



Self-perceptions of pubertal timing and patterns of peer group activities and dating behavior among heterosexual adolescent girls



Rona Carter ^{a, *}, Sandra Williams ^{b, 1}

^a University of Michigan Department of Psychology, 2243 East Hall, 530 Church Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA

^b Q-Q Research Consultants, 1444 Biscayne Blvd #115, Miami, FL 33132, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 12 January 2016

Keywords:

Dating
Peers
Menarche
Pubertal timing

ABSTRACT

This study identified patterns of past and concurrent peer group and dating behavior in a sample of adolescent girls ($N = 511$; aged 17–19 years; 49% White). Peer group activities and dating behaviors were classified as occurring in either early (ages 10–13 years), middle (ages 14–16 years), or late (ages 17–19 years) adolescence according to the age at which each participant indicated the activity/behavior was first experienced. Latent class analysis identified four latent classes: Early Interactions/Early Daters (15%), Early Interactions/Late Daters (17%), Early Interactions/Middle Daters (33%) and Middle Interactions/Middle Daters (35%). Class membership was associated with girl's perceived pubertal timing. Compared to Early Interactions/Early Daters, girls in the Early Interactions/Late Daters class reported higher levels of pubertal timing, indicating greater perception that their pubertal development was late relative to peers. Late perceived pubertal timing is potentially relevant for dating but not necessarily other mixed- and cross-sex peer interactions.

© 2015 The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Adolescent peer group activities play an important role in the formation of heterosexual romantic involvement (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004; Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Dunphy, 1963). Adolescents typically progress from involvement in same-sex peer groups in early adolescence to affiliation with mixed-sex peer groups in early to middle adolescence and then to dyadic romantic relationships in middle to late adolescence (Connolly et al., 2004, 2000; Dunphy, 1963). This sequenced introduction to romantic relationships serve to socialize adolescents into heterosocial interest and behavioral patterns (Dunphy, 1963). Interindividual variations in the timing of puberty also influence the timing of heterosexual romantic interests (Capaldi, Crosby, & Stoolmiller, 1996; Cavanagh, 2004; French & Dishion, 2003; Udry & Billy, 1987). This association is thought to be due to the hormonal changes just prior to puberty and the “kicking in” of sexual interest and awareness (Halpern, 2003). It may also be due to the physical transformations in appearance relative to one's peers and the reactions that adolescents experience from other individuals (e.g., peers) to their developing body.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 734 763 2225.

E-mail addresses: ronac@umich.edu (R. Carter), swilliams@qqresearchconsultants.com (S. Williams).

¹ Tel.: +1 (305) 999 7772.

Undoubtedly, adolescent peer group activities and pubertal timing constitute significant predictors of heterosexual romantic involvement. It is less clear whether interindividual variations in the timing of puberty relate to participating in mixed-sex peer groups and facilitate opportunities for cross-sex associations and dating. Past research has examined associations between same-sex friendships, affiliation with mixed-sex groups, and dating but controlled for pubertal timing (Connolly et al., 2004). Clarifying the role of puberty is important because adolescents who develop earlier than their same-age peers may move into mixed-sex peer group activities earlier than their same-age peers. They will also establish heterosexual romantic relationships earlier than their same-age peers (De Genna, Larkby, & Cornelius, 2011; Negriff, Susman, & Trickett, 2011). This line of reasoning rests on established findings about peer relationships processes in adolescence (see, Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011, for a review).

Adolescents who develop earlier than their same-age peers will select friends of comparable physical development rather than chronological age, and these friends will be older peers (Caspi, Lynam, Moffitt, & Silva, 1993; Magnusson, Stattin, & Allen, 1985; Stattin & Magnusson, 1990). Because older adolescents are theorized to participate in more mixed-sex peer group activities than younger adolescents (Dunphy, 1963), early developers will have friends who are doing more mixed-sex peer group activities than their same-age peers would have, and these older friends will expose them to the same kinds of activities. Early mixed-sex peer group exposure and romantic involvement is problematic for individuals who develop early because they do not have sufficient time to complete prior developmental tasks before the transition to adolescence (Ge & Natsuaki, 2009). As a result, early developers might be less prepared socially and cognitively for the social stressors associated with mixed-sex peer interactions. These social stressors may overtax their relatively undeveloped coping resources and place them at risk for maladjustment (Ge & Natsuaki, 2009).

Considering the aforementioned, this study explored patterns of past and concurrent peer group activities (i.e., spending time in mixed- and cross-sex settings) and dating behavior (i.e., spending time with a boy whom the adolescent liked) in an ethnically diverse sample of adolescent girls and tested whether pubertal timing relates to participation in these activities. We used a sample of adolescent girls because puberty occurs, on average, about two years earlier in girls than boys (Grumbach & Styne, 1998). As a result, girls may be more vulnerable to the risk associated with early entry into mixed-sex peer interactions. Two aspects of pubertal timing were the focus of this study: (1) menarche and (2) perceived pubertal timing. Menarche is distinct from perceived pubertal timing because it is a private event and may not be a factor in girls' social interactions. Perceived pubertal timing, in contrast, assesses whether girls see themselves as being non-normative in one direction (early) or the other (late) relative to their peers of the same-sex and age.

Perceived pubertal timing affords the opportunity to assess girls' interpretation and meaning of the physical changes associated with puberty. For example, if perceived pubertal timing is related to peer group activities and dating behavior, it may be due to the physical transformations in appearance relative to one's peers and the response that girls generate based on reactions from other people to their developing body. Conversely, if menarche is related to peer group activities and dating behavior, it may be due to the hormonal changes associated with the puberty resulting in an increase in sexual desire. Perceived pubertal timing, therefore, may reflect a different process than menarche possibility at the social rather than biological level.

The present study

In sum, we examined patterns of past and concurrent peer group activities and dating behavior reported to first have occurred in either early (ages 10–13 years), middle (ages 14–16 years), or late (ages 17–19 years) adolescence. Peer group activities and dating behavior included: (1) mixed- and cross-sex activities such as going to the movies, concerts, sports activities, and places with both boys and girls (but not as a date) and meeting up with a group of boys and girls at night and (2) dating behavior such as going out with someone, but with a group of friends and going out with someone, just the two of them. Latent class analysis (LCA) was used to identify patterns of peer group activities and dating behavior. LCA affords us the opportunity to classify girls based on their mixed- and cross-sex peer group activities and dating behaviors during early, middle, and late adolescence. We also examined whether these LCA classifications differed by girls' menarche and perceived pubertal timing. In line with prior research demonstrating that pubertal timing is positively associated with reports of romantic and dating behavior (De Genna et al., 2011; Negriff et al., 2011), we expected to see significant class differences in girls' menarche and perceived pubertal timing scores. Specifically, early menarche and perceived pubertal timing was hypothesized to be associated with early mixed- and cross-sex activities and early dating behavior.

Method

Participants

Participants were first-year female college students aged 17–19 years that participated in an anonymous web-based study on friendships and romantic involvement. Since the survey was placed on an open web-site, inclusionary criteria for participation were specified in the informed consent page (i.e., freshman female students between ages 17–19 years); however, adherence to the criteria could not be verified due to the anonymous nature of the survey. In order to minimize superfluous replies to the survey an online survey hosting site was used (www.qualtrics.com). There were 685 persons that viewed the survey. One-hundred and sixty-one persons provided consent but did not start the survey. Thirteen participants

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/880570>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/880570>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)