

# The Association Between Adolescent-Parent Relationship Quality and Adolescent Prioritization of Sex in Relationships



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## Introduction

- The adolescent-parent relationship is one of the most influential forces in adolescent development.
- Adolescent-parent relationship quality is well known to be correlated with reduction in adolescent risky sexual behavior (Deptula et al., 2010).
- Though some research has been done into exactly why we see a negative correlation between adolescent-parent relationship quality and risky sexual behavior, it is still unknown.
- It is possible that adolescent-parent relationship quality impacts adolescents' views of relationships and prioritizations on emotional versus sexual behaviors within relationships (Kahn et al., 2015).

## Methods

### Sample

- Adolescents from grades 7th – 12th (n=4043) were drawn from the first wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). Add Health is a representative sample of U.S. adolescents.

### Measures

- Adolescent-parent relationship quality was assessed using eight questions. Adolescents were asked to rank the warmth, love, and closeness they felt with each parent on a scale of 1 – 5. The answers to these questions were summed to create a score out of 40.
- Sexual prioritization was assessed by asking adolescents to rank 17 different activities that couples might do together from least to most important to them. Their ranking of sex among that list was quantified (0-17).
- Timing of first sexual encounter was assessed by asking adolescents if they had ever had vaginal sex, and if so, at what age?

## Research Questions

- Is there an association between an adolescent's relationship with their parents and their prioritization of sex within romantic relationships?
- Is there an association between an adolescent's relationship with their parents and their age at first sexual encounter?

## Results

### Univariate

- 77.1% of adolescents scored at least a 31/40 on how close they felt with their parents.
- 31.7% of adolescents at the time of interview had had sex.

### Bivariate

- Correlation analysis showed that **the stronger the relationship between adolescent and parent, the less the adolescent was likely to prioritize sex in romantic relationships** ( $p < 2.2e-16$ ,  $r = -0.14$ ).
- Adolescent-parent relationship quality was not significantly correlated with age at first sexual encounter. ( $p = 0.081$ ,  $r = -0.049$ ).
- Linear regression showed that for every point increase in the adolescent's relationship with their parents, they on average prioritized sex 0.1 places lower on the scale of 0-17 ( $p < 2e-16$ ).

### Multivariate

- Both parental beliefs about sex and adolescents' history of sexual education were controlled for using multiple linear regression.
- Multiple linear regression showed that **adolescent-parent relationship quality was associated with adolescent prioritization of sex** independent of parental beliefs and adolescent history of sexual education ( $p = 1.98e-12$ ,  $m = -0.07$ ).

### Moderating Variables

- Race was examined as a moderating variable
- Multiple Linear regression showed that there was not a significant moderating effect of race on the relationship between adolescent-parent relationship quality and adolescent prioritization of sex.

## Discussion

- Independent of sexual education or parental beliefs about sex, adolescent's who rate the quality of their relationship with their parents higher are less likely to prioritize sex in romantic relationships.
- There was no significant association between an adolescent's relationship with their parents and their age at first sexual encounter.
- These results identify a group of adolescents who may be at higher risk for risky sexual behavior due to poor relationships with their parents.
- Importantly, the present findings are based off an observational study and cannot conclusively prove causality.
- Further research could be used to determine whether adolescent prioritization of sex is associated with prevalence of negative consequences associated with sex such as STDs, pregnancy, etc.

Figure 1. Adolescent prioritization of sex versus adolescent-parent relationship quality. Color gradient represents the parents' beliefs about their children having sex on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being most against it and 10 being most for it.

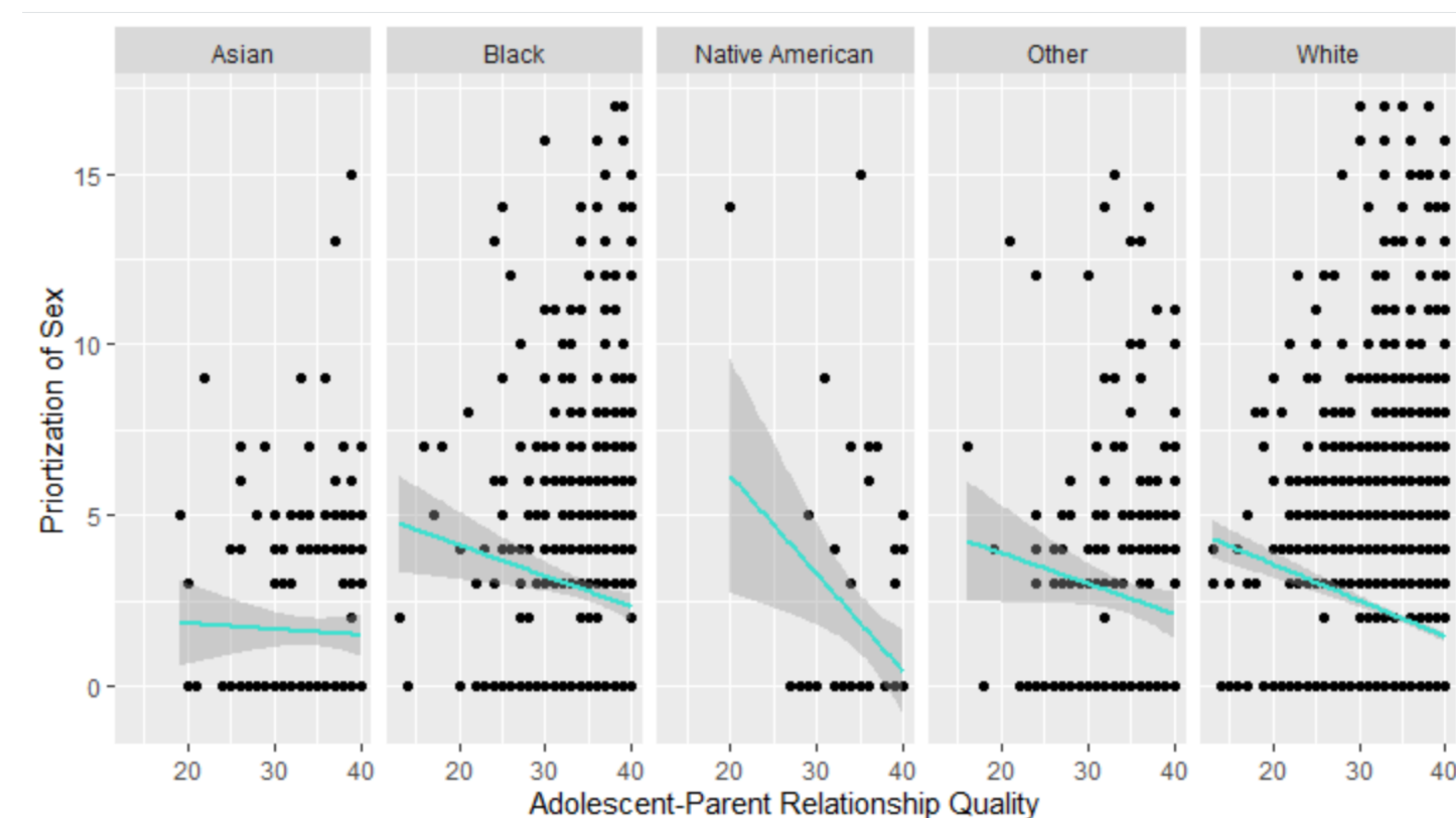
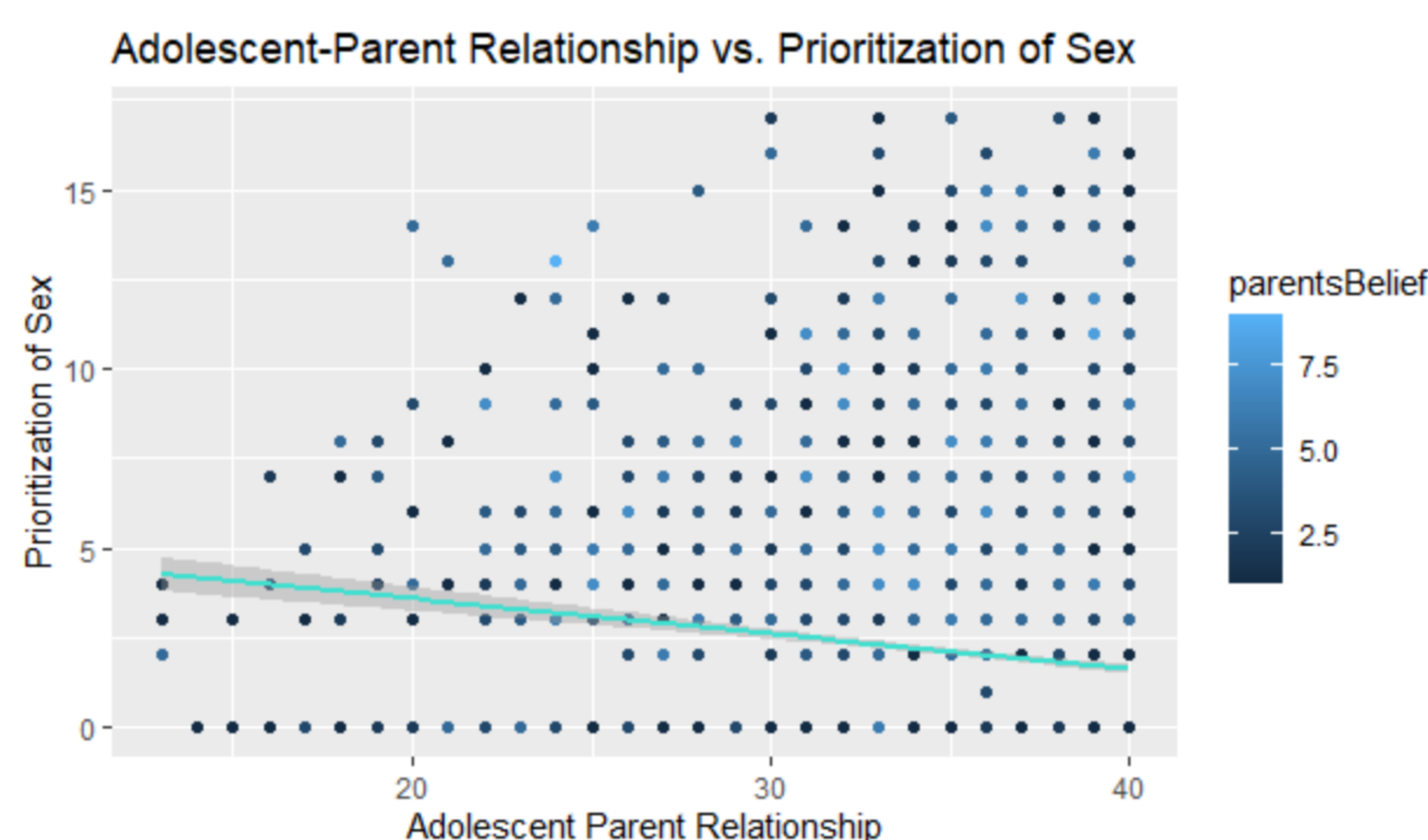


Figure 2: Adolescent prioritization of sex versus adolescent parent relationship quality by race