



The Significance of Adolescent Dating Experiences for Competence in Adult Romantic Relationships

Lindsey M. Meyer, Kenneth L. Raby, Michelle M. Englund, & W. Andrew Collins
 Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota



Background

- There is considerable debate regarding the developmental significance of adolescent dating relationship experiences for later competence in adult romantic relationships:
 - Some consider adolescent dating experiences an important context for the development of interpersonal skills, expectations, and beliefs that influence adult romantic relationship competence (e.g., Furman, 2002; Madsen & Collins, 2011).
 - Others view it as an emerging developmental task that has limited significance for later romantic relationships (Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth, & Tellegen, 2004).
- Adolescents' dating experiences (16 years) predicted higher quality interactions with romantic partners during early adulthood (20-21 years; Madsen & Collins, 2011)
- It is unclear whether adolescent dating experiences predict romantic relationship competence beyond emerging adulthood.

Purpose

- Investigate whether the predictive significance of adolescent dating experiences for romantic relationship competence extends into adulthood.

Methods

Participants

- N = 179 (48% female)
- First-born children of low-income mothers
- Followed from birth through 32 years

Predictor Measures

- **Childhood Relationship Experiences**
 - **Early Supportive Caregiving (12 – 42 months)**
 - Composite of observational measures:
 - Attachment security (12 & 18 months; strange situation)
 - Maternal Supportive Presence (24 & 42 month; laboratory tasks)
 - Maternal Verbal & Emotional Responsivity Scale from HOME (30 months)
 - **Peer Social Competence (7-9 years)**
 - Composite of 1st, 2nd, & 3rd grade teacher rankings
 - Overall peer competence in school (e.g., popularity, peer acceptance, social skills)
 - **Parent-Adolescent Relationship Quality (13 years)**
 - Videotaped family interactions
 - Composite of 7-pt. observer coded scales (see Roisman et al., 2001):
 - Balance I (willingness to express ideas)
 - Balance III (dyad's ability to work together to accomplish goals of the task)
 - Emotional Engagement
 - Positive Affect
- **Adolescent Dating Experiences**
 - **Quality of adolescents' dating relationships (16 years)**
 - Composite of coder rated 5-pt. scales based on interviews:
 - Conflict Resolution, Disclosure, Enjoyment, Intimacy, Security
 - **Dating Involvement (16 & 17.5 years)**
 - Average number of dating partners reported

Methods Cont'd

Outcome Measures

- **Adult Romantic Relationship Competence (23 & 32 years)**
 - Coder rated 5-pt. scale based on interviews
 - Overall effectiveness in forming and maintaining high-quality romantic relationships

Results

- Peer social competence significantly predicted romantic relationship competence at age 23 and age 32.
- Adolescent dating quality and involvement marginally predicted 23 year romantic relationship competence.
- Dating involvement in adolescence significantly predicted 32 year romantic relationship competence, even after accounting for romantic relationship competence at age 23.
 - Higher numbers of dating partners in adolescence significantly predicted *less* competent romantic relationships at 32 years.
- Relationship competence at 23 years predicted relationship competence at 32 years.

Table 1. Correlations among study variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Female	-						
2. Early Care (12-42 mo.)	-0.02	-					
3. Peer Social Comp. (7-9 yrs)	0.20**	0.18*	-				
4. Parent-adol/ Rel. Qlty (13 yrs)	-0.02	0.34**	0.24**	-			
5. Dating Quality (16 yrs)	0.03	0.12†	0.08	0.07	-		
6. Dating Invol. (16-17.5 yrs)	-0.18*	-0.04	-0.15*	0.03	-0.10	-	
7. Romantic Rel. Comp. (23 yrs)	0.12	0.16*	0.23**	0.06	0.20**	-0.17*	-
8. Romantic Rel. Comp. (32 yrs)	-0.01	0.18*	0.29***	0.12	0.19**	-0.23**	0.42***

Note: †p<.10. *p<.05. **p<.01.

Table 2. Linear regressions predicting to Romantic Relationship Competence at both 23 years and 32 years

Predictor	Romantic Relationship Competence 23 years		Romantic Relationship Competence 32 years	
	β	SE	β	SE
Female	.07	0.08	-.11	0.08
Early Care (12-42 mo.)	.08	0.08	.07	0.08
Peer Social Comp. (7-9 yrs)	.18*	0.09	.18*	0.07
Parent-adol. Rel. Qlty (13 yrs)	-.03	0.09	.03	0.09
Dating Quality (16 yrs)	.16†	0.09	.08	0.09
Dating Involvement (16 yrs)	-.12†	0.08	-.15*	0.07
Relationship Competence (23 yrs)			.34**	0.08
Overall R2	0.11		0.26	

Note: †p<.10. *p<.05. **p<.01.

Conclusions

- Adolescent dating relationships are an important social context for adult romantic relationships:
 - Early adult romantic relationship competence appears to draw on individuals' cumulative interpersonal histories, including:
 - Peer experiences in middle childhood,
 - Dating experiences during adolescence, and
 - Romantic relationship experiences in emerging adulthood.
 - Adolescents involved in several transitory dating relationships are less likely to form and maintain healthy, long-term romantic relationships during early adulthood compared to adolescents involved in fewer longer term relationships.

References

- Furman, W. (2002). The emerging field of adolescent romantic relationships. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 11*, 177-180.
- Madsen, S.D., & Collins, W. A. (2011). The salience of adolescent romantic experiences for romantic relationship qualities in young adulthood. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 21*, 789-801.
- Roisman, G.I., Madsen, S.D., Hennighausen, K.H., Sroufe, L.A., & Collins, W.A. (2001). The coherence of dyadic behavior across parent-child and romantic relationships as mediated by the internalized representation of experience. *Attachment and Human Development, 3*, 156-172.
- Roisman, G. I., Masten, A.S., Coatsworth, J.D., & Tellegen, A. (2004). Salient and emerging developmental tasks in the transition to adulthood. *Child Development, 75*, 123-133.