race or ethnicity. Sixty-six percent of participants lived with both biologic parents, and 61% had a parent with at least some postsecondary education. More than two-thirds reported sexual debut during adolescence—15% prior to age 16 and 53% between ages 16 and 18. At Wave 1, the majority of respondents expected to and wanted to go to college (59% and 79%, respectively). By early adulthood, 65% of respondents had initiated postsecondary education.

In crude bivariate analyses, sexual debut timing was strongly associated with early adult postsecondary initiation (Table 2, page 155). Forty-nine percent of those who had had an early debut had initiated postsecondary education by Wave 3, compared with 63% of those who had had a typical debut and 78% of those who had debuted late. Both debut timing and postsecondary educational advancement were associated with many risk and protective factors: In general, even prior to sexual debut, those who debuted late had more protective and fewer risk factors than those who reported early or typical debut. For example, 73% of those who had debuted late lived with both biologic parents in adolescence, compared with 65% of those who had had a typical debut and 53% of those who had had an early debut. Further, although 63% of those who had had a late debut had high expectations for attending college, only 53% of those who had had an early debut had similarly high expectations. Also, reports of smoking cigarettes were more than three times as common among those who had debuted early as among those who had debuted late.

Many of the risk and protective factors that were associated with timing of sexual debut were also significantly associated with postsecondary education initiation in early adulthood. For example, female gender, white race, cognitive ability, living with both biologic parents, mean grades, neighborhood education and desire to go to college, which were measured at Wave 1 (1994–1995), except childhood maltreatment, sexual debut timing, postsecondary education initiation and childbearing, which were measured at Wave 3 (2001). All p values are Bonferroni-adjusted. Characteristics for which no reference group is shown were measured as a continuous variable (mean grades), an ordered categorical variable (grade level, percentage of neighborhood population with less than a high school diploma and below poverty level) or a dichotomous variable where “no” is the reference category (all others).

For females, the association between sexual debut timing and educational progress in early adulthood greatly decreased after the addition of control variables to the model (Table 3). However, even after adjustment, both early and typical debut timing remained moderately negatively associated with postsecondary education initiation in early adulthood. In our crude model, females who had had an early debut and those who had had a typical debut were less likely than females who had debuted late to have initiated postsecondary education by early adulthood (relative risk ratios, 0.6 and 0.8, respectively). However, after adjustment for differences in background characteristics and predebut academic performance and aspirations, the relative disadvantage of both early and typical initiators was attenuated (0.8 and 0.9, respectively). In adjusted models, many of the risk and protective factors identified in bivariate analyses remained significantly associated with postsecondary education initiation, including race or ethnicity, living with both biologic parents, parental education, ever being held back a grade, mean grades, expectation of going to college and childhood physical neglect.

As with females, both early and typical debut were significantly negatively related to early adult...