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## What's Love Got to Do with It? Sexual Behaviors of Opposite-Sex Couples Through Emerging Adulthood

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**CONTEXT:** Sexual relationships in young adulthood may have important ramifications for individuals' physical and emotional well-being. Nonetheless, representative information about young adults' sexual activities in long-term relationships and the emotional context of such relationships is rare.

**METHODS:** A subsample of 6,421 participants in Wave 3 of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (18–26-year-olds) who were in a sexual relationship of at least three months' duration were selected for analysis. Multiple logistic regression models were used to explore the relationship between love and various sexual activities.

**RESULTS:** Eighty percent of respondents had engaged in cunnilingus and fellatio as well as vaginal intercourse in their current relationship; this group included 22% who also had engaged in anal sex. Compared with their peers who reported that they and their partner did not love each other a lot, both males and females who reported mutually loving relationships had significantly higher odds of having given oral sex (odds ratios, 3.9 and 2.6, respectively) and having received oral sex (1.8 and 3.3); males in mutually loving relationships also had elevated odds of having had anal sex (3.1).

**CONCLUSIONS:** Most young adult couples in long-term relationships engage in a variety of sexual practices with loving partners; the direction of causality in this association and its implications for relationship building require exploration. Furthermore, programs and interventions that address health and well-being during emerging adulthood should cover issues relevant to a broad range of sexual activities, including oral and anal sex.

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