Gender Differences in Developing Romantic Relationships: Intimacy and Commitment
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Research Question
Are there gender differences in the relation between adolescent romantic relationship intimacy and later romantic relationship functioning?

Introduction
• Intimacy is a key component of romantic relationships.
• Refers to a process in which both partners reveal themselves and in turn validate one another
• Intimacy plays a critical role in keeping a romantic relationship at a balanced, well-functioning level (Collins & Sroufe, 1999).
• Adolescent females focus more on self-disclosing and support in their romantic relationships, whereas males focus more on establishing their independence and dominance (Feiring, 1999).
• Males tend to be more focused on the level of physical attraction in a potential partner than are females (Feiring, 1998).

Hypothesis
• Predict gender x adolescent intimacy interaction for adult romantic relationship outcomes.
• High adolescent intimacy will relate to high commitment and high overall relationship quality for females, but to low commitment and low overall relationship quality for males.

Methods
Participants
• N = 46 (24 female) young adults who participated in interviews about a current romantic relationship at ages 16 and 23.
• Participants drawn from the Minnesota Parent-Child Project (Sroufe et al., 2005), a longitudinal study of adaptation in at-risk children and their families (70% White, 11% Black, and 19% other).

Age 16:
• Intimacy Scale (ICC = .80) Interview-derived rating of the degree of mutual love, caring, support and trust in the relationship. Ratings on a 7 point scale.

Age 23:
• Overall Quality in the Romantic Relationship (ICC = .94) Interview-derived rating of the goodness of the relationship. Ratings on a 5 point scale.
• Commitment (ICC = .93) Interview-derived rating of participant’s resolve to maintain the relationship over time. Ratings on a 5 point scale.

Results
• As predicted, a gender x adolescent intimacy interaction for adult romantic relationship outcomes was present.
• Relationship Commitment (figure 1):
  - Females: Higher age 16 Intimacy predicted higher age 23 Commitment
  - Males: Higher age 16 Intimacy predicted lower age 23 Commitment
• Overall Relationship Quality (figure 2):
  - Females: Higher age 16 Intimacy predicted higher age 23 Overall Relationship Quality
  - Males: Higher age 16 Intimacy predicted lower age 23 Overall Relationship Quality

Discussion
• Females and males receive different experiences from their adolescent romantic relationships.
• Females: adolescent romantic relationships may act as a starting point in which to begin learning to be intimate with a romantic partner.
• Males: adolescent romantic relationships may function as a means of exploring themselves, viewing the relationship only in terms of status.
• Males and females may have differing motivations for attaining high intimacy.