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EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Parents' Management of Adolescents' Romantic Relationships Through Dating Rules: Gender Variations and Correlates of Relationship Qualities

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Abstract This study examined parents' rules concerning their late adolescents' dating activities. Participants were mostly European-American, including 165 mothers or fathers and 103 of their children (ages 17–19; 28 sons and 75 daughters). Parents provided information regarding their use of dating rules; rules were coded by type (i.e., supervision, restriction, or prescription) and by the degree of control the rule set provided. Most parents (64%) reported using dating rules, and rules varied by the adolescents and parents' gender. Rule types were related differentially to qualities of parents and adolescents' relationships, such that supervision rules reflected a healthy parent–child dynamic and prescription rules related negatively to qualities of parents' romantic/marital relationships. This study contributes to a growing body of research on parents' management of adolescents' peer relationships by expanding the focus from friendships to romantic partnerships.

Keywords Dating · Adolescent romantic relationship · Parent–adolescent relationship · Rules

Introduction

Most individuals begin dating during adolescence, while still under the care of their parents. In fact, more than 70% of adolescents have engaged in romantic relationships by age 18 and a large proportion of these relationships last 11 months or longer (Carver et al. 2003). Although the literature on parental socialization is extensive (Maccoby 1992; Steinberg 2001), including a growing body of research on parents' socialization of extra-familial ties (e.g., Tilton-Weaver and Galambos 2003; Updegraff et al. 2001), little is known about parents' direct socialization practices as their children form romantic relationships (Mounts 2008). Dating impacts the immediate psychological well-being of adolescents (Welsh et al. 2003) as well as qualities of their future romantic relationships (Karney et al. 2007; Seiffge-Krenke 2003), thus underscoring the importance of understanding potential influences on adolescents' romantic relationships as well as their correlates. Furthermore, information on effective parenting practices regarding dating has the potential to inform parents and outreach initiatives alike.

To enhance our understanding of parents' management of adolescents' dating activities, the present study examined parents' use of dating rules. Basic descriptions of dating rule use, extent, and intensity were uncovered, including variations by parents and adolescents' gender. In addition, links between rule types and qualities of parent–adolescent relationships, parents' romantic/marital relationships, and adolescents' romantic relationships were explored. In doing so, this study contributes to a growing body of research on parents' management of adolescents' peer relationships, both by expanding the focus from friendships to romantic partnerships and by examining correlates of close relationships.

Links Between Parental and Romantic Contexts

Indirect Parenting Influences on Adolescents' Romantic Relationships

Parents' impact on adolescents' dating activities has been studied primarily in terms of indirect influences, with

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positive parent–child relationships predicting better quality adolescent romantic relationships (Donnellan et al. 2005; Overbeek et al. 2003; Seiffge-Krenke et al. 2001). Beyond behavior, representations of attachment relationships with parents have been linked longitudinally to romantic relationship qualities in young adulthood (Roisman et al. 2001). Thus, parent–child interactions provide a context for developing or practicing relationship-relevant skills (e.g., emotion regulation, conflict resolution) and for forming relationship cognitions that influence adolescents' romantic relationships.

Direct Parenting Influences on Adolescents' Romantic Relationships

Research on parents' direct influence on adolescent romantic relationships is limited (Mounts 2008). This may be due, in part, to a misperception that parents cannot (and perhaps should not; see Bloss 1967) impinge on this domain. However, despite transformations in parent–child relationships across the transition to adolescence, parents remain influential in their children's lives (Steinberg 2001). For example, although adolescents look to their friends for advice on fashion or music, they turn to parents for guidance on moral issues (Smetana and Asquith 1994). Furthermore, adolescents perceive parents as one of the most accurate sources of information about dating (compared to peers or romantic partners; Wood et al. 2002), and adolescents anticipate parents' reactions before taking action (Wyatt and Carlo 2002). Parents' communication of clear expectations regarding appropriate dating behaviors is likely to influence adolescents' subsequent decisions, making evident the need for studies of parents' direct influence on adolescents' romantic relationships.

Kan and her colleagues provide a recent exception to the lack of research in this area with their examination of parenting practices regarding romantically involved adolescents (Kan et al, 2008). These researchers adapted Mounts' (2000) Parental Management of Peers Inventory, allowing parents to complete responses for children's romantic peers rather than friends. Specifically, parents of late adolescents completed a self-report measure regarding their supportive involvement (e.g., encouraging a child to invite a romantic partner over to their house, spending time with a boyfriend/girlfriend themselves, meeting the parents of a boy/girlfriend), restrictive involvement (e.g., limiting the amount of time a child talks with a boy/girlfriend, arranging family activities so that the child cannot spend time with a boy/girlfriend), and autonomous approach (e.g., telling a child that the selection of a boy/girlfriend is the child's own choice). Based on their responses, parents were classified as being positively involved, negatively involved, or autonomy-oriented with respect to their children's romantic involvement. These approaches related to aspects of late adolescents' romantic relationships 1 year later and were moderated by qualities of earlier parent–child relationships, suggesting that the parent–adolescent relationship provides a context for interpreting parent practices regarding adolescents' romantic relationships. Kan and colleagues demonstrated that parents bring diverse approaches to the task of managing adolescents' romantic relationships; further examination of specific parenting practices—such as dating rules—may provide additional insight regarding direct parenting influences on adolescents' romantic relationships.

Conceptual Framework: Parental Management of Peer Relationships

Conceptual frameworks of parental management of peer relationships provide a promising starting point for examining parents' management of romantic relationships, as evidenced by Kan and colleagues' (2008) successful adaptation of Mounts' (2000) measure of parental management of peers. Initial frameworks of parental management of peer relationships were developed regarding children (Ladd and Le Sieur 1995; Ladd and Pettit 2002), and thus only considered non-romantic peers. More recently these frameworks have been extended to the management of adolescents' peer relationships, incorporating developmental changes in adolescents' autonomy needs as well as parents' changing concerns regarding peer influence and antisocial behavior (Parke et al. 2003).

In one such model, Mounts (2008) proposes that parents' goals and beliefs, in concert with parents' perceptions of their children and their children's friends, prompt parents' management of peers. Drawing upon earlier work by Ladd and his colleagues (Ladd and Le Sieur 1995; Ladd and Pettit 2002), Mounts specifies that parents enact this management through four roles. As *designers* of their adolescents' environments, parents select the neighborhoods where their children encounter peers. As *mediators* of adolescents' peer relationships, parents facilitate meetings with peers (e.g., suggesting activities or providing transportation). As *supervisors* of peer relationships, parents direct adolescents' actions or provide rules to help them avoid undesirable peers and unhealthy peer interactions (e.g., monitoring, providing rules prohibiting contact with certain peers). As *consultants*, parents offer advice or help adolescents think through problems regarding peers. Longitudinal studies have shown that these specific parenting practices predict a variety of characteristics of adolescents and their friends (Knoester et al. 2006; Mounts 2000, 2008). In addition, the meaning and impact of specific parenting practices regarding peers varies by culture and ethnicity (Brown and Mounts 2007). Although

research that would test this model's applicability to management of romantic peers is largely absent, the model was developed with potential applications to both romantic and non-romantic peers in mind (N. S. Mounts, personal communication, June 19, 2008).

Rules as a Tool for Supervision

The present study focuses on parents' roles as supervisors of adolescents' romantic partnerships through the specific parenting practice of rule setting. Rules are considered one mechanism by which parents can regulate children's peer relationships (Parke et al. 2003). Recent conceptualizations of monitoring note that monitoring is a temporal process, with some aspects taking place before the child goes out (e.g., rule setting, children's disclosure of plans, parents' solicitation of plans) and other aspects occurring after the child returns home (e.g., children's disclosure of activities, parents' solicitation of activities; Hayes et al. 2003, 2004). Rules are a pre-activity facet of the monitoring process and can be used by parents to sets limits, solicit information, or clarify expectations for appropriate behavior. Research demonstrating that rules are distinct from other aspects of monitoring such as parental knowledge supports this framework (Simpkins and Parke 2002). Parents often have concerns about their children's romantic involvement (Kan et al. 2008) and such concerns may prompt the use of dating rules, as proposed in Mounts' (2008) model.

Rule Types

No known studies examine parents' rules for adolescents' peer relationships (romantic or not); however, Simpkins and Parke (2002) studied the rules that mothers of 6th grade children had regarding their children's play. Rules were categorized as *supervision rules* (e.g., rules requiring attainment of parental permission to play, rules to have an adult present during play), *restriction rules* (e.g., rules regarding times to start or end play, rules about where the child can play), or *rules concerning behavior with peers* (e.g., rules concerning conflict management strategies, rules encouraging prosocial behavior, rules promoting parent-preferred behavior such as the playing with friends the child's own age). Mothers with more supervision rules had sons who showed more prosocial behavior and depression, whereas mothers who had more rules concerning behavior with peers had children with positive peer-rated behaviors (Simpkins and Parke 2002). Thus, rules are one parenting practiced used by parents in their roles as supervisors of peer relationships and rule types are related differentially to qualities of peer relationships.

Although conceived of for non-romantic peers, parents may use similar rule types to supervise adolescents' romantic partnerships. *Supervision rules* would help the parent gain knowledge about the adolescent's dating activities (e.g., rules requiring that the parent meet the date, rules that the child disclose the evening's plans or call if plans change). *Restriction rules* would place some limitation on the adolescent's dating activities (e.g., curfews, rules about the age at which the child can first date, rules about where the date can take place). *Prescription rules* (akin to Simpkins and Parke's "*rules concerning behavior with peers*") would outline how the adolescent should behave on a date or in a dating relationship (e.g., return the date's phone calls, treat the date with respect). In short, rules could serve one of three functions: requiring the child to disclose information (supervision), prohibiting unwanted activities (restriction), or setting up expectations for appropriate dating behaviors (prescription).

Extent of Rule Use and Degree of Control

In addition to types of rules, the number of rules and the degree of control that sets of rules afford parents can be considered. Some evidence suggests that parents may best be served by invoking rules that exert a moderate level of control. Excessive parental solicitation for information has been associated with adolescent problem behaviors (Stattin and Kerr 2000). Furthermore, extensive use of rules in the absence of parental support is consistent with an authoritarian parenting style, which again has been associated with a host of adolescent problem behaviors (Steinberg 2001). Miller and colleagues (1986) found a curvilinear relationship between adolescents' reports of the extent of their parents' rule use (i.e., no rules, moderate rules, many rules) and adolescents' sexual permissiveness and intercourse experience. Similarly, Smith (1983) found a curvilinear relationship between mothers' (but not fathers') control attempts and adolescents' behavioral compliance. Mounts (2000) tested linear and curvilinear associations between parents' prohibition of peer contact and adolescents' selection of delinquent friends, finding only linear relationships. The present study considered linear and curvilinear associations between the extent and control level of rule sets and relationship qualities; however, as this is the first study of dating rules, no specific predictions were advanced.

Associations Between Parenting Practices and Qualities of Relationships

Parenting practices take place in a relationship context. Furthermore, parents' assessments of close relationships prompt, in part, supervision of peer relationships through rules (Mounts 2008). Ample evidence supports links between parenting practices and qualities of close

relationships, including parent–child relationships, parents' marital relationships, and adolescents' peer relationships. For example, links between parenting practices and qualities of the parent–child relationship can be seen in studies demonstrating that parenting style (e.g., levels of warmth and involvement) provides a context for parenting practices (Darling and Steinberg 1993; Kan et al. 2008). Parenting practices are also connected to marital relationship quality: longitudinal research reveals that marital problems lead to inconsistent or harsh parenting, which, in turn, impact adolescents' adjustment (Cui and Conger 2008). Peer relationship qualities have been linked most clearly to parenting practices regarding peer management; parents who mediate their children's peer relationships by arranging meetings with peers, supervising play, and consulting on peer concerns have children who enjoy more positive friendship qualities (Knoester et al. 2006; Parke et al. 2003). Similarly, nurturing parenting practices are associated with positive qualities of adolescents' romantic relationships (Donnellan et al. 2005). As shown by these examples, parenting practices may both stem from and result in variations in relationship qualities. The present study examines relationship correlates of parenting practices regarding dating to help place these practices in context, thus providing potential insight regarding adaptive and maladaptive practices.

Study Goals and Hypotheses

A primary goal of the present study was to explore whether parents of late adolescents have dating rules and, if so, to describe these rules. Because dating rules have not been studied before, open-ended questions were used to ask parents if they had any rules, and, if so, to list these rules. Adapting the framework developed by Simpkins and Parke (2002), dating rules were categorized as supervision, restriction, or prescription rules. Given the lack of previous research on dating rules, it is unknown whether the nature of the rule (i.e., supervision, restriction, prescription) or the extent of rule use (i.e., the number of rules given overall and for each type) is of greater importance; thus, the present study considered both aspects of rule use.

A second goal of this study was to examine the role of parents and adolescents' gender on dating rules. Given mothers' greater involvement in their children's daily lives (Waizenhofer et al. 2004), mothers were expected to be more active in setting rules regarding adolescents' dating activities. In addition, based on research finding that parents supervise (Crouter et al. 2005) and restrict (Block 1983) daughters more than sons, and given that dating raises particular concerns regarding protecting daughters from risks (Kan et al. 2008), daughters were hypothesized to receive more extensive and controlling rule sets.

A final goal of this study was to investigate connections between rules and qualities of parent–adolescent relationships, parents' romantic/marital relationships, and adolescents' romantic relationships. Based on research demonstrating links between high levels of child disclosure and better quality parent–child relations (Kerr and Stattin 2000), parents' use of supervision rules—which require child disclosure—was expected to relate to parents' comfort with the adolescent separation-individuation process. No predictions were made regarding links between rules and qualities of adolescents' romantic relationships as past research on this topic has been mixed; some research suggests that parents' interference with romantic relationships brings the romantic couple closer (Driscoll et al. 1972), while other research shows no immediate or long-term connections between parents' involvement and qualities of adolescents' romantic relationships (Kan et al. 2008; Leslie et al. 1986). Prescription rules, while possibly stemming from well-intentioned advice, may represent inappropriate intrusiveness into the adolescent's dating life. To test this possibility, a measure of parental use of psychological control was included (Barber 1996). Past research on psychological control shows that these behaviors relate to insecurity in one's own relationships (Barber 2002); thus, parents who relied heavily on prescription rules were predicted to report less satisfaction, less closeness, and greater insecurity in their own romantic/marital relationships.

Method

Participants

Parents and adolescents were recruited for this study while visiting a small liberal arts college in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States to register for courses the summer before entering college. Participants included mothers ($n = 116$; 38 mothers of sons and 78 mothers of daughters) or fathers ($n = 49$; 25 fathers of sons and 24 fathers of daughters) from 165 families; only one parent from each family participated. In addition, 103 of their late adolescent children (28 sons and 75 daughters; $M_{age} = 17.74$, $SD = .51$; *Range*: 17–19 years) took part in the study. Parents included in this sample lived with their children all of the time (95.8%) or some of the time (4.2%); parents who lived with their children some of the time had frequent (i.e., weekly or more) contact with their children. Most parents were married (77.7%) or involved in a current romantic relationship (10.9%). Of their children, 57.8% were currently involved in a steady dating relationship ($M_{length} = 11.24$ months, $SD = 9.09$; *Range*: 1–38 months), 32.4% had been involved in a past steady dating relationship, 4.9% had been on a date, but not had a steady dating relationship, and 4.9% had never

dated. Most (90%) of the adolescents had siblings; 43% of participants were the oldest or only children in their families. The majority of the sample was European-American (87.8 and 83.5% for parents and adolescents, respectively), with a smaller percentage indicating African-American (9.8; 8.7%) or other/mixed race or ethnicity (2.4; 7.8%). Participants resided primarily in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions of the United States. The average household income of these families was $91,000, with 75% of families reporting an income between $42,000 and 138,000. Attrition analyses revealed that daughters were represented more (74% participated) than sons were (42% participated) in the sample of children who participated, χ^2 (1, $N = 165$) = 14.05, $p < .001$; children who did and did not participate in the study were similar on all aspects of parents' dating rules.

Measures

Parents and adolescents provided basic demographic information, including current romantic relationship status. Those involved in current romantic relationships completed measures of romantic relationship qualities. In addition, adolescents reported on parents' use of psychological control, while parents reported on their comfort with the secure base role and on their use of dating rules.

Parents' Comfort with the Secure Base Role

Parents completed the *Parents of Adolescents Separation Anxiety Scale* (PASAC; Hock et al. 2001). This scale measures parents' comfort with their parenting roles. The portion of the PASAC used in this study included 14 items tapping parents' comfort with their secure base roles (e.g., "I like knowing that my teenager will come to me when he/she feels upset"). Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .71.

Parental Use of Psychological Control

Adolescents reported on their mothers' and fathers' use of psychological control on an 8-item scale developed by Barber (1996; e.g., "My mother [father] is a person who is always trying to change how I feel or think about things"). Response options ranged from 1 (*not like him/her*) to 3 (*a lot like him/her*). A higher score indicated more parental psychological control. The interitem correlations in the current study were $\alpha = .83$ for fathers and .84 for mothers.

Adolescents' Romantic Relationship Qualities

Adolescents who were currently involved in a steady dating relationship completed the *Network of Relationship Inventory* (NRI; Furman and Buhrmester 1985), which measured qualities of their relationships. The portion of the NRI used in this study measured six qualities of romantic relationships with 3 items each (18 items total). Response options ranged from 1 (*little or none*) to 5 (*the most*). Subscales included satisfaction (e.g., "How satisfied are you with your relationship with this person?"), intimacy (e.g., "How much do you tell this person everything?"), affection (e.g., "How much does this person really care about you?"), admiration (e.g., "How much does this person like or approve of the things you do?"), conflict (e.g., "How much do you and this person get upset or mad at each other?") and antagonism (e.g., "How much do you and this person get on each other's nerves?"). Cronbach's alphas for these subscales ranged from .70 to .92 (mean $\alpha = .85$). As suggested by Furman and Buhrmester (1992), indices reflecting supportive (satisfaction, intimacy, affection, admiration) and negative interactions (conflict, antagonism) were formed by averaging the appropriate subscale scores. Interitem correlations for supportive and negative interactions were high, $\alpha = .93$ for each subscale.

Parents' Romantic Relationship Qualities

Parents who were currently involved in romantic relationships completed measures of satisfaction (Hendrick 1988), subjective closeness (Berscheid et al. 1989), and insecurity (J. Fei and E. Berscheid, Unpublished manuscript) in their relationships. The satisfaction scale included 7 items (e.g., "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?), with response options ranging from 1 (*low*) to 7 (*high*). The subjective closeness scale included two items (e.g., "Compared to all of your other relationships—both same and other sex—how close is your relationship with your partner?"), with response options ranging from 1 (*not at all close*) to 7 (*very close*). The insecurity scale included 15 items (e.g., "I worry that my partner doesn't care as much for me as I do for my partner"), with response options ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alphas for these scales ranged from .92 to .93.

Dating Rules

Parents responded to a question asking if the family had any rules about dating. If they answered affirmatively, parents then indicated who set these rules (response options: *mostly me; mostly my spouse; my spouse and I set these rules together; my spouse, my child, and I set these rules together; other)* and listed the rules.

Coding of Dating Rules

Dating rules were transcribed for coding and, when necessary, parents and children's genders were masked. Each

parent's rule set was rated on a 5-point scale developed for this study capturing the degree of control the set of rules offered regarding adolescents' dating activities. High ratings were given to parents who had extensive and explicit rules about the adolescent's dating behavior; taken as a whole, such rules were judged to heavily constrain the adolescent's dating activities (e.g., rules prohibiting dating, early curfews, rules limiting acceptable dating partners). Low ratings were given to parents who listed few rules or rules that would not interfere with the adolescent's dating activities (e.g., rules to simply keep the parent informed, rules to wear seatbelts). The lowest rating was given to parents reporting no dating rules. Thirty percent of the rule sets were double-coded for reliability; coders had high agreement on the degree of control, $\alpha = .94$.

Each individual rule was categorized as providing supervision, restriction, or prescription (see Table 1). Rules that would provide the parent with information but would not preemptively restrict dating activities were coded as supervision rules (e.g., rules to inform the parents of plans). Rules that would constrain or limit the adolescent's dating activities were coded as restriction rules (e.g., curfews, rules prohibiting dating older partners). Rules that specified how the adolescent should behave on a date were coded as prescription rules (e.g., rules to open doors for a date, rules to treat a date with respect). Each rule was assigned to a single category. Thirty percent of the rules were categorized by two coders, resulting in an inter-rater agreement of 84%. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, engaging a third coder when needed. For the purpose of analyses, each rule type was measured categorically (used vs. not used) and continuously (number of rules).

Procedure

Upon giving informed consent (or upon providing parental consent for adolescents under 18 years old), parents and adolescents completed the self-report measures in separate rooms. Surveys took approximately 30 min to complete. Parents and adolescents received a small token (e.g., keychain) and were entered in a drawing for gift cards to the campus bookstore in appreciation for their participation.

Results

Dating Rule Use

Most parents (64.2%) of late adolescents indicated that their families had rules about dating. Parents were more likely to have dating rules when the adolescent was currently involved in a romantic relationship (78% had rules) than when the adolescent was not currently involved (57% had rules; χ^2 (1, $N = 165$) = 7.53, $p < .01$). Adolescents whose parents reported using dating rules had a history of more romantic partners ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 3.11$) compared to those whose parents did not set rules ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 2.25$), $t(63.63) = 2.03$, $p < .05$. Parents did not differ in their likelihood of setting dating rules based on the adolescent's age of dating onset, $t(91) = .23$, *ns*, or the adolescent's status as a first/only born or later born child, χ^2 (1, $N = 165$) = 1.09, *ns*.

Rules were most often set by both parents together (34.2%), by the parents and the adolescent (28.2%), or by the mother alone (27.4%); rules were less likely to be set

Table 1 Definitions of dating rule types and sample rules

Rule type	Definition	Sample rules
Supervision "Keep me informed"	Rules that require the adolescent to provide information regarding his or her dating activities	Parents must meet the date Check in once (call) during the evening Parents must know where you are going If plans change, we need to know If they are going to a party, an address and phone number are needed
Restriction "Don't do this"	Rules that place some limitation or constraint on the adolescent's dating activity	No dates on school nights No, no, no sex! No single dates—two or more couples Curfew of 1:00 a.m. Told places he can't go
Prescription "Behave this way"	Rules that specify expectations regarding how the adolescent should behave with a date or in a dating relationship	Use good judgment Be a gentleman/lady Leave when a situation is making you uncomfortable Don't let someone domineer or walk over you Before becoming sexually active both partners need to discuss the issue

Table 2 Means, standard deviations and ranges for dating rules as a function of parent and child's gender ($N = 165$)

Reporter	*n*	Number of rules		Degree of control		Supervision		Restriction		Prescription	
		M (*SD*)	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Range
Parents	165	2.24 (2.19)	0–9	2.26 (1.18)	1–5	.98 (1.51)	0–6	.92 (1.23)	0–7	.30 (.65)	0–3
Fathers	49	1.76 (2.17)	0–8	2.02 (1.22)	1–5	.86 (1.44)	0–6	.73 (1.13)	0–4	$.16\ (.43)_e$	0–2
Mothers	116	2.44 (2.18)	0–9	2.36 (2.18)	1–5	1.03 (1.54)	0–6	1.00 (1.26)	0–7	$.36\ (.72)_f$	0–3
Parents of sons	63	1.90 (2.18)	0–8	$1.91\ (1.05)_a$	1–5	$.65\ (1.29)_c$	0–6	.81 (1.23)	0–5	.35 (.65)	0–2
Fathers of sons	25	1.40 (2.24)	0–8	1.80 (1.22)	1–5	.60 (1.38)	0–6	.68 (1.38)	0–4	.12 (1.22)	0–2
Mothers of sons	38	2.24 (2.11)	0–8	2.03 (.91)	1–4	.68 (1.23)	0–4	.89 (1.25)	0–5	.50 (.73)	0–2
Parents of daughters	75	2.44 (2.18)	0–9	$2.46\ (1.22)_b$	1–5	$1.18\ (1.61)_d$	0–6	.99 (1.22)	0–7	.27 (.65)	0–3
Fathers of daughters	24	2.13 (2.07)	0–6	2.25 (1.19)	1–4	1.13 (1.48)	0–4	.79 (1.06)	0–4	.21 (.41)	0–1
Mothers of daughters	78	2.54 (2.21)	0–9	2.52 (1.23)	1–5	1.19 (1.65)	0–6	1.05 (1.27)	0–7	.29 (.71)	0–3

Note: For each dimension of dating rules, means with different subscripts within each column indicate significant gender differences ($p < .05$)

by fathers alone (5.1%) or to be set through some other arrangement (5.1%). As shown in Table 2, parents listed an average of 2.24 rules ($SD = 2.19$; *Range* 0–9 rules); parents who listed at least one rule gave an average of 3.48 rules ($SD = 1.76$). Of the 373 separate rules listed, rules were most often aimed at supervising (43.2%) or restricting (40.7%) dating activities, rather than prescribing them (16.1%). Intercorrelations among all study variables are presented in Table 3, revealing that the number of rules listed in one category of rule type was not significantly correlated with the number of rules listed in any other category.

Variations in Dating Rules by Parent and Child's Gender

Intercorrelations among all study variables are presented as a function of parents' gender in Table 4 and as a function of children's gender in Table 5. As shown in Table 6, chi-square analyses revealed that mothers were more likely than fathers to use rules to manage their children's dating activities and that parents of daughters were more likely to use supervision rules than parents of sons were. Furthermore, parents established rule sets that offered more control over adolescents' dating behaviors when their sons

Table 3 Intercorrelations among dating rules and parent and adolescent relationship qualities

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
Dating rules													
1. Number of rules													
2. Degree of control	.76***												
3. Supervision	.73***	.51***											
4. Restriction	.65***	.62***	.08										
5. Prescription	.37***	.19*	.00	.15									
Parent–adolescent relationship													
6. Comfort w/secure base	.20**	.28***	.18*	.11	.05								
7. Psych. control—father	.09	.07	−.05	.09	.22*	−.03							
8. Psych. control—mother	−.13	−.18	−.17	−.04	.02	−.16	.33**						
Parent romantic relationship													
9. Satisfaction	−.13	−.12	−.04	−.09	−.17*	.19*	−.23*	−.01					
10. Closeness	−.14	−.10	−.04	−.07	−.22**	.19*	−.17	.02	.86***				
11. Insecurity	.09	.03	.05	.03	.12	−.25**	.14	.01	−.82***	−.79***			
Adolescent romantic relationship													
12. Supportive interactions	.03	.16	−.08	.14	−.03	.18	−.15	−.21	−.09	−.00	.07		
13. Negative interactions	−.13	.00	−.09	−.04	−.13	.11	.21	.19	.06	.15	.06	−.15	

Note: *N*'s range from 61 to 165

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 4 Intercorrelations among dating rules and relationship qualities as a function of parent's gender

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
Dating rules													
1. Number of rules	–	.81***	.83***	.72***	.36**	.31*	−.00	−.17	−.14	−.12	.09	.09	−.02
2. Degree of control	.73***	–	.63***	.69***	.15	.35*	.06	−.01	−.09	.02	.06	.04	.43
3. Supervision	.69***	.47***	–	.26	.14	.19	−.12	−.07	−.16	−.12	.09	−.16	−.12
4. Restriction	.61***	.59***	.01	–	.14	.26	.12	−.14	−.09	−.08	.11	.14	.22
5. Prescription	.37***	.19*	−.04	.14	–	.25	.04	−.18	.07	−.00	−.12	.43	−.42
Parent–adolescent relationship													
6. Comfort w/secure base	.11	.21*	.18	.00	−.05	–	−.13	−.15	.38**	.41**	−.38**	−.25	.28
7. Psych. control—father	.17	.12	.00	.11	.31*	.06	–	.34	−.06	.13	.06	.17	.20
8. Psych. control—mother	−.06	−.19	−.18	.03	.11	−.15	.29*	–	.21	.15	−.24	−.30	.14
Parent romantic relationship													
9. Satisfaction	−.14	−.15	.01	−.10	−.25*	.08	−.31*	−.10	–	.83***	−.84***	−.44	.03
10. Closeness	−.15	−.15	−.01	−.07	−.29**	.07	−.23	−.03	.87***	–	−.75***	−.41	.18
11. Insecurity	.13	.06	.05	.04	.23*	−.11	.14	.09	−.81***	−.83***	–	.34	.30
Adolescent romantic relationship													
12. Supportive interactions	−.03	.17	−.09	.12	−.15	.39**	−.25	−.13	−.05	.08	.05	–	−.09
13. Negative interactions	−.16	−.16	−.08	−.11	−.07	.01	.22	.20	.09	.16	−.08	−.17	–

Note: Intercorrelations for fathers (*n*'s range from 15 to 49) are presented above the diagonal and intercorrelations for mothers (*n*'s range from 46 to 116) are presented below the diagonal
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 5 Intercorrelations among dating rules and relationship qualities as a function of child's gender

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
Dating rules													
1. Number of rules	–	.73***	.66***	.71***	.43***	.13	.22	−.06	−.16	−.10	.08	.06	−.33
2. Degree of control	.77***	–	.54***	.58***	.27*	.28*	.15	−.01	−.10	−.25	.03	.29	−.04
3. Supervision	.76***	.48***	–	.16	−.01	.11	−.34	−.35	.05	.06	−.05	.17	−.42
4. Restriction	.60***	.64***	.03	–	.29*	.01	.40*	.03	−.20	−.09	.11	−.14	−.10
5. Prescription	.35***	.18	.02	.07	–	.15	.47*	.33	−.22	−.28*	.16	.21	−.16
Parent–adolescent relationship													
6. Comfort w/secure base	.21*	.20*	.17	.15	.01	–	−.04	−.11	.28*	.30*	−.22	.06	.34
7. Psych. control—father	.05	.06	.02	−.03	.16	−.02	–	.48*	−.43*	−.30	.22	−.01	.12
8. Psych. control—mother	−.14	−.21	−.06	−.07	−.18	−.09	.29*	–	−.16	−.21	.17	.07	−.02
Parent romantic relationship													
9. Satisfaction	−.11	−.12	−.08	−.01	−.15	.15	−.15	.09	–	.84***	−.78***	−.28	.12
10. Closeness	−.16	−.13	−.09	−.05	−.19	.12	−.05	.18	.88***	–	−.83***	−.26	.16
11. Insecurity	.10	.03	.11	−.02	.08	−.29**	.10	−.10	.84***	−.77***	–	.31	.16
Adolescent romantic relationship													
12. Supportive interactions	−.06	.01	−.26	.25	−.11	.13	−.21	−.28	−.09	.04	.01	–	−.09
13. Negative interactions	.04	.11	.09	.02	−.16	.02	.28	.29	.04	.19	−.03	−.12	–

Note: Intercorrelations for parents of sons (*n*'s range from 19 to 63) are presented above the diagonal and intercorrelations for parents of daughters (*n*'s range from 42 to 102) are presented below the diagonal

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 6 Prevalence (%) of families using rules by parent and child's gender

Rule type used	Fathers ($n = 49$)	Mothers ($n = 116$)	χ^2 (1)	Parents of sons ($n = 65$)	Parents of daughters ($n = 102$)	χ^2(1)
Any rule	51	70	5.30*	57	69	2.24
Supervision	37	41	0.31	27	48	7.19**
Restriction	41	53	1.91	40	55	3.61
Prescription	14	25	2.32	25	20	0.77

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

($r = .50$, $p < .05$), but not their daughters ($r = .09$, *ns*), had a history that included dating more romantic partners; $z_{diff} = 1.77$, *ns*.

A series of 2 (parent gender) × 2 (child gender) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to examine differences in rule types (supervision, restriction, and prescription) and degree of control offered by rule sets ($N = 165$). All means and standard deviations are shown in Table 2. None of the parent–child gender interaction effects were significant. A main effect for the gender of the child was found for supervision rules, $F(1,161) = 3.92$, $p < .05$. Follow-up tests showed that daughters were given more supervision rules than sons were. Main effects were not significant for restriction rules. A main effect for the gender of the parent was found for prescription rules, $F(1,161) = 4.37$, $p < .05$; mothers used more prescription rules than fathers did. A main effect for the gender of the child was found for degree of control, $F(1,160) = 5.48$, $p < .05$. Compared to sons, daughters were given rule sets that offered parents a greater degree of control.

Associations Among Rules and Qualities of Parents' and Adolescents' Familial and Romantic Relationships

Rule Use, Number, and Degree of Control

Parents who were comfortable with their secure base roles were more likely to report using dating rules, $M_{rules} = 4.30$, $SD = .40$; $M_{no\ rules} = 4.11$, $SD = .46$, $t(163) = 2.85$, $p < .01$. In addition, parents comfortable with their secure base roles used a greater number of rules and their rule sets were judged to afford them more control over their children's dating activities.

To test for curvilinear relations between number of dating rules and relationship qualities, the overall distribution of number of dating rules was used to group parents according to whether they provided no dating rules ($n = 59$), a moderate number of dating rules (i.e., 1–2 rules; $n = 31$), or a high number of dating rules (i.e., 3–9 rules; $n = 75$). Next, a series of ANOVAs (rule group × relationship quality) were conducted. The overall model for parents' comfort with their secure base roles was significant, $N = 165$, $F(2,164) = 4.74$, $p = .01$. Follow-up Tukey comparisons were consistent with a linear relation between control and comfort with secure base roles. Parents who set no rules ($M = 4.10$, $SD = .47$) were less comfortable with their secure base roles than parents who set either a moderate ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .34$) or high ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .41$) number of rules. For those adolescents currently involved in romantic relationships, the overall model for negative interactions in romantic relationships was significant, $n = 61$, $F(2,60) = 3.59$, $p < .05$. Follow-up Tukey comparisons were partially consistent with a curvilinear relation as adolescents experienced more negative romantic relationship interactions when their parents set a moderate number of rules ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.01$, $n = 13$) as opposed to a high number ($M = 1.63$, $SD = .63$, $n = 33$); the levels of negative romantic relationship interactions for adolescents whose parents set a high or moderate number of rules were not significantly different from those whose parents did not use rules ($M = 1.96$, $SD = .97$, $n = 15$).

Supervision Rules

Parents who included supervision rules in their rule sets were more likely to feel comfortable with their secure base roles, $M_{sup.\ rules} = 4.32$, $SD = .42$; $M_{no\ sup.\ rules} = 4.17$, $SD = .43$, $t(163) = 2.23$, $p < .05$. Likewise, using a greater number of supervision rules was associated with parents' greater comfort with their secure base roles. Parents' use of supervision rules was not associated significantly with qualities of adolescents' romantic relationships or parents' romantic relationships.

Restriction Rules

Parents reported using a greater number of restriction rules when their children were currently involved in a romantic relationship ($M = 1.25$, $SD = 1.47$) than when they were not currently romantically involved ($M = 0.74$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(90.12) = 2.40$, $p < .05$. Use of restriction rules was not significantly associated with qualities of parent–child relationships, parents' romantic/marital relationships, or

adolescents' romantic relationships for the sample as a whole. Greater use of restriction rules by parents of sons was associated with sons' perceptions that their fathers were psychologically controlling.

Prescription Rules

The presence or absence of prescription rules in parents' rule sets was not associated with any relationship qualities tested. However, greater use of prescription rules was associated with adolescents' perceptions that their fathers were psychologically controlling. When analyzed separately by adolescents' gender, this correlation was significant for sons, but not for daughters; however, the two correlations were not significantly different from each other, $z_{diff} = 1.48$, *ns*.

Parents who used a greater number of prescriptive rules reported that their own romantic/marital relationships were characterized by less satisfaction and closeness. When analyzed by gender of the parent, these correlations remained significant for mothers, but not for fathers; the difference between correlations for mothers and fathers was not significant, $p's > .05$. When considering gender subgroups of parent–child dyads, the link between greater use of prescription rules and parents' romantic relationship qualities held for mothers of sons only ($n = 32$). For these women, using more prescription rules was associated with lower satisfaction ($r < -.39$, $p < .05$), less closeness ($r = -.47$, $p < .01$), and greater insecurity ($r = .45$, $p = .01$) in their own romantic relationships. The correlation between prescription rules and insecurity was significantly lower for fathers of daughters ($r = -.16$) than for mothers of sons, *ns;* $z_{diff} = 2.25$, $p < .05$; there was no significant difference between correlations for any other gender groupings and relationship qualities.

Discussion

Parenting romantically involved adolescents poses unique challenges. Around the time that adolescents begin to date they undergo developmentally normative changes (e.g., autonomy striving, increased interest in extra-familial ties) that may make it difficult for parents to retain the direct influence they enjoyed at earlier ages. Moreover, contemporary norms limit parents' involvement in their children's courtship processes compared to earlier historical periods (Modell 1989). Models of parental management of peer relationships suggest that parents may supervise adolescents through the parenting practice of rule setting, thus satisfying parents' desire to offer guidance and protection to romantically involved children. In the present study, a majority of parents reported using dating rules to manage their late adolescents' dating behaviors. Rule use varied by parents and adolescents' gender. Inclusion and degree of use of different types of rules (i.e., supervision, restriction, and prescription) were differentially related to qualities of the parent–adolescent relationship, as well as parents' romantic relationships.

Gender and Dating Rule Use

As expected, parents were more likely to use rules to regulate their daughters' dating activities than their sons'. Rule sets for daughters were more likely to contain supervision rules and to afford parents a greater degree of control. These findings fit with research demonstrating parents' greater supervision of daughters in general (Crouter et al. 2005). With respect to dating, historically parents have monitored their daughters' romantic activities more closely than their sons' and have played a more influential role in their daughters' courtships (Bates 1941; Spreadbury 1982). Unexpectedly, sons with more extensive dating histories were subject to more controlling rule sets, but daughters' dating histories were unrelated to parents' dating rules. Perhaps parents heavily regulate their daughters' dating activities from their onset of dating, but only gradually increase regulation of sons' dating activities as new dating situations arise.

Mothers and fathers differed in their reports of dating rules. Specifically, mothers were more likely to report using rules and to use more prescription rules. Past research has shown mothers to be more involved in the daily routines of their children (Waizenhofer et al. 2004) and to be more active in regulating their children's peer relationships compared to fathers (Updegraff et al. 2001). Mothers participated more often in the rule setting process than fathers did (mothers were involved in developing the rule sets in 88.2% of families; fathers were involved in 66.3%). Despite greater use of dating rules by mothers and for daughters, no significant parent-by-child gender interactions were uncovered.

Use of Different Rule Types

This study successfully adapted Simpkins and Parke's (2002) framework regarding mothers' rules for their children's play. The overall pattern of findings reveals that use and prevalence of supervision rules related to aspects of the parent–child relationship and the prevalence of prescription rules related most often to qualities of parents' romantic/marital relationships. Dating rule types were not related to qualities of adolescents' romantic relationships. Parents who set a moderate (i.e., 1–2 rules) or high number of rules (i.e., 3–9 rules) were more comfortable with their secure base roles than parents who set no rules. Adolescents who

experienced more negative interactions in their romantic relationships were more likely to have parents who set a moderate number of rules. Past research has found a curvilinear relationship between parental control and adolescent outcomes such that a moderate number of rules is ideal (Miller et al. 1986; Smith 1983); however, the present study does not replicate these findings. The current study measured the number of dating rules given, whereas past studies have considered adolescents' perceptions that their parents' control attempts were weak, moderate, or heavy. It is possible, as other researchers have suggested, that adolescents' perception of the appropriateness of parental control attempts is more important in determining adolescent outcomes than the actual number of rules (Padilla-Walker and Carlo 2004).

Supervision Rules

Supervision rules are most closely linked to the monitoring process, as these rules require that adolescents disclose information about their dating activities. Recent re-conceptualizations of parental monitoring show that parental knowledge is more strongly predicted by adolescents' willingness to disclose than by parents' active monitoring attempts (Stattin and Kerr 2000). Parents' use of supervision rules is somewhat unique in that it involves parents' solicitation through the establishment of rules and adolescents' disclosure in adherence to rules; therefore, such rules are in line with models emphasizing the bilateral nature of parent and adolescent influences on parental management of peer relationships (Parke et al. 2003). Indeed, more than a quarter of the families in this sample reported that establishing dating rules was a process that jointly involved parents and adolescents. For supervision rules to be effective by their very nature, adolescents must be willing participants in the regulation process.

A child's romantic involvement is a separation task that may invoke anxiety for some parents (Gray and Steinberg 1999). Across adolescence, children gradually shift their support partners from parents, to friends, to romantic partners (Kobak et al. 2007). In the present study, parents who felt comfortable with their secure base roles were more likely to establish supervision rules. Such rules afforded them a greater degree of influence over their adolescents' dating activities, without preemptively restricting or prescribing these activities. Rather, these parents felt secure monitoring from a distance, knowing that they could intervene when needed.

Restriction Rules

Parents whose children were currently involved in romantic relationships had more restriction rules than parents whose children were not currently involved. In longitudinal work, Mounts (2000) found that parents' prohibitions/restrictions regarding peers stemmed from adolescents' involvement with worrisome peers, as opposed to promoting these friendships. Likewise, parents may not see the need to restrict romantic behaviors until concerns arise. The effectiveness of such restrictions remains to be determined. In Mounts' (2000) study, at least, parents' prohibitions/restrictions were not effective in preventing adolescents from establishing friendships with deviant peers.

Of the three rule types, restriction rules are likely the most intrusive to adolescents, posing a greater threat to adolescents' autonomy strivings than supervision or prescription rules. Indeed, sons who were given more restriction rules perceived their fathers to be more psychologically controlling. As concerns arise it is reasonable that parents would respond by imposing restrictions; however, it is not yet clear how adolescents perceive and respond to restrictions regarding their romantic lives.

Prescription Rules

Parents who were dissatisfied with their own romantic relationships used more prescription rules to manage their adolescents' dating activities than parents who were satisfied. Like other dating rules, prescription rules set expectations regarding the adolescent's dating activity. However, unlike supervision and restriction rules, which appear to have a motive of ensuring the adolescent's safety, prescription rules outline behaviors and personal values likely to lead to better quality romantic experiences for the adolescent or the couple. It is noteworthy that prescription rules related to qualities of parents' romantic relationships, but not to qualities of adolescents' romantic relationships. Furthermore, this connection existed for mother–son pairs, but not for mother–daughter, father–son, or father–daughter pairs.

Simply observing a child's initiation into dating and the heightened emotions that accompany young love (Larson et al. 1999) may prompt parents to reflect on their own romantic lives, at times with dissatisfaction, regret, or even envy (Silverberg and Steinberg 1990). It is possible that prescription rules reflect some mothers' wishes that their sons enact romantic behaviors evoking qualities of romantic partnerships that they themselves desire (e.g., "treat your date with respect" or "don't let someone domineer you"). In this context, such rules may represent a broader dynamic of psychological control within the family, as supported by the finding that greater use of prescription rules was associated with adolescents' perceptions that their fathers were psychologically controlling. Moreover, research on psychological control emphasizes that insecurity in one relationship (e.g., marital relationship) may lead to psychologically controlling behavior in

another relationship (e.g., parent–child relationship; Barber 2002). Alternatively, these mothers may be altruistically offering helpful guidance needed to navigate the complexities of romantic relationships. In related research, mothers with anxious or lonely recollections of childhood peer experiences took a more active role in their children's social development (Putallaz et al. 1991). Although these mothers were effective in promoting their children's peer competence, it remains to be seen whether parents' romantic prescriptions are effective in promoting healthier adolescent romantic relationships.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations that also suggest fruitful avenues for future research. Most prominently, the correlational nature of this study prevents causal conclusions regarding links between dating rules and relationship qualities. Certainly it seems reasonable that supervision rules, for example, could stem from a healthy parent–child relationship, but it is also possible that establishing supervision rules might promote better communication within the family and improve parent–child relationships. Alternatively, parents' use of supervision rules may be indicative of a long-standing pattern of authoritative parenting such that the adolescent seldom engages in risky dating behaviors, making restrictions and prescriptions unnecessary. Likewise, while the establishment of prescription rules may stem from parents' marital unhappiness, the reflective process involved in developing prescription rules may lead parents to question their own marital satisfaction. Longitudinal studies are needed to test alternative models regarding the direction of effects between dating rules and relationship qualities.

A second limitation is that this study relied upon a college-bound sample that was largely European-American. Research on parents' management of adolescents' peer relationships shows strong cultural influences on the approaches parents take (Brown and Mounts 2007; Mounts 2004), and emerging research on parents' involvement in adolescents' romantic relationships suggests that researchers should be mindful of generalizing results beyond the culture or ethnicity studied (Brown et al. 2007; Smetana and Gettman 2006). In addition, the timing of this study is somewhat unique in that it was conducted the summer before the children of the parent participants entered college. The pending developmental transition may have reasonably heightened or lessened parental concerns regarding adolescents' dating activities. Studies of dating rule use in early or middle adolescence, and even studies of parental involvement in emerging adults' romantic relationships, would help clarify associations between parents' management of romantic relationships and other developmental tasks.

A further limitation of this study is that the sample included only one parent from each family; in particular, caution is needed when interpreting results from parent–child gender groupings in this modest sample. Separate interviews asking mothers, fathers, and adolescents a parallel set of questions would be helpful to determine parents' intentions when setting rules, as well as adolescents' interpretations of such rules. Padilla-Walker and Carlo (2004) found that adolescents who perceived parents' intentions as inhibiting and controlling (akin to restriction and prescription rules in this study) viewed parents' actions as less appropriate than adolescents who perceived parents' intentions as caring and helping. In addition, Kan and colleagues (2008) found that the emotional climate of the parent–child relationship impacted the effectiveness with which parents were able to influence their children's romantic relationships. While the present study has established that a majority of parents employ dating rules, it remains unclear whether adolescents know about or are receptive and responsive to these rules. Gathering information from the parents of adolescents' romantic partners may uncover additional processes at work in this mesosystem level influence. As one parent wrote, "His girlfriend's parents are more strict than we are, so we haven't had to make any rules." Management of adolescents' romantic relationships may be a joint project involving the cooperative efforts of both partners' families, or may even be relegated to the partner's family at times; this study could not explore such possibilities.

A final limitation is that this study reveals relatively little about the 36% of families who did not set dating rules (including 22% whose children were currently involved in romantic relationships). Kan and colleagues (2008) report that a similar percentage of families (35%) adopted an autonomy-oriented approach regarding parents' involvement in adolescents' romantic relationships, communicating to their children that their dating activities were their own business. It is possible that families without rules in the current study took a similar approach; however, the current study examined just one type of management—rules—perhaps overlooking other strategies that parents use. Information regarding the multiple processes through which parents manage their children's romantic relationships is sorely needed. Mounts' (2008) model offers guidance, suggesting that researchers turn their attention to parents' roles as designers, mediators, and consultants of adolescents' romantic relationships.

Conclusion

In sum, this study contributes to a growing body of research on parents' management of adolescents' peer relationships by expanding the focus from friendships to romantic

partnerships. In their roles as supervisors of romantic relationships, most parents employ dating rules to gain knowledge about adolescents' dating activities, prohibit undesirable activities, or prescribe desirable behaviors. Mothers are more active than fathers in the management of adolescents' romantic relationships through dating rules, and daughters are subject to more supervision rules and more controlling rule sets than sons are. Parents' use of dating rules was not found to be associated with qualities of adolescents' current romantic relationships; rather, use of supervision rules was linked to parents' comfort with their parenting roles, and use of prescription rules was linked to parents' dissatisfaction with their own romantic/marital relationships. These findings demonstrate that variations of a single peer management practice (i.e., rule setting) are differentially related to qualities of close relationships, thus emphasizing the need to examine parenting practices within the broader context of family relationships.

Researchers and government agencies alike have begun to recognize the importance of adolescents' romantic relationships as precursors of healthy adult relationships and marriages (Karney et al. 2007; Seiffge-Krenke 2003), highlighting healthy adolescent romantic relationships as an important educational agenda (Barber and Eccles 2003). The present study is valuable because it not only provides much needed knowledge of parenting practices as adolescents establish extra-familial ties, but it can also inform future outreach initiatives targeting parents of romantically involved adolescents.

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