 3 adds the control variables and indicates that partner alcohol use is significantly related to problematic alcohol use ($p < .001$, $\chi^2 = 348.65$, 15). Friends' alcohol use also significantly relates to problem alcohol use in this model. Parental substance

use no longer retains statistical significance ($p < .06$). However, parental substance use is significantly related to alcohol-related problems ($p < .04$) when adolescent age is excluded as a covariate.

Consistent with results of the OLS model predicting frequency of alcohol use, older adolescents have significantly higher odds of alcohol-related problems while African American youth have the lowest odds of experiencing problems created by the use of alcohol. In contrast to the OLS model, males were no more likely than females to report alcohol-related problems. Letter grades negatively related to alcohol use. Family factors were not related to problem alcohol use in model 3.

[Table 3 about here]

Effects of Age, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity by Partner's Alcohol Use

Interaction terms of age and partner alcohol use were added to model 3 (results not shown). For both dependent variables, frequency of alcohol use and alcohol-related problems, results indicate a significant age by partner's alcohol effect. The effect of partner's alcohol use is greater for older adolescents. This result is consistent with prior literature suggesting that older adolescents' romantic relationships are more intimate and potentially more important.

Interaction terms of gender and partner alcohol use were added to model 3 (results not shown). The effect of partner's alcohol use is significant for both males and females and the magnitude of the association indicates a significantly greater effect of partner alcohol use for males. For models measuring reports of alcohol-related problems, results indicate a significant effect of partner's alcohol use for both males and females, but do not indicate that this effect differs for males and females. Males' alcohol use frequency is influenced by their partner's level of drinking as compared to females but such a gender effect is not found when more severe

alcohol use is measured (i.e., alcohol-related problems). Overall, an interesting gender dynamic is suggested: females in the sample report significantly greater mean levels of alcohol use by their partner (1.28) than do males in the sample (.71), yet multivariate analyses suggest that females influence the alcohol use frequency of their dating partner more strongly than do males.

Analyses of the interaction effect of race/ethnicity (African American and Hispanic as compared with white youths) indicate significant differences in partner's effect on alcohol use frequency and alcohol-related problems across ethnic groups. In models predicting alcohol use frequency (not shown), results indicate a significant effect for all ethnic groups: specifically, white, African American, and Hispanic adolescents each differ significantly from one another in their levels of partner's influence. Net of demographic controls, results further indicate that the partner's influence on alcohol use frequency is strongest for Hispanic adolescents (.43), followed by white (.25) and African American (.07) adolescents. In models predicting alcohol-related problems (results not shown), a significant effect of partner's alcohol use was found for all racial subgroups. In contrast to the alcohol use frequency models, the effect of partner's alcohol use was statistically similar for white and African American respondents. However, African American and Hispanic adolescents differ significantly in the level of effect their partner's alcohol use on alcohol-related problems. Net of demographic controls, results indicate that the effect of partner's alcohol use on alcohol-related problems is highest for Hispanic adolescents (.90) and that this effect is significantly greater than the effect found for African American adolescents (.36).

Longitudinal Analyses

Table 4 presents results of longitudinal analyses of wave 1 dating partner alcohol use as a predictor of wave 2 alcohol use frequency and alcohol-related problems. Results of these

analyses indicate that partner alcohol use at wave 1 remains a statistically significant predictor, when viewed longitudinally and controlling for wave 1 self-reported alcohol use and covariates. Overall, the longitudinal analysis is consistent with the cross-sectional analysis in that partner use is a significant predictor of respondent alcohol use frequency at the zero-order and remains significant even after friends' alcohol and parental alcohol/drug use are entered into the models. Based on nested F tests, dating partner alcohol use significantly contribute to the fit of the model for alcohol use frequency ($F = 9.58, p < .01$) (1,520). These longitudinal analyses provide an indication that the statistical associations between partner alcohol use and respondent alcohol use in the cross-sectional analyses are not entirely due to the initial selection of similar romantic partners. However, friends' alcohol use is significantly related in the longitudinal analysis until partner's alcohol use is included. This suggests at least some of peer effects demonstrated in prior research include romantic partner influences on these alcohol behaviors. We also estimated interaction models (age, gender, and race/ethnicity by partner alcohol use) for alcohol use frequency and alcohol-related problems. Inconsistent with the cross-sectional analyses, no significant interactions (age, gender, race/ethnicity) were found for alcohol use frequency or alcohol-related problems.

[Table 4 about here]

Conclusion

Overall, our findings suggest that the relationship between partner alcohol use and respondent alcohol use remains statistically significant even when traditional predictors such as age, family structure, and parental monitoring have been included. The cross-sectional analyses indicate significant associations in adolescents' frequency of alcohol use and problem use and

that of their current romantic partners' alcohol use. Across all models, the effect of partners' alcohol use remained significant even after peer alcohol and parent alcohol/drug use were entered as predictors. In addition, the longitudinal results suggest that the observed associations may not all stem from the initial tendency to select similar partners, since wave 1 partner alcohol use contributes significantly to variance in respondents' wave 2 frequency of alcohol use frequency and problem use, even after controlling for the respondent's initial self-reported alcohol use.

Consistent with the broader developmental literature on the heightened role of peers among adolescents, our findings demonstrate the importance of romantic partners above and beyond peers during this important developmental period. As results of the age by partner interaction analyses suggest, the use of alcohol by a romantic partner may be an especially salient influence on drinking behavior of older teens. The finding that older teens are especially influenced by their dating partner is consistent with recent national surveys indicating higher percentages of older teens report ever using alcohol. Additional research is needed to understand the role of romantic partners in the onset of alcohol use and drinking to the point of drunkenness. Early influence by a dating partner may set the stage for later hazardous alcohol use patterns among romantic couples. As prior research among a sample of married or cohabiting adults suggests, romantic partners' use of alcohol and other drugs has been associated with decreases in binge drinking and marijuana (Duncan et al. 2006). Unlike adult drinkers, teenage drinkers have only recently begun drinking and as such, may be drinking for very different reasons as compared to adults. Generalizing research findings conducted among adult samples may be inappropriate for adolescents.

The results of the interaction analyses regarding gender by partner alcohol use suggest the unique context and structure of romantic relationships. As our cross-sectional results suggest, the influence of a romantic partner on drinking is salient for both males and females, but that the effect is stronger for males. Recent research conducted among young adult couples suggests that men may be particularly influenced by the drinking habits of their partner (Duncan et al. 2006). Our data suggest that the role of the partners' alcohol use is stronger for males than females with regard to alcohol use frequency, but not with regard to our second dependent variable, alcohol-related problems. In early adolescence, romantic partners may influence drinking behavior, but as drinking behavior escalates to a hazardous drinking level, the role of romantic partners may diminish. Examining the link between early romantic relationships and later drinking behavior is critical for young adults given the robust association between alcohol use and sexual victimization. For instance, college women are more likely to be victimized on drinking days as compared to non-drinking days (Parks and Fals-Stewart 2004). Additional knowledge of adolescent romantic dating contexts associated with subsequent alcohol-related sexual victimization will be useful in intervention efforts targeting the prevention of intimate partner violence.

Finally, our findings suggest the importance of examining the varying impact of race and ethnicity on alcohol use and relationship styles. For instance, our data indicate that the effect of a romantic partner is greater for white and Hispanic teens, as compared to African American adolescents and thus is consistent with previous studies as noted earlier (e.g., Giordano et al. 1993; Giordano et al. 2005; Larson et al. 2001). Among Hispanics, for instance, traditional values of family and parental respect have been modeled as protective factors in the etiology of drug use yet have been found to vary based on nativity (e.g., Gil, Wagner, and Vega 2000). Our

study does not focus on factors related to nativity and acculturation, but our results do suggest that the role of romantic partners in respondent alcohol use varies across ethnic subgroups of adolescents. While many factors linked with race and ethnicity influence underage drinking (e.g., peer pressure, family dynamics, availability and access), the salience of romantic partners as reference others among ethnically diverse youth is less understood. Additional research is needed to understand how romantic partners model prosocial and antisocial behaviors among youth.

Our study is limited by the use of self-report alcohol/drug use measures. While the alcohol use measure did tap frequency and severity of respondent, dating partner, and friend alcohol use, an item measuring quantity of alcohol per episode was not available within this sample of adolescents. Although every effort was made to collect this sensitive data in a confidential manner from both adolescent and parent respondents, parents overly concerned with promoting a socially acceptable image may have been likely to underreport their own alcohol/drug use. A second limitation is that the participants in this study were drawn from an urban Midwestern city. Despite oversampling of Hispanic and African American youth, these findings may not generalize to different populations such as those vulnerable to high level of alcohol-related problems (e.g., treatment populations) or residing outside the Midwest. A third limitation of the current study is that some participants may have been unaffected by the level of alcohol use of their dating partner. Without direct measures of multiple factors influencing drinking behavior, we are not able to detect the extent of a specific dating partner's alcohol on respondent's self-reported drinking behavior. The challenge of future work will be to identify the dynamics influencing the context of alcohol use among adolescent dating partners.

Overall, our study suggests that early romantic experiences significantly influence drinking behavior above and beyond parent and peer alcohol use and that this association varies by demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity). Teens experimenting with alcohol are likely to experiment sexually with a romantic partner and in doing so, may exacerbate their risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Prevention programs targeting concurrent alcohol use and sexual risk behaviors among youth will benefit from an increased understanding of the romantic context of alcohol use. For some youth, a romantic partner's drinking may set the stage for the hazardous use of alcohol and other drugs in adult relationships. Thus, research focused on how early alcohol use across romantic contexts shapes the character and stability of adult intimate relationships is also likely to inform prevention work. However, the findings of this research have also documented that romantic partners may have a positive influence on alcohol use and the problem behaviors associated with it, depending upon the behavioral tendencies of the romantic partners with whom teens become involved. Future research on social relationships during adolescence should expand the traditional focus on peers and friends to include more attention to the ways in which romantic liaisons potentially influence a range of consequential health related outcomes.

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Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Frequencies for Recent (last 12 months)/Currently Dating Respondents

Variables	Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD	Range
	Wave 1			Wave 2		
<i>Dependent Variables</i>						
Respondent alcohol use frequency	.74	4.00	0-7.5	1.17	5.52	0-7
Respondent alcohol-related problems	.33	.47	0-1	.11	1.11	0-1
<i>Independent Variables</i>						
Dating partner alcohol use	.96	5.12	0-8			
Friend alcohol use	1.38	5.77	0-8			
Parent substance use	.95	3.12	0-6.25			
<i>Controls</i>						
Age (M)	15.37	5.65	12-19	15.77	4.96	13-19
Gender						
Male	48.97%			51.06%		
Female	51.03%			48.94%		
Race						
White	69.71%			70.97%		
African American	23.15%			22.00%		
Hispanic	7.15%			7.03%		
Respondent letter grades	6.18	6.76	1-9	6.41	7.07	1-9
Family structure						
Two biological	49.28%			52.83%		
Single	23.55%			22.13%		
Step	14.77%			14.34%		
Other	12.40%			10.69%		
Parental Education						
Less than 12 Years	12.60%			10.27%		
12 years	32.02%			31.49%		
Some college	32.95%			23.42%		
College +	22.42%			34.82%		
Parental monitoring	2.14	2.99	1-5	2.15	3.72	1-5
	<i>N</i>	<i>937</i>			<i>537</i>	

Note: Means, standard deviations, and percentages shown are weighted.

Table 2. Standardized OLS Coefficients for the Regression of Alcohol Use Frequency on Controls and Dating Partner Alcohol Use (Cross Sectional) (n=937)

Regressors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Dating partner alcohol use	.56***	.28***	.29***
Friend alcohol use		.53***	.48***
Parent substance use		.05*	.04
<i>Controls</i>			
Age			.05*
Gender			
(Male)			
Female			-.08**
Race			
(White)			
African American			-.07**
Hispanic			.01
Respondent letter grades			-.02
Family structure			
(Two biological)			
Single			.04
Step			.04
Other			-.03
Education			
Less than 12 years			-.03
(12 years)			
Some college			-.01
College +			.01
Parental monitoring			-.04
Intercept	.74	.73	.83
F	417.72	333.17	71.25
R ²	.31	.52	.58

Note: Contrast categories are in parentheses. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 3. Logistic Regression Models for Alcohol-related Problems on Controls and Dating Partner Alcohol Use (Cross Sectional, n=937)

Regressors	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b	O.R.	b	O.R.	b	O.R.
Dating partner alcohol use	.66***	1.94	.41***	1.51	.37***	1.44
Friend alcohol use			.58***	1.78	.49***	1.63
Parent substance use			.17*	1.18	.17 ⁺	1.18
<i>Controls</i>						
Age					.26***	1.30
Gender (Male) Female					.08	1.08
Race (White) African American Hispanic					-1.05*** .06	.35 1.06
Respondent letter grades					-.12*	.89
Family structure (Two biological) Single Step Other					-.16 -.17 -.25	.85 .84 .78
Education Less than 12 years (12 years) Some college College +					-.22 -.11 -.11	.81 .90 .90
Parental monitoring					-.11	.90
Intercept	-.75		-.84		-.60	
-2 log likelihood	1022.0		891.6		846.5	
Df	1		3		15	

Note: Contrast categories are in parentheses. (need to confirm preferred symbol) ⁺p<.10 *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4. Standardized OLS Regression for Alcohol Use Frequency and Logistic Regression Coefficients for Alcohol-related Problems on Dating Partner Alcohol Use and Controls (Longitudinal, n=537)

Regressors	Model 1	Model 2	
		Frequency of Alcohol Use	Alcohol-related Problems
		b	O.R.
Dating partner alcohol use	.14**	.26**	1.44
Friend alcohol use	-.02	-.09	.90
Parent substance use	.01	.05	1.12
R's wave 1 alcohol use	.45***	.32**	1.79
<i>Controls</i>			
Age	.15***	.17	1.24
Gender (Male)			
Female	-.01	-.19	.50
Race (White)			
African American	-.20***	-.35*	.21
Hispanic	-.07*	.03	1.19
Respondent letter grades	.04	-.14	.88
Family structure (Two biological)			
Single	.05	.07	1.39
Step	-.01	-.03	.87
Other	-.06	-.18	.34
Education			
Less than 12 years (12 years)	.08	.08	1.46
Some college	-.00	.24*	2.57
College +	.02	.02	1.09
Parental monitoring	.06	.06	1.14
Intercept	-1.18	-2.36	
F	22.42		
R ²	.41		
-2 log likelihood		244.2	
df			

Note: Contrast categories are in parentheses. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001