... we were teenagers, and so always closest on the phone... But we were both the best we could have been. At that age, the deep attractions, the ones that threaten your open future, may thrill you, may kidnap your days, but more powerful is the flood of terror, the nakedness you feel when she only starts walking your way (p. 216).

My dad always said that high school relationships were dumb, and that no one should date in high school... I always thought that it was interesting he said this, because my mom and dad started dating their sophomore year of high school and have been together ever since. When I would mention this to them they said, ‘I know, we were stupid’. (Lauren, 19, p. 21)
## Basic Statistics on Adolescent Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Definition of Dating/Relationship</th>
<th>% Reporting Being in Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Toledo (Ohio) Adolescent Relationships Study</strong></td>
<td>“when you like a guy/girl and he/she likes you back” (past 12 months)</td>
<td>7th grade: 32%  9th grade: 41%  11th grade: 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project STAR (Studying Teens and Relationships; University of Denver)</strong></td>
<td>“dating for one month or longer... defined broadly as spending time with someone you are seeing or going out with” (past 12 mo)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11th grade: 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Adolescent “Add Health” Study</strong></td>
<td>In “special romantic relationships?” Follow-up questions about holding hands, hugging, kissing (past 18 mo)</td>
<td>7th grade: 17%  9th grade: 32%  11th grade: 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(more refined categories, see p. 12 &amp; Table 1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transitions to Marriage/Long-Term Committed Relationships

The median age at first marriage has been going up steadily in the U.S., although there are regional variations. Indeed, “Many parents... warn their children of the hazards of considering early marriage” (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011, p. 188).

Some experts believe there are still valid arguments for early marriage, however. Oklahoma, in particular, is a state in which large numbers of people continue to get married “sooner.”
Basic Statistics on Adolescent Sexual Behavior


Today’s teens dating less and having less sexual activity than in earlier generations. Some (such as Twenge) link these trends to the popularity of the iPhone. Key findings are summarized at [Big Think](https://www.bigthink.com/).


Table 1: Percentages engaging in various sexual behaviors by age 18
Table 3: Of people who engaged in a behavior by age 18, the average age of doing so


Figure 2: Sexual intercourse in 15-and-older adolescents by gender and vocabulary test score

Much of psychological, medical, and epidemiological research cleanly demarcates adolescent and adult sexuality, with many elements of sexual experience assumed to be inappropriate for adolescents and preserved for adults...

Because sexuality is seen as a domain requiring adult maturity to experience and express, adolescent sexuality is portrayed – even in ostensibly objective research – as tentative, experimental, confused, inept, and innately dangerous...

An alternative view... is that the essential elements of adult sexuality are identifiable in early adolescence and are relatively continuous through the sexual lifespan. Key elements of sexual anatomy are fixed during puberty...The hormonal underpinnings of sexuality also remain relatively intact from puberty through late adulthood.

Fortenberry (2013) Continued

• **Sexual Desire***
  - Cognitive: Sexual thoughts seem to become increasingly common around age 13-14
  - Others as objects of desire ("crushes"): Common at 10-12 years of age
  - Self as an object of desire: Awareness of one’s bodily changes, perceptions of one’s own attractiveness

• **Sexual Arousal***
  - Physio techniques to measure adults’ sexual arousal rarely (if ever) used with adolescents
  - Small percentages of young adults recall feeling sexual “excitement” in early adolescence

• **Sexual Behavior**
  - Other behaviors to study besides intercourse. Even the term “abstinence” is unclear, as it can include kissing or other behavior.
  - “Masturbation remains subject to substantial stigma and religious condemnation, but contemporary medicine holds masturbation to be developmentally normal, and health-neutral if not health-enhancing.” Percentages engaging in it increase dramatically from late childhood to early adolescence, especially in boys.
  - New behaviors emerging (e.g., “sexting”)

• **Sexual Function**
  - Pleasure/orgasm, pain/discomfort
  - Psychological qualities (e.g., self-esteem, identity) also involved

*Fortenberry notes that the “distinction of sexual desire and sexual arousal is not clear…”*
Negative Aspects of Relationships and Sex

• **Teen Pregnancy** (premised on belief teen parents are too young to raise children)
  
  o “...despite similar rates of sexual involvement, European teens are more likely than U.S. teens to use contraception and to use more effective contraceptive methods, resulting in much lower pregnancy rates” ([link](#))
  
  o CNN article on [unintended pregnancies](#) and reasons for their decline
  
  o CDC [pregnancy and abortion statistics](#)
  
  o “**Teens and Older Partners**” (Michael Males, 2004; see especially Table 4):
    
    “...for the youngest mothers of most concern to policy makers, those under age 15, about six times more babies are fathered by men over age 20 than by peer boys (National Center for Health Statistics 1908-2003).”
  
  o [Wise Guys: Implementing a Boys-Only Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program](#)
Negative Aspects... (Continued)

- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)
  - 2008 study: “One in four U.S. women aged 14–19 has a sexually transmitted infection (STI)...” (used biological verification, not merely self-report)

- Dating Violence
  - Statistics on teen dating violence from college students’ retrospective reports
Basketball players A.C. Green and Dwight Howard each grew up with strong religious beliefs, including conservative attitudes toward sexuality. One held to his beliefs, the other didn’t.

Why might some people stick to their religious values and others not?
“Porn Literacy” Education Aims to Get Adolescents to Think Critically About Messages Conveyed and Not Conveyed (e.g., Consent) in Porn

“...grounded in the reality that most adolescents do see porn and takes the approach that teaching them to analyze its messages is far more effective than simply wishing our children could live in a porn-free world.”
Internet resources

Advocates for Youth

Alan Guttmacher Institute

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Reproductive Health Page

Focus on the Family (Abstinence Education)

Power to Decide (formerly National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy)

Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)