



Friendship Quality as Moderator of the Effect of Romantic Involvement on Loneliness

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Introduction

Friendships and romantic relationships are considered key relationships that have strong implications for psychological adjustment especially loneliness (Sullivan, 1953).

Although previous research have demonstrated the link between adolescents and young adults' romantic experiences and loneliness (e.g., Russell et al., 1984), few studies have simultaneously considered the joint influence of both friendship and romance on loneliness.

In light of the importance of both friendship and romance during late adolescence, it seems likely that closeness in either type of relationship might buffer against loneliness.

In order to address this possibility, the current poster extended previous work and examined:

- 1) Whether romantic involvement is related to loneliness during middle adolescence.
- 2) Whether closeness with a same- and other-sex friends are uniquely related to loneliness when romantic involvement is statistically controlled for.
- 3) Whether closeness with a same- and other-sex friends moderate the association between romantic involvement and loneliness.

Method

Data came from the 12th grade wave of assessment of a longitudinal study that followed adolescents of public elementary schools in Richardson, Texas from the 6th to 12th grades.

Adolescents (N = 97) were asked to:

- a) Indicate the extent of romantic involvement (e.g., dating, going steady, etc.) during the 12th grade on the Romantic History Survey (Buhrmester, 1997).
- b) Rate the closeness of their best same- and other-sex friendships using Furman and Buhrmester's (1985) Network of Relationships Inventory
- c) Rate levels of loneliness on the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell et al. 1980)

Table 1

Hierarchical Regression Examining the Effect of Romantic Involvement, Same-Sex Friendship

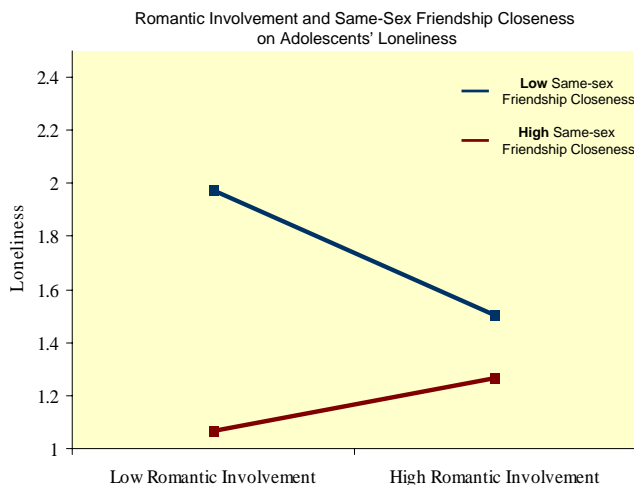
Closeness, Other-sex Friendship Closeness on Adolescents' Loneliness (N = 97).

Predictor	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Gender	-.05	-.05	.10	.13	.13
Romantic Involvement		-.19 [†]	-.20*	-.20*	-.17 [†]
Same-sex Friendship Closeness			-.36**	-.69**	-.70**
Other-sex Friendship Closeness			-.19 [†]	-.24	-.23
Same-sex Friendship Closeness X Romantic Involvement				.39*	.96*
Other-sex Friendship Closeness X Romantic Involvement				.04	-.06
Same-sex Friendship Closeness X Romantic Involvement X Gender					.55
Other-sex Friendship Closeness X Romantic Involvement X Gender					.05
R ²	.00	.04	.25	.31	.33
R ² Δ	.00	.04 [†]	.21**	.06*	.03

Note. Standardized regression coefficients are shown above.

[†]p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01

Figure 1



Results and Discussion

Hierarchical regression analyses assessed the unique and interactive relations of romantic involvement and same- and other-sex friendship closeness on adolescents' loneliness.

All continuous predictors were centered to the means and interaction terms were computed based on the centered variables (Aiken & West, 1991).

Steps of entering the predictors as well as the results were presented in Table 1.

Supporting the prediction, **romantic involvement was marginally related to adolescents' loneliness** ($r = -.19$).

The marginal findings are consistent with Sullivan's developmental theory such that romantic relationship might become more significant in later adolescence and young adulthood.

When friendship quality was included in the model (see Step 3), results showed that **both same- and other-sex friendship closeness were significantly predictive of less loneliness** while the effect of romantic involvement remained significant.

Together, friendship predictors explained an additional 21% of the variance in loneliness.

As predicted, Step 4 results showed that the **effect of romantic involvement on loneliness was moderated by the closeness of same-sex friendship** (see Figure 1).

It appears that romantic involvement had little affect on loneliness for adolescents in close friendships, but strongly affected loneliness for adolescents in friendships that were not close; adolescents with low romantic involvement and non-close friendships experienced the greatest degree of loneliness.

Finally, Step 5 results showed that the three-ways-interactions among gender, romantic involvement, and friendship closeness on loneliness were not significant.

Taken together, the results support the hypothesis that adolescent loneliness is affected, both uniquely and jointly, by experiences in both friendship and romance.