The Influence of Parent-Adolescent Relationship Quality on Adolescents’ Romantic Attachment via Self-Esteem

Hio Wa Mak¹, Gregory M. Fosco¹, and John Grych²

¹ Pennsylvania State University, ² Marquette University

Introduction

- Romantic relationships have unique developmental significance in adolescence (Collins, 2003; Collins, Welsh, & Fruman, 2009; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992)
- Adolescents who struggle to maintain positive dating relationships are at elevated risk for internalizing psychopathology (e.g., La Greca & Harrison, 2005)
- In adolescence, family relationships help set the stage for more positive dating experiences that have long-term implications into adulthood (e.g., Roisman, Madsen, Hennighausen, Stroie, & Collins, 2001; Seiffge-Krenke, Overbeek, & Vermulst, 2010)
- The mechanisms through which family experiences in adolescence shape adolescent romantic relationship functioning are not well understood

The Present Study

Aim:
- To examine adolescents’ self-esteem as a pathway through which parent-adolescent closeness impacts their romantic attachment

Hypotheses:
- Mother-adolescent closeness and father-adolescent closeness will be positively associated with adolescent self-esteem
- Higher self-esteem will predict decreases in avoidant attachment in 6 months
- Higher self-esteem will predict decreases in anxious attachment in 6 months

Method

Participants and Procedure
- 368 ninth- to twelfth-grade students aged between 14 and 19 (Mage = 16.32; SD = 1.17)
- From a large, ethnically diverse urban public high school in the United States
- Adolescents completed surveys during social studies class periods
- Time 2 data collection happened approximately 6 months later (N = 171)

Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>326</td>
<td></td>
<td>129</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bracial</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variables | α | Mean | SD
Mother-Adolescent Closeness (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) – 20 items
Father-Adolescent Closeness (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) – 20 items
Self-Esteem (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) – 10 items
Avoidant Romantic Attachment (ECRS; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) – 18 items
Anxious Romantic Attachment (ECRS; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) – 18 items

Indirect effects using bootstrapping (R = 1000)
Mother-adolescent closeness to avoidant attachment: 95% CI = [−.066, −.005]
Father-adolescent closeness to avoidant attachment: 95% CI = [−.066, −.001]

Note. Path coefficients reflect standardized betas; solid lines reflect statistically significant paths (p < .05). Dotted lines are not statistically significant.

Results

Fig. 1. The Influence of Parent-Adolescent Closeness on Adolescents’ Avoidant Romantic Attachment via Self-Esteem

Fig. 2. The Influence of Parent-Adolescent Closeness on Adolescents’ Anxious Romantic Attachment via Self-Esteem

Discussion

- Having close relationships with parents allows adolescents to develop higher self-esteem
- Higher self-esteem predicts decreases in avoidant attachment in romantic relationships, an indication of comfort in being close to romantic partner
- Having close relationship with parents predict comfort in closeness with romantic partner indirectly through higher self-esteem
- Adolescent boys have higher self-esteem than adolescent girls
- Older adolescents predict decrease in both discomfort in being close in romantic relationships and anxiety in romantic relationships
- Romantic attachment is plastic to a certain extent, depending on adolescents’ self-esteem and age

Implications

- Interventions on relationship closeness with parents may yield multiple benefits
- Interventions targeting adolescents’ self-esteem can potentially benefit adolescents’ romantic relationships

Future Research

- Examine other pathways that may contribute to anxious attachment
- Examine the relationship among parental closeness, self-esteem and romantic relationship quality and satisfaction

Correspondence concerning this presentation should be addressed to Hio Wa (Grace) Mak: gracemak@psu.edu

For more information on similar studies, visit the Family POWER Lab website: http://gregfosco.weebly.com