

The Development of Romantic Relationships in Adolescence

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1 **Missing the Love Boat**

Why Researchers Have Shied Away from Adolescent Romance

*B. Bradford Brown, Candice Feiring,
and Wyndol Furman*

For most American adolescents, romantic relationships begin as a remarkable mystery. What's this weird feeling deep in the pit of my stomach? How do I get someone to like me? How do I know if someone I like likes me back? What should we do together? What can we talk about? How can I tell if someone really loves me or is just trying to take advantage of me? If we start having sex, will it change the relationship? Why don't my parents understand that my boyfriend/girlfriend and I need to spend lots of time together? These are mysteries that nearly all American adolescents must confront; they are a part of growing up. For help with such issues, adolescents may turn to friends or family members or even television shows. But at present there is little reason for them to turn to social scientists for insights because research on this topic has been surprisingly sparse.

Investigators have not ignored the topic entirely. Descriptive information on dating has been gathered periodically (e.g., Gordon & Miller, 1984; Hansen, 1977; Roscoe, Cavanaugh, & Kennedy, 1988), and some ethnographers have studied peer group processes and romantic relationships (Dunphy, 1969; Eder, 1985). A few theories of adolescent dating and romantic relationships have been proposed (e.g., Dunphy, 1969; Feinstein & Ardon, 1973; McCabe, 1984; Skipper & Naas, 1966). In addition, a substantial amount of research has been conducted on college students, who are sometimes described as late adolescents and sometimes as young adults. Most of that work, however, was not derived from developmental theories, nor was it conducted by adolescent researchers. Instead, the research has stemmed from theories of adult relationships, and the investigators intend them to be studies of adult relationships.

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Accordingly, we believe it is accurate to say that issues concerning adolescent romance are as mysterious to social scientists as they are to each successive generation of teenagers. That state of affairs spawns the major mystery to be explored in this chapter: Why has there been such limited research and theory over the past half century on a topic of such obvious, enduring importance to adolescent development and behavior? Thus, our agenda for this chapter deviates from the standard introduction in edited volumes, which states the purpose, scope, and organization of the volume and then briefly summarizes the contents of each chapter. We believe that such a deviation is necessary, as the question is not how to extend existing knowledge but how best to venture into the unknown. Understanding the reasons for our limited knowledge about romantic relationships is necessary to appreciate the task we set before the authors in this volume.

We begin with a discussion of the arena of adolescent romance and then describe how romantic relationships are central to adolescent development and behavior. We offer five major reasons for the dearth of work in this area. Finally, we overview the task that we gave to the contributors to this volume.

Romantic Life

What are the essential features of adolescent romance? The challenge of this question quickly becomes apparent by reflecting upon the variety of experiences that are relevant to the development of romance in adolescence. One adolescent daydreams about the person sitting behind him in math class with whom he has never spoken, whereas another goes steady with someone for three years and describes their relationship as the “real thing”; still another couple is inseparable for two straight weeks, then suddenly breaks up. A teenager claims to have a boyfriend but, when asked, the boy denies the connection. Two adolescents acknowledge that they are going together but never spend time with each other apart from other members of their crowd. Another pair of adolescents talk with each other every night but never display any affection for each other in public for fear of being ridiculed by their peers.

All of these forms of romantic experiences, from fantasies to interactions to relationships of short and long duration, must be considered in order to fully understand the development of adolescent romance. It is essential to recognize that not all of an adolescent’s romantic experiences stem from romantic relationships. Critical components of adolescent romance exist outside of a concrete relationship with a specific romantic

partner (see Brown, this volume; Feiring, this volume; Furman & Wehner, 1997; Larson, Clore, & Wood, this volume). Thus, we distinguish between the individual's romantic experiences and romantic relationships as dyadic phenomena (see the discussion in Furman, Feiring, & Brown, this volume). Early adolescent crushes on *impossible others* (professional athletes, models, pop music stars, famous actors, or even a popular schoolmate who is far above oneself in the social hierarchy) may be critical learning experiences even when no concrete relationship transpires. Individuals can explore romantic feelings in conversations with friends, learning a great deal about the cultural, gender, or sexual scripts that are expected in romantic relationships without negotiating the relationship itself (see the chapters by Coates, this volume; Feiring, this volume; Larson et al., this volume; Miller & Benson, this volume).

Of course, romantic relationships are a particularly important class of romantic experience. There have been efforts to provide explicit definitions of romantic relationships (e.g., Tennov, 1979), but we regard it as premature to place such tight constraints on the construct. Rather, we will point to characteristics or features that are prototypic of these relationships and thus could be included in a definition.

First, romance involves a *relationship*, an ongoing pattern of association and interaction between two individuals who acknowledge some connection with each other. Short-term dating relationships as well as long-term committed relationships are included in this criterion, although some authors in this volume differentiate further between them (see Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dube, this volume; Graber, Britto, & Brooks-Gunn, this volume).

Second, romantic relationships are voluntary in most Western cultures. Thus, romance is a matter of personal choice, which means that such relationships are tenuous. They may be ended at the discretion of either partner even if a relationship between the couple continues in some other form. In cultures where the relationships are arranged, the romantic feelings one has toward the other are still voluntary, even if the relationship is not.

Third, there is some form of attraction, often (but not necessarily) intense or passionate in nature. This attraction typically includes a sexual component. The sexual attraction is often manifested in some form of sexual behavior, but not always. Personal, religious, or cultural values may constrain such behavior. In certain ethnic groups, opportunities for sexual activity among romantic partners are impeded by the mandatory presence of a chaperone each time the couple meets; some sexual minority youth may feel unable to act on their sexual desires because of societal norms. In

some cases, sexual feeling may not be present at all. Adolescents can have relationships for the sake of convenience or status or perhaps as a cover for their sexual orientation. These relationships would not be prototypic romantic relationships, however.

Yet, the attraction toward a romantic partner involves passion or feelings of love beyond those of a sexual nature. There are usually some manifestations of companionship, intimacy, and caring, and many are characterized as a special kind of friendship. As they become long-term, the relationships usually involve some level of commitment and exclusivity, and attachment and caregiving processes become salient (see Collins & Sroufe, this volume; Furman & Simon, this volume).

Collectively, these features differentiate romantic relationships from virtually all other close relationships an adolescent is likely to have. However, the particular way in which these features are manifest or the degree to which they are central to the relationship is likely to vary over the course of a particular relationship, from one relationship to another, from one developmental segment of adolescence or young adulthood to another, from one cultural context to another, and from one historical era to another. The individual, developmental, cultural, and historical variability is what makes it unwise to *fix* a definition or to confine the field to relationships alone. Romantic fantasies, infatuations, conversations with friends about romance and potential partners, preromantic “posturing,” and relationships that last for periods ranging from 2 days to several years – all of these are part of the romantic lives of adolescents, and all need to be addressed in theory and research on the topic.

The Importance of Studying Adolescent Romance

It can be argued that a phenomenon that cannot even be easily defined is hardly worth social scientists’ close attention. Is there evidence that researchers have truly “missed the boat” by devoting so little effort to theoretical or empirical assessment of adolescent romance? Clearly, romance is central in adolescent pop culture of most Western countries. Love or romance is the central theme in 73% of popular (“Top 40”) rock music songs in the United States (Christenson & Roberts, 1998); no other theme or issue is nearly as dominant. Sex, dating, and romantic interests or relationships are one of the most common script themes for adolescent characters featured in television serials (Ward, 1995). Within American popular culture, then, romantic issues are portrayed as in the forefront of adolescents’ lives.

Romance is also in the forefront of adolescents' minds. Wilson-Shockley (1995) reported that adolescent girls attribute 34% of their strong emotions to real or fantasized heterosexual relationships, and boys gave this reason for 25%. These proportions are substantially higher than those on any other topic, including school, peers, and family. Ethnographers and anthropologists echo this sentiment in confirming that dating and romance form one of the organizing principles of adolescent peer structure (Dunphy, 1969; Eder, 1985; Mead, 1928); they also are a focal topic of conversation among adolescents in their leisure time (Eder, 1993; Thompson, 1994). Across adolescence the amount of companionship and intimacy with other-sex peers increases substantially (Richards, Crowe, Larson, & Swarr, 1998; Sharabani, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981) as well as the support received from them (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). In fact, late adolescents who are in college rate their romantic partners as just as supportive as anyone else in their social network.

The consequences of romantic activity underscore the importance of studying it more closely. Several chapters delineate some of these consequences in detail (see especially Connolly & Goldberg, this volume; Downey, Bonica, & Rincon, this volume; Larson et al., this volume). Briefly, romantic involvement is associated with social competence (Neeman, Hubbard, & Masten, 1995) and positive self-esteem (Samet & Kelly, 1987). On the other hand, adolescents who are involved in romantic relationships at an early age have higher rates of drug use, minor delinquency, and psychological or behavioral difficulties, as well as lower levels of academic achievement than those who are not currently involved in a relationship or who delay romantic activity until later in adolescence (Brown & Theobald, 1996; Cauffman & Steinberg, 1996; Grinder, 1996; Konings et al., 1995; Neeman et al., 1995; Wright, 1982). Whether romantic involvement or involvement at early age is a cause or an effect of these various positive or negative correlates is currently unclear. We suspect that the nature of the romantic experiences and relationships may markedly affect the kind of impact they have on individuals.

From a more distal perspective, adolescent romantic relationships are hypothesized to be a major vehicle for working through issues of identity and individuation and other components of self-concept (see Coates, this volume; Connolly & Goldberg, this volume; Erikson, 1968; Downey et al., this volume; Feiring, this volume; Gray & Steinberg, this volume). Adolescents may also be learning relational patterns that influence the course of subsequent relationships, perhaps even marriages (Erikson, 1968; Furman & Flanagan, 1997; Sullivan, 1953).

To be sure, romance is not the *only* thing on adolescents' minds, but it more than competes for adolescents' attention with school or achievement, career development, and relationships with family or friends. Why, then, is social scientific research and theory in each of these other domains so much more extensive?

Why Adolescent Romance Has Been Ignored

We can think of five reasons why researchers have shied away from studying adolescent romance. These are offered not as an attempt to justify the neglect of the topic, but simply to explain the lack of scientific study in this field. Although scientific efforts to understand adolescent romance may be limited, the same cannot be said of songwriters. From the vast library of popular music about teenage love we easily located a song title that provided an appropriate introduction to each reason.

1. "*Who wrote the book of love?*" Good research, it is said, is theoretically driven, and devotees of a particular theory are constantly looking for phenomena to study that will test or support their theory. Phenomena that lie outside the theory's purview, however, are routinely ignored (Kuhn, 1962). Throughout the middle portion of this century, romantic relations were a source of intrigue to social psychologists studying processes of mate selection – but only to the extent that romantic partners were considering a long-term commitment to each other. Because such concerns come rather late in the typical developmental sequence of adolescent romantic interests and activities (see Brown, this volume; Connolly & Goldberg, this volume; Furman & Simon, this volume), researchers concerned with theories of mate selection had only a circumscribed interest in adolescent romance. Understandably, most of this work was conducted on college students, who were more likely to be involved in relationships with genuine potential for marriage or a lifelong commitment. Studies of a younger population would have been suspect, as it seems questionable that adolescents select dating partners on the same basis as they would marital partners. Thus, mate-selection theories offer a poor fit with the realities of most adolescents' romantic ventures. The fit worsened in recent decades as the median age at first marriage moved well beyond the college years, so that even college students are no longer routinely preoccupied with mate selection in their romantic relationships. Of course, a significant proportion of teenagers do get married or cohabit, but these teenagers are harder to access, a reason discussed subsequently.

Other theories of interpersonal attraction are better suited to exploring the selection of dating partners. For example, balance theory (Heider,

1958), equity theory (Adams, 1965), or exchange theory (see Laursen & Jensen-Campbell, this volume) should be useful for examining adolescents' decisions about initiating, pursuing, or abandoning relationships with particular romantic partners. Although the rapid turnover in romantic alliances during early adolescence should be especially intriguing to theorists from these traditions, their emphasis has been on friendships rather than romantic relationships. In part, this is because friendship lent itself more easily than romantic relationships to the laboratory paradigms that dominated this field for several decades. In part, the explanation may lie in other reasons for ignoring adolescent romance that we review later.

Another framework with a strong interest in romantic relationships is attachment theory. Drawing from Bowlby's conceptualization, Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed that romantic love involves the integration of the attachment, caregiving, and sexual/reproductive behavioral systems. Furthermore, they suggested that individual differences in how romantic love is experienced may be due to differences in past attachment history; they proposed three main types of love styles that parallel the three infant attachment classifications. Since that time, literally hundreds of studies have been conducted (see Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Most have employed college student samples, partly because of the ease with which these individuals could be studied, but also because one is more likely to find in this age group the serious, intimate, long-term relationships in which an attachment bond develops. The short-term relationships that are characteristic of most young people's romantic experiences and endeavors in early and middle adolescence struck many researchers as unsuitable to this theoretical framework. Several of the current chapters, however, illustrate how an attachment perspective can be applied very effectively to this earlier period of adolescence (see Collins & Sroufe, this volume; Furman & Simon, this volume; Gray & Steinberg, this volume).

Neoanalytic theories (Erikson, 1968; Sullivan, 1953) actually emphasize romantic relationships in their depiction of adolescent development. Sullivan, in particular, placed romantic interests and encounters at the center of one stage in his theory. He argued that, in early adolescence, there is a shift in intimacy needs from an *isophilic* choice (seeking someone quite like the self) to a *heterophilic* choice (seeking someone quite different from the self – intimacy with a member of the other sex); integrating this shift in intimacy needs with the demands of the *lust dynamism* crystallized an adolescent's interest in romantic relationships. Nevertheless, most researchers who have applied Sullivan's theory to adolescent social relationships have focused on friendship. It is difficult to account for this.

In the field of psychology, most of the contemporary theoretical work on love is being done by social psychologists. Sadly, the fields of social psychology and social development are quite distinct from one another. Despite several noteworthy integrative efforts (Brehm, Kassin, & Gibbons, 1981; Masters & Yarkin-Levin, 1984), investigators in each field know relatively little about the work being conducted in the other field. This has hampered the derivation of theories or conceptual models that integrate social/situational factors with the individual/developmental factors that are crucial to understanding the dynamics of adolescent romance. A number of the chapters in this volume, however, illustrate promising ways of integrating theories from these two perspectives and applying them to adolescent romance (e.g., Larson et al., this volume; Laurson & Jensen-Campbell, this volume).

To be fair, adolescents have not made the task easy for theorists. A major source for the development of ideas and theory is personal observations. As most parents know, adolescents are reluctant to discuss their romantic interests and relationships with adults. This reticence is especially characteristic of early to middle adolescence, when self-consciousness and uncertainty about how to behave in a new, emotionally charged role are apt to be high. Friends, rather than social scientists (even those who are parents of teens), are more likely to learn about the ups and downs of romantic life. Social scientists could rely on their own memories of this period, but easy access to more immediate knowledge of adolescent romance may be lacking.

In any case, one explanation for the dearth of research on adolescent romance is that teenagers' romantic ventures do not fit well within the basic constructs or foci of dominant theories of social or interpersonal development. Rather than extend the theories to encompass the broader scope of adolescent romance or evolve new theories for this purpose, social scientists have preferred to wait until romantic relationships evolved to the point where they became more compatible with existing theoretical models of social roles or interpersonal relationships.

2. "*They say it's only puppy love.*" In addition to their poor fit with principles of dominant theories in the field, adolescents' romantic ventures struck many investigators as too frivolous for serious study. Certainly, in comparison to the sobering business of mate selection and the formation of lasting relationships in later adolescence, younger people's steady cascade of short-term relationships and endless babble about who likes whom and who broke up last weekend can seem trivial to adult researchers. Thus, it may seem wiser to defer scientific inquiry until adolescents have matured into a serious, genuine capacity for romance. One could argue that romantic

encounters prior to this time lack the psychological and social depth to be taken seriously, to be considered as genuine relationships. As our previous discussion of the importance of these relationships indicates, however, this perspective seems shortsighted.

Ironically, concern over the “trivial” interests of youth in their romantic affairs spawned one of the most extensive and intriguing debates among early investigators. Willard Waller (1937) initiated this debate with an article based on his observations of romantic ventures among undergraduates at Pennsylvania State University. He suggested that a substantial number of these late adolescents seemed distracted from the critical mission of mate selection by a concern with the *status* of their dating partners or the status that dating a particular person brought to themselves. He labeled this preoccupation the *rating/dating complex*. It spawned a series of studies that stretched over several decades as investigators debated the existence or predominance of this phenomenon (see Brown, this volume; Gordon, 1981; Herold, 1974). Rather than approaching adolescents’ status seeking through romantic relationships with the dispassionate fascination of a social scientist, however, many investigators adopted a moralistic tone, chiding adolescents for their frivolous pursuits or remonstrating their colleagues for mistaking status seeking for “genuine” romance.

In sum, many investigators seemed reluctant to venture into the morass of adolescent romance before the point at which young people displayed the maturity to pursue such relationships with an earnest eye toward intimate, stable, enduring relationships, which were a suitable basis for the assumption of adult family roles. All romantic activity prior to this point was regarded as “puppy love” or an unimportant digression from meaningful socialization into adult roles.

3. “*But that was yesterday, and yesterday’s gone.*” Our first two reasons for the limited research on adolescent romance fault social scientists for their narrow perspective on romantic relationships, but there is also reason to be sympathetic to their plight. Studying adolescents’ romantic ventures is something like chasing a greased pig. It requires researchers to embrace teenage peer culture, which is notoriously evanescent. Romantic ties in this context can be remarkably short, lasting a matter of weeks, if not days. By the time researchers are geared up to study the relationship, it’s over! Then, several weeks later, it’s back on again, but only for another month. How are researchers supposed to measure such rapidly changing phenomena?

Teenagers also seem to keep changing the rules. In one generation, dating was de rigueur; an identifiable twosome was the basic unit of social interaction (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Gordon & Miller, 1984); going

places and doing things just with a group of friends was a sure sign that one was “out of it” – at least until a new romantic partner could be secured. In the next generation, much of formal dating was replaced by a pattern of socializing in mixed-gender groups that contained some identifiable romantic couples, some who might become couples, and a cadre who were just friends (Miller & Gordon, 1986). Furthermore, the rules vary in different segments of the peer culture. The fluidity of the context makes it difficult to conduct meaningful research, especially work that is longitudinal or that compares one generation to another.

More generally, it is pragmatically difficult to study adolescent romance. Parents, whose consent is usually required, are often reluctant to let researchers delve into their children’s love lives, even when issues of sexuality are excluded. Many school administrators are not enthusiastic about giving up precious school time for such a potentially volatile research topic. Adolescents may be reluctant to discuss their romantic interests unless the relationship is secure and longstanding.

It is tempting to avoid these methodological and logistical nightmares by studying college students or married couples. One ought to wait, investigators can argue, until youth are old enough to be readily accessible and follow adult rules of romance, which are far more stable and reliable. The chapters in this volume, however, provide a succession of reasons for resisting this temptation.

4. “*Why don’t we do it in the road?*” Another reason for the dearth of studies of adolescent romance is that this work has been overshadowed by research on sexuality. Understandably, sexual attitudes and behavior are of strong interest to researchers of adolescent development. A surge in sexual drives and the emergence of reproductive capabilities are key elements in the process of puberty, and puberty itself is often regarded as the event that initiates and defines adolescence (Steinberg, 1999). Thus, some may perceive adolescent romance simply as an interpersonal context for sexual activity.

From a health policy perspective, adolescent sexual behavior is of vast importance. The rapid rise in sexually transmitted diseases among young people, and the high rates of pregnancy and abortion among American youth (compared to their counterparts in other technologically advanced nations), are persistent causes for concern. Thus, adolescent sexuality is one of the most, if not the most, pressing and consequential facets of adolescents’ romantic activities. The result is that there has been far more support and encouragement for research on teenage sexuality than other aspects of teenage romance.

The irony is that in focusing on adolescent sexuality, investigators often forget about romantic relationships altogether. Although studies examine

associations between adolescent sexual behavior and various features of parent–child or friendship relationships, rarely do they consider facets of the romantic relationship in which the behavior occurred. Most of the vast research on adolescent sexual activity does not consider the idea that romantic liaisons or relationships are primary contexts for adolescent sexual activity (see Graber et al., this volume; Miller & Benson, this volume). If we are to understand why and when adolescents engage in different forms of sexual behavior, it seems essential to consider their partner in sexual activity and the nature of their relationship.

The most troublesome outcome of this overshadowing of romance by sex is the tendency to equate romance with sexuality or to subsume romantic activity under sexual activity. Adolescent sexual activity can occur in other contexts (see Diamond et al., this volume), and there is much more to romantic relationships than sex. Approximately half of the adolescents in the United States have never engaged in sexual intercourse. Most of them engage in some forms of sexual activity, but the point is that there is diversity in their experiences and their relationships entail more than sex. Our prior discussion of the importance of romantic experience delineates some of these other important elements of romantic relationships, and the chapters that follow point out many other new and interesting elements of adolescent romantic life.

5. “*Don’t know much about history.*” Historical trends over the last half century in the field of child development provide another possible explanation for the absence of work on adolescent romantic relationships. In general, theory and research have proceeded from the mother–infant dyad outward to other social partners and groups, and from infancy to childhood and adolescence. From the 1950s to the middle 1970s, the focus of social developmental research was on the mother–infant and mother–child relationships (Lamb, 1981). Toward the end of the 1970s, work on fathers began to emerge, as well as research on peer and sibling relationships in childhood. In the 1980s, interest in adolescence as an important developmental period increased and the Society for Research in Adolescence was formed (Dornbusch, Petersen, & Hetherington, 1991). From this perspective, adolescent romance is at the end of a historical trajectory because it concerns relationships outside the parent–offspring dyad and deals with adolescence.

Closely allied to this historical focus on parent–child relationships and childhood socialization is a pattern of federal research funding that gave little impetus to studies of adolescent romance. Without a clear connection to prominent theories of social development and without a direct link to press-

ing social issues that could affect policy decisions, the field of romantic relationships did not seem to be a high priority in the funded grants programs of various federal agencies or private research foundations. Indeed, researchers bold enough to study issues of romance could be subjected to public ridicule for their “frivolous” expenditure of public tax dollars, as one investigator discovered when Senator William Proxmire gave her one of his infamous “golden fleece” awards for her federally funded research on love. Understandably, investigators followed the flow of federal research dollars into more lucrative facets of adolescent social development.

In sum, we argue that most researchers have overlooked adolescent romance because it did not fit neatly into their theoretical frameworks or provide a reliable source of research funding, or because they felt that related topics such as teenage sexuality and pregnancy were more pressing, or because adolescent romance just did not seem to be important – particularly in view of the challenges of defining and measuring its various manifestations. Adolescents may belabor the intricacies of teenage romance hour after hour in songs on the radio or shows on television, but most adult researchers seem to be tuned to a different channel.

“Why Must I Be a Teenager in Love?”

Particularly with reference to matters of love and romance, parents often hear their teenage offspring’s plaintive assertion, “You just don’t understand!” We’re inclined to take the teenager’s side in this debate. At least from the perspective of social scientific research and theory, adults’ understanding of adolescent romance extends little beyond their unreliable memories of their own experiences with it. We believe it is time to address this situation, to give social scientists much needed direction and encouragement to explore adolescent romance.

In this volume, we have asked a set of well-established and highly regarded scholars to offer insights into adolescent romantic relationships. Their task was *not* to summarize research to date or to present results of their own recent work. Rather, we asked them to lay the conceptual groundwork for serious research in the field. We chose to solicit conceptual chapters because of the nascent nature of the field; we believed that the field can benefit more from a series of theoretical pieces that suggest systematic directions for research than from initial reports of the work that has just started. In some instances, the authors have borrowed from existing theory about adolescent development, social adjustment, or interpersonal relationships; in other cases, they have derived a new conceptual scheme that

seems more suitable to the particular facet of adolescent romance on which they focus.

We asked contributors to be mindful of the diversity of individuals within the adolescent population of North America. In particular, we asked them to be sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences among adolescents that might have an impact on romantic experiences. We also admonished them to bear in mind that not all adolescents are heterosexual and to consider how sexual orientation would influence and be influenced by romantic relationships. We also urged them to consider the broad arena of romantic experiences that include but are not limited to long-term relationships.

The volume is divided into three major parts. The first focuses on *processes* in romantic relationships, that is, on how romantic interests and relationships unfold, both over the course of a specific relationship and over the period of adolescence as a developmental stage. Larson et al. consider the regulation of emotions in adolescents' romantic relationships. Laursen and Jensen-Campbell describe proximal and distal processes in interpersonal interactions. Furman and Simon discuss the nature and role of cognitive views of romantic relationships. Miller and Benson focus on sexuality in romantic relationships. Collectively, these contributions underscore the fact that adolescent romance is neither a singular event nor a stable feature of adolescence, but entails complex processes that unfold in a variety of ways across this period of life.

The second part illuminates how individual differences contribute to the diversity of adolescents' experiences in romantic relationships. Collins and Sroufe consider how the capacity for intimacy in romantic relationships may vary, drawing particularly on the role of relational experiences in childhood. Downey et al. explore how sensitivity to rejection affects adolescents' willingness to engage in romantic activity, as well as their decision making once in a romantic relationship. Diamond et al. discuss the experiences of sexual minority youth (lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents) in different kinds of relationships in adolescence. Feiring examines how individual differences in gender identity affect romantic inclinations and encounters, and how these, in turn, can restructure gender identity. Each of these chapters emphasizes the need to move beyond a normative or singular portrait of adolescents' romantic experiences.

In the third part, contributors comment on how forces outside the individual shape and are shaped by adolescent romance. These include the family (Gray and Steinberg), their friendship network (Connolly and Goldberg), and the peer group (Brown), as well as culture (Coates) and society (Graber et al.). These contributors help identify ways to explore the

reciprocal relationships between the individual and social forces as they relate to adolescent romance.

In the final chapter (Furman, Feiring, and Brown), we again deviate from the norm for edited volumes by eschewing the standard task of simply summarizing the major points made by each contributor in favor of a broader commentary on the most pressing issues and promising approaches for investigators to consider in the next generation of research on adolescent romance. Our intent is to provide a more integrative evaluation of the chapters in this volume, pointing out intersecting ideas and approaches, as well as facets of adolescent romance that this volume does not attend to adequately. Taken together, the contributions in this volume should provide a choice of perspectives and a variety of ideas from which to approach the understanding and study of adolescent romance.

Adolescence is often regarded as a time of deep and diverse emotions. Few phenomena reflect the euphoria and the despair of this stage of life more poignantly than romantic relationships. Few phenomena have as profound an impact on the young person – both in the immediate and the long term. It is high time that social scientists dive into this intense, emotional, and fascinating aspect of the adolescent experience. We hope that this volume will provide scholars with the motivation and the direction to do so. “Why must I be a teenager in love?” It’s a question that deserves a better answer than researchers have provided over the past 50 years.

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