

Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health
Volume 38, Number 2, June 2006

Greater Expectations: Adolescents' Positive Motivations for Sex

By Mary A. Ott, Susan G. Millstein, Susan Ofner and Bonnie L. Halpern-Felsher

CONTEXT: Effective STD and pregnancy prevention efforts should benefit from knowledge of what motivates adolescents to have sex. Positive motivations, and how they differ by gender and sexual experience, are poorly understood.

METHODS: A sample of 637 ninth graders were asked about their relationship goals, expectations of the degree to which sex would satisfy these goals and sexual experience. Three scales measured adolescents' goals for intimacy, sexual pleasure and social status within a romantic relationship. Another three scales measured expectations that sex would lead to these goals. Data were examined in analyses of variance and mixed models.

RESULTS: Participants valued intimacy the most, then social status and, finally, sexual pleasure. These relationship goals differed significantly by gender and sexual experience. Females valued intimacy significantly more and sexual pleasure less than males. Sexually experienced adolescents valued both intimacy and pleasure more than sexually inexperienced adolescents. Among females, but not males, sexually experienced adolescents valued the goal of social status less than those with no sexual experience did. Adolescents expected that sex would most likely lead to sexual pleasure, then intimacy and, finally, social status. Females and sexually inexperienced adolescents reported lower expectations that sex would meet goals than did males and sexually experienced participants.

CONCLUSIONS: Adolescents view intimacy, sexual pleasure and social status as important goals in a relationship. Many have strong positive expectations that sex would satisfy these goals. Prevention programs and providers should address the risks of sex in the context of expected benefits.

Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 2006, 38(2):84–89

- » [table of contents](#)
- » [search the PSRH archive](#)
- » [guidelines for authors](#)

Mary A. Ott is assistant professor of pediatrics, Section of Adolescent Medicine, Department of Pediatrics; and Susan Ofner is biostatistician II, Section of Biostatistics, Department of Medicine—both at Indiana University, Indianapolis. Susan G. Millstein is professor of pediatrics, and Bonnie L. Halpern-Felsher is associate professor of pediatrics, both at the Division of Adolescent Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, University of California, San Francisco.

DOI:10.1363/3808406

[Full text in PDF](#)

[Full-featured version available to subscribers](#)

related to their online access. Phone: 1 (800) 835-6770 or E-mail: cs-journals@wiley.com.