

Homophily in Adolescent Romantic Relationships

Wyndol Furman

University of Denver

Valerie A. Simon

Wayne State University

Running Head: Romantic Relationships

Date of Submission: August 3, 2007

To Appear In: M. Prinstein & K. A. Dodge (Eds.) *Peer Contagion Processes among Youth*. New York: Guilford Press

Homophily in Adolescent Romantic Relationships

It's actually, it's really gotten me out of this big hole I used to be in. I used to go off and I smoked weed a lot, drank a whole (obscurity), a lot, I mean I used to love to party 24-7 and all that, and during this time, my grades just went down to like crap. And she's helped me a lot and all that, and I mean, she's helped me actually get interested in school again, and be able to go off and just be actually be, I mean, she got me out of the rut. I mean I hardly drink. I don't smoke no more. I mean things like that. (a 12th grade boy)

The chapters in this volume examine adolescent peer influence processes. Most of the papers, however, focus on the influence of adolescent friends and peer groups, and the mechanisms underlying such influences. Relatively little is said (or known) about the influence of romantic partners on adolescents.

Yet the preceding quote suggests that romantic partners may play an important role as well. Certainly, romantic relationships are a central part of most adolescents' social worlds. In a survey of adolescents in a Midwestern city in the United States (Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2006), 32% of seventh graders, 41% of ninth graders, and 59% of eleventh graders report having a romantic relationship in the last year. Many early adolescent girls expect to be in love all the time (Simon, Eder, & Evans, 1992). By the tenth grade, adolescents interact more frequently with romantic partners than they do with parents, siblings, or friends (Laursen & Williams, 1997). Moreover, other-gender peers occupy much of adolescents' attention even when they are not interacting with them. Romantic relationships are a frequent topic of conversation among most adolescents (Eder, 1985; Thompson, 1994). Even when they are not

with the other gender, high school students also spend much of their time thinking about actual or potential romantic partners (Richards, Crowe, Larson, & Swarr, 1998). Most report thinking about sex “often” or “very often” as well (Juhasz, Kaufman, & Meyer, 1986).

Romantic partners are also a major source of support for many adolescents. By the tenth grade, they are tied for second with mothers in the hierarchy of support figures (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). In college (19 years of age), romantic relationships are the most supportive relationship for males, and are among the most supportive relationships for females. For heterosexual youth, the other gender is also a frequent source of strong emotions as well—in fact, a more frequent source of emotions than same-gender peers, parents, or school issues (Wilson-Shockley, 1995 as cited Larson, Clore, & Wood, 1999). It seems very likely that romantic partners are also frequent sources of emotion for sexual minorities.

Romantic experiences not only are central in the daily lives of adolescents, but also they are thought to shape both intimacy and identity development (Erikson, 1968; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). They may also help adolescents successfully establish autonomy as they explore extra-familial relationships and come to rely less on parents (Dowdy & Kliever, 1998; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Adolescent romantic experiences may even influence the nature of subsequent close relationships, including marriages (Erikson, 1968; Furman & Flanagan, 1997; Sullivan, 1953). These ideas about the long-term influence of romantic experiences, however, are simply speculations, as little work has examined such questions. In fact, we know relatively little about the short-term or immediate impact of romantic experiences on adolescents. Particularly absent is work on the selection of romantic partners and the effect the characteristics of the partner may have on psycho-social development and adjustment.

In the present chapter, we examine the issue of *homophily* in adolescent romantic relationships—i.e., the degree of similarity between adolescents and their partners. Such homophily can occur by *selection* or assortative pairing; that is, individuals have long been hypothesized to be attracted to those who are similar to each other (Byrne, 1971; Newcomb, 1961). Additionally, the *socialization* influences of partners may lead adolescents to become more similar to them. Finally, relationships with dissimilar partners may end more quickly than those with similar ones (i.e. *deselection*).

The issue of homophily in adolescent romantic relationship has received virtually no attention. Accordingly, we begin by briefly summarizing the literature on homophily in marriages and adult romantic relationships. We then discuss how homophily may or may not be different in adolescent romantic relationships. Next we describe the results of two empirical studies examining homophily. Finally, we delineate a series of issues that warrant attention in subsequent work. Our comments refer to heterosexual relationships, because unfortunately research has not examined this issue in gay or lesbian relationships.

Homophily in Adult Couples

Numerous studies have assessed the degree of homophily in adult romantic couples, especially marriages. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to review this literature (see Buss, 1985; Epstein & Guttman, 1984; Kalmijn, 1998; McPherson et al., 2001), several key conclusions warrant mentioning. First, people tend to partner both within their social group (endogamy) and to people close in status (homogamy). Married couples are much more likely to be similar to each other than complement each other. The degree of homophily in cohabiting and dating couples is almost as great as in married couples (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004). In fact, virtually no evidence exists that opposites attract. Instead, homophily occurs on both status and

value dimensions (Lazerfeld & Merton, 1954). That is, homophily occurs on features associated with formal, informal, or ascribed status, such as age, ethnicity, education, intelligence, religion, and physical attractiveness. Additionally, homophily occurs in values, attitudes and beliefs. The degree of homophily in personality characteristics, however, is modest (see Buss, 1985; Klohnen & Mendelsohn, 1988).

Theoretical explanations for these findings suggest that we tend to select similar partners because of the genetic and social advantages it confers to individuals and groups (Kalmijn, 1998; Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). However, methodological limitations of most homophily studies make it difficult to determine the degree to which observed similarities reflect selection or other processes that would lead to similarity, such as socialization or deselection. For example, most homophily studies are cross-sectional and examine couples in longstanding marriages. Accordingly, observed partner similarity could reflect either the initial selection of partners, the influence of partners during the time of courtship or early years of marriage, or the deselection of partners through divorce. Moreover, even longitudinal studies that begin substantially after couples have met (let alone marry) may underestimate the influence of socialization effects as such effects may have already occurred prior to the onset of the study.

A few studies have examined whether similarity is greater in longer lasting relationships as deselection or socialization accounts would expect. These investigations have yielded mixed results (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003; Butterworth & Rodgers, 2006; Caspi & Herbener, 1993; Epstein & Guttman, 1984; Gruber-Baldini, Schaie, & Willis, 1995; Huston & Levinger, 1978). Other research has shown that married partners who are more similar are more compatible and less likely to divorce, which suggests deselection may be one significant factor (Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner, 2001; Levinger, 1976). Likewise, similarity is associated with

satisfaction among pre-marital couples (Houts, Robins, & Huston, 1996) and dissimilarity seems predictive of break-ups (Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976).

Evidence of romantic partner socialization can be found in longitudinal research examining continuity in behavior. A supportive, nondeviant adult partner can disrupt patterns of childhood conduct disorder, whereas a deviant one promotes its continuity (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Quinton, Pickles, Maughan, & Rutter, 1993; Werner & Smith, 2001).

Homophily in Adolescent Romantic Relationships

Surprisingly, virtually no work has examined homophily in adolescent romantic relationships. For example, in Feingold's (1988) review of similarity in physical attractiveness of romantic couples, only 1 of the 34 studies used an adolescent population, and it was an unpublished conference presentation (Price, Dabbs, Clower, & Resin, 1974 as cited in Feingold, 1988). In fact, aside from this presentation, we have been unable to locate studies that examined homophily in adolescent romantic relationships.

Moreover, the literature on interpersonal attraction in adolescence is also quite limited and dated. Most of it is comprised of studies of characteristics perceived to be desirable in romantic partners. The factors listed as important for adolescent romantic relationships are intelligence and interpersonal skills, such as being friendly, relaxed, pleasant, considerate, dependable, and funny (Hansen, 1977; Regan & Joshi, 2003; Roscoe, Diane, & Brooks, 1987). Physical appeal, such as being sexually responsive or passionate or being well-dressed, are also mentioned, especially for casual sexual partners (Regan & Joshi, 2003). Similarity to self and prestige factors, such as material wealth or social status receive lower ratings (Hansen, 1977; Regan & Joshi, 2003). Finally, adolescent females and males prefer a partner a little older than themselves, although males have a wide range of acceptability, being willing to go out with

someone younger than themselves (Kendrick, Keefe, Gabrielidis, & Cornelius, 1996). Such self-reports of preferences, however, have significant limitations. As one may discern from the preceding descriptions, they seem to be markedly influenced by social desirability; for example, adolescents list features such as being popular, having a car, and knowing how to dance as important for their peers' preferences, but not their own (Hansen, 1977). The typical questionnaire assessment of preferences also makes all characteristics artificially equally accessible and does not take into account the indirect influence of these characteristics on judgments of the likelihood of other less accessible characteristics (Feingold, 1992). Hence, self-reports are not necessarily accurate reflections of one's actual preferences. For example, women say that physical attractiveness is less important than men do, but this gender difference is much smaller in actual behavioral choices (Feingold, 1990). Additionally, behavior is determined by more than one's own choice. Most individuals may be attracted to particularly attractive, intelligent, wealthy, socially skilled individuals, but the limited number of such individuals may make one choose alternatives. One's own characteristics, social stratification, courtship roles, cultural constraints, and the approval or disapproval of others all make one's actual choices different from one's preferences (Feingold, 1992). Thus, the literature on ideal partner choices does not provide much information about actual interpersonal choices. And research has not yet examined the actual degree of homophily in adolescent romantic relationships.

Given the seeming universality of homophily in relationships (McPherson et al., 2000), it would be easy to suggest that such findings would apply to adolescent romantic relationships, and, in fact, we expected to find such homophily in the two studies reported subsequently. Yet there are reasons to believe that selection, socialization, and deselection processes may or may not be the same as in older relationships. Romantic relationships are new in adolescence, and

youth are just learning what these relationships are like and may be more likely to experiment with them. Adolescence is the time for developing an identity and establishing autonomy from one's family. Having different kinds of partners could serve as a means of learning who you are and what you like in a relationship. It could also show that your choices and decisions are distinct from those of your parents. As a 12th grade girl in one of our studies put it:

He was two years older and so they didn't like the fact that he was more experienced than I was, and um. They don't know that I had a sexual relationship with him, but I think in a way that, that was me in a way, not, I mean I really didn't have much to rebel against. But I almost see it that way because you know a lot of my friends were dating and that you know, typically stereotypical nice guy you know the guy you wanna bring home to mom and. He wasn't really that and so it was kinda like my, my little rebel.

Adolescents may also select romantic partners on a different basis than adults would select partners as the relationships and their functions are different. In fact, adolescents report that they value different characteristics in a marital partner, romantic relationship, and casual sex partner (Hansen, 1977; Regan & Joshi, 2003).

With regard to socialization effects, one might expect them to have relatively little influence as adolescent romantic relationships are relatively short-lived and do not entail the level of dedication or obligation that can develop in committed adult relationships. On the other hand, they are central features of adolescents' social worlds. Having such a relationship is quite desirable to most adolescents, and they may be more willing to do things or make changes to attract someone or keep a partner. Moreover, adolescents may be more likely to be influenced by a partner, because these are a new form of relationship in which they have less guidance or experience about what is and is not expected or reasonable. A romantic partner is the fourth

most likely person to offer drugs, but is second only to a family member in terms of being difficult to refuse; approximately half of the offers from romantic partners are accepted (Trost, Langen, & Kellar-Guenther, 1999).

Finally, the deselection process for adolescents may also differ from that of adults. Most adolescent relationships are not expected to endure, and, in fact, adolescents may not want them to last forever. After all, most youth see adolescence as a time for affiliation, not a time for finding a marital partner. The factors determining dissolution may differ in relationships involving less commitment or obligation from those involving more commitment (Laursen & Jensen-Campbell, 1999).

All of these considerations underscore the importance of examining homophily in adolescent romantic relationships. In effect, the nature of homophily may not be the same as romantic relationships later in development

A Study of Homophily in Middle Adolescent Romantic Relationships

In one study, we examined the degree of homophily in middle adolescent romantic relationship using data from Project Star, a longitudinal study of romantic relationships, other close relationships, and adjustment. The participants in the overall project are 100 girls and 100 boys who were recruited when they were in the tenth grade (14 to 16 years old). By design, the sample's ethnicity sample closely approximated that of the United States; specifically, the sample was 70% Euro-American, 12.5% African-American, 12% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian, and 3% Other/Biracial. We recruited the participants from a range of schools and neighborhoods to obtain a diverse community sample. Consistent with our goals, the mean scores on most measures of adjustment, substance use, and sexual activity closely approximated the means of normative samples or large surveys.

The participants in Project Star were not selected on the basis of their dating experience or relationship status. However, when they were seen for their yearly appointment or contacted by telephone at the 4th and 8th month interval between appointments, they were asked if they were in a romantic relationship of three months duration or longer. If so, the participant and partner were invited to come into a session to be observed interacting with each other.

During the first three waves of data collection, we collected observations from 83 participants. Some participants were observed more than once; in these cases, we used the questionnaire data about the participant and the partner they were first observed interacting with. The length of relationships averaged 10.79 months ($SD = 9.26$). The ethnic distribution resembled that of the larger sample.

We examined the degree of homophily in demographic characteristics, peer networks and symptomatology. All were heterosexual relationships, and thus we examined the association between the girls' and boys' scores. We controlled for the influence of time of data collection as the data were collected over the course of the three years the participants were in high school.

Consistent with prior work on older couples, statistically significant homophily was found on several demographic scores (see Table 1). In particular, the girls and boys who were dating each other were significantly more likely to be from the same specific ethnic group and more likely to be the same in terms of ethnic majority/minority status. The girls and boys who were dating were also similar in socio-economic status, as measured by maternal education. Finally, they were similar in their own academic success as measured by self-reported grade point average.

Next we examined the degree of similarity in perceptions of peer relations (see Table 1). Both their self-reported number of same gender friends and the number of other gender friends were significantly related.

Finally, we examined the degree of similarity in externalizing symptoms (delinquency & aggressive behaviors) and internalizing symptoms (depression, anxiety, & somatization) as assessed by the Youth Self Report (Achenbach, 1991). The externalizing scores of those dating each other were significantly correlated, but not their internalizing scores.

The significant relations in the couple's ethnicity and SES suggested that the homophily on the other characteristics could stem from demographic homophily. We reran the correlations controlling for the ethnicity of the boy and girl (dichotomized as majority/minority status). The correspondence in maternal education was still significant, but seemingly a little lower than when ethnicity was not controlled for ($r = .35$ vs. $.40$, respectively). The correlations, however, for grade point average, peer network characteristics and symptoms were virtually identical to what they were when ethnicity was not controlled ($M r = .30$ vs. $M r = .29$, respectively). Similarly, when the maternal education of the two was controlled for, the correspondence in ethnicity was a little lower than when maternal education was not controlled for ($r = .33$ vs. $r = .40$, respectively), but the correlations for the other variables were essentially the same as they had been ($M r = .29$ & $M r = .29$, respectively). Thus, the homophily in these characteristics does not appear to be a result of demographic homophily.

The fact that homophily was found in the number of same and other gender friends suggested that the adolescent romantic homophily that was observed could stem from peer group or friend homophily. After all, adolescent romantic relationships are embedded in the general peer group context (Brown, 1999). Interactions with the other gender first occur in mixed-

gender groups (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Peplar, 2004); then dating begins, often in the company of other peers. Adolescents' peers monitor choices of partners, serving as both messengers and matchmakers. A desirable choice may increase one's popularity, whereas an undesirable one may be sanctioned. Peers may promote romantic partner similarity along dimensions important to friendships and the peer group.

We were able to control for friend homophily because a close friend of the participant had also completed these questionnaires. Accordingly, we partialled out the corresponding characteristics of the participant's friends, when examining romantic homophily. The correlations on the demographic, network, and symptom variables were similar in magnitude to those when the friend characteristics were not controlled for ($M r = .32$ vs. $M r = .34$, respectively). In effect we found clear evidence of romantic homophily and it cannot be attributed to demographic or friend homophily.

Homophily in Early Adolescent Romantic Relationships.

In a separate longitudinal study, Simon, Wargo Aikins, and Prinstein (2007) were able to distinguish selection and socialization effects in a sample of young adolescents. Using a longitudinal follow-back design, adolescents and their romantic partners were traced back to a prior data collection to examine pre-relationship similarities. This strategy allowed for a relatively pure examination of selection effects, as neither adolescents nor partners identified themselves as being romantically involved at that time. Pre-relationship similarities were then used to estimate the socialization effects of romantic partner characteristics on adolescents' psychosocial functioning after relationships were established.

The 78 young adolescents in this study were participants in Project ADAPT, a larger longitudinal study designed to examine developmental trajectories of psychosocial functioning

during early and middle adolescence. To examine romantic partner selection and socialization, participants were selected from the larger school-based sample using three criteria: 1) all target participants were not in a romantic relationship at Time 1; 2) all target participants were in a romantic relationship between the first and second data collections and 3) the romantic partners of target participants were also study participants. Only one partner within any romantic dyad was included as a target participant in order to avoid dependency in the data. This resulted in a data set in which each adolescent served as only a target participant or as a romantic partner. At Time 1, romantic partners had not yet started dating each other, and all romantic relationships were initiated sometime before Time 2, with reported durations averaging 3.41 months ($SD = 4.78$).

At the beginning of the study, adolescents (48% female) were in the sixth (32%), seventh (35%), and eighth (33%) grades of a public school within a town of fairly homogeneous middle-class sociometric status. Per capita income of the town was \$32,301, and school records indicated that 11% of students were eligible for free/reduced lunch. The ethnic composition of the sample also reflected that of the school district and included 87% European American, 2% African American, 4% Asian American, 2% Latino American, and 6% mixed ethnic background.

Data were collected in the school at two time points, eleven months apart. Sociometric ratings of popularity, physical attraction, body appeal, depressive symptoms, anxiety, peer aggression (relational and physical), and peer victimization (relational and physical) were obtained for participants and romantic partners at both time points using unlimited peer nomination procedures (Cillessen & Mayeaux, 2004). Participants and partners also provided self-reports of depressive symptoms and anxiety at both time points.

To assess for the presence of romantic homophily, intraclass correlations between adolescents and prospective partners were calculated at Time 1. Significant pre-relationship similarities were found between adolescents and their future romantic partners on peer popularity, attractiveness, body appeal, and depressive symptoms (self and peer rated). Intraclass correlations ranged from .25 for physical attractiveness to .59 for popularity and for self-reported depressive symptoms (all $ps < .01$). No pre-relationship similarities were found for anxiety, peer aggression (physical or relational), or peer victimization (physical or relational).

Next, the influence of romantic partners was assessed by examining the influence of partners' pre-relationship characteristics on participants' characteristics over time. A series of regression analyses were used to predict participants' functioning after relationships had begun (Time 2) from partners' functioning prior to the relationship (Time 1) after controlling for adolescents' own pre-relationship functioning. This strategy is commonly used in studies of peer influence, where peer characteristics are typically examined as an additive effect. Significant partner effects are interpreted to reflect change in adolescents' functioning that is predicted by partner characteristics (i.e., partner influence). Lack of significant partner effects typically reflects the stability of adolescent functioning and a lack of peer influence. In this model, peers are presumed to influence all adolescents in a roughly equivalent manner. However, more recent conceptualizations characterize peer socialization as an interaction between characteristics of the socializing agent and the socialized individual (Duncan, Boisjoly, Kremer, Levey, & Eccles, 2005; Dishion & Dodge, 2005; Hartup, 1999, 2005). Accordingly, we examined romantic partner characteristics as a conditional influence that depended upon adolescents' and partners' pre-relationship levels of functioning.

The additive and conditional influence of romantic partner characteristics were examined in a series of hierarchical regressions in which adolescents' Time 2 functioning was predicted from their own pre-relationship functioning, romantic partners' pre-relationship functioning, and the interaction of adolescents' and partners' pre-relationship functioning. Dependent variables included adolescents' Time 2 popularity, physical attraction, peer aggression, peer victimization, depressive symptoms, and anxiety. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 2.

Whereas selection effects were found for popularity, physical appearance, and depressive symptoms, socialization effects were found for all outcomes except physical appearance and self-reported anxiety. Hence, partner socialization effects may not be limited to characteristics on which partners are initially similar. Partners' pre-relationship characteristics significantly influenced the stability of adolescents' functioning in all domains except physical appearance. Yet virtually all of the significant effects resulted from the interaction of partners' and adolescents' pre-relationship functioning.

To understand the nature of the interactions, we conducted post-hoc analyses that examined the stability of adolescents' functioning from Time 1 to Time 2 when romantic partners were high ($M + S.D.$) and low ($M - S.D.$) on each of the dependent variables at Time 1 (Holmbeck, 2002; see also Aiken & West, 1991). For example, the post-hoc analysis for self-reported depression examined whether the association between adolescents' Time 1 and Time 2 depression scores varied by whether adolescents dated partners with high or low Time 1 depression scores. The results suggested that adolescents who were relatively low functioning prior to the relationship and who coupled with high functioning partners tended to experience more change than their low functioning peers who dated low functioning partners. For example, adolescents who were low on popularity prior to the relationship and coupled with a partner high

in popularity experienced more significant increases in popularity over time than their low popular peers who dated low popular partners. Similarly, adolescents who experienced high levels of psychosocial problems (i.e., depressive symptoms, anxiety, peer aggression, and peer victimization) prior to the relationship and who paired with partners with few problems tended to have fewer problems at Time 2 than similarly troubled adolescents who paired with high-problem partners. Figure 1 illustrates this pattern for the case of adolescents' self-rated depression. Adolescents' depression scores are plotted for Time 1 and Time 2 according to whether they and their partners were initially high ($M + S.D.$) or low ($M - S.D.$) on depression. Here it can be seen that adolescents who were initially high on self-rated depression and coupled with partners who were initially low on depression showed more significant changes in depressive symptoms over time than their equally depressed peers who dated high-depressed partners. These results suggest that high functioning romantic partners appeared to exert greater influence on more poorly functioning youth.

Findings of positive change among youth who date high functioning partners raises the interesting possibility that romantic partners may provide a mitigating influence on more poorly adjusted youth. Such consistent evidence of positive peer influence appears to be rare in the peer influence literature. Findings of stability among youth who date low functioning partners could result from either symptom reinforcement or immunity to influence. Findings from studies of peer influence suggest that psychosocial problems thrive in dyads where both peers experience similar problems (symptom reinforcement), whereas high functioning youth may be less susceptible to the influence of low functioning peers (Adams, Laursen, & Wilder, 2005; Dishion & Dodge 2005; Dishion, McCord & Poulin, 1999). Although the current findings are consistent with this prediction, they do not assess the differential reasons for the stability findings.

Uncovering the underlying processes for stability and instability will be an important task for future research.

Integrating the Empirical Investigations

Taken together, the two studies provide clear evidence of homophily in adolescent romantic relationships. Similarity was found on a range of different characteristics, including demographic characteristics, peer network characteristics, and psychosocial variables. The similarities in demographic characteristics, such as maternal education, ethnicity, and grade point average are congruent with past work on adult romantic relationships and peer friendships (see McPherson et al., 2001). Such homophily could stem from either the social stratification of society or adolescents' preferences to associate with similar peers. The similarities in attractiveness and body appeal are consistent with the literature on matching of attractiveness in adult romantic relationships (see Feingold, 1988).

With regard to peer relationships, young adolescent romantic couples were found to be similar in popularity, and middle adolescent couples were similar in the size of their networks with same- and other-gender friends, which are also indicators of popularity. These findings support prior theoretical assertions that dating often occurs with those similar in social status (Brown, 1999).

Prior investigations have found evidence of homophily of aggressive and delinquent behaviors in friendships (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, & Garipey, 1988; Haselager, Hartup, van Lieshout, & Riksen-Walraven, 1998). Just as adolescents may prefer peers who are similar in aggressive and delinquent behavior, they may prefer romantic partners who are similar on those features. Interestingly, homophily in romantic partners' aggressive and delinquent behaviors did not occur in the young adolescent study. Physical and relational aggression are

associated with perceived popularity in early adolescence (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Rose, Swenson & Waller, 2004). Similarly, bullies are also more likely to be dating in early adolescence (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000). Being aggressive and engaging in mild levels of delinquent behavior (e.g. a “bad boy” or “bad girl”) may make one an attractive romantic partner to most adolescents who are dating at an early age. If aggression were generally associated with attraction, matching on this characteristic may be less likely to occur. When more adolescents become actively involved in romantic relationships and aggressive and delinquent behaviors lose their general appeal, such behaviors may become differentially attractive as was found in the study of middle adolescents.

Homophily was also found in the internalizing symptoms in romantic relationships in early adolescence. Again, prior investigations have found evidence of homophily of depressive symptoms in friendships (Hogue & Steinberg, 1995; Stevens & Prinstein, 2005). Nondepressed individuals prefer to associate with other nondepressed individuals, whereas depressed individuals prefer other depressed individuals (Rosenblatt & Greenberg, 1988; Wenzlaff & Prohaska, 1989); apparently, this preference applies to romantic relationships as well as friendships. It is less apparent why this does not occur at both ages. We believe that romantic partners are more likely to come from the immediate peer group during early adolescence than middle adolescence; if so, the peer group level effects on romantic partners may be stronger at the earlier ages.

It also appears that homophily in romantic relationships is somewhat distinct from homophily in friendships—at least by middle adolescence. One of the challenges for subsequent research will be to determine precisely what it is about romantic and peer experiences that lead each to have similar, yet distinct, associations with adolescents’ psychosocial behavior.

Moreover, it will be important for future research to not only take into account other peer relationships when examining romantic relationships, but also for studies of nonromantic peer relationships to take into account romantic relationships. Finally, it will be important to consider how particular instances of homophily may affect or be affected by other aspects of adolescents' social network

In the study of early adolescence we were able to between selection and socialization effects by examining the characteristics of adolescents before their romantic relationship had begun. In fact, we believe that this is the first naturalistic study to demonstrate that two adolescents in a romantic relationship resemble each other before the relationship has begun. As such, it provides an important extension of the experimental literature demonstrating that similarity is predictive of interpersonal attraction (e.g. Byrne, 1971).

As discussed previously, past research has used two strategies to find evidence of socialization effects. One approach has been to examine whether the degree of similarity is greater as the length of the relationship increases. The other strategy and the one used here has been to examine whether the interactions of partner and participant characteristics are predictive of change or stability in the participant. If the partner is different from the participant and is having a socializing effect, the participant should show greater change than if the partner were similar. Interestingly, when this later strategy has been used in investigations of committed relationships (e.g. Laub et al., 1998; Quinton et al., 1993; Werner & Smith, 2001), it seems to have been more successful than the typical study of examining changes in similarity as a function of length of relationship.

Moreover, studies of homophily may underestimate the socialization influences of romantic partners. Typically friends want their friends to behave in a similar manner as they do,

but that is less the case in romantic relationships. For example, a boyfriend or girlfriend may want a partner to act more assertively in social contexts, because neither of them is particularly assertive, and the dyad would function better if at least one of them were. If the partner made such a change, the two would be less similar to each other. Even if the change were in the direction of making them more similar, the objective is typically not to make them similar per se. For example, one person may be careful about their appearance, and may want a partner to be less slovenly, but the goal is usually not for the two to be similar in appearance per se. It is for the partner to be more careful about appearance. In fact, if the partner became even more careful about appearance than the one making the request, that may be even more desirable. In effect, we need to be aware that studies of homophily may underestimate the influence of a partner, and even when they do capture the effects (e.g. the two become similar), they don't necessarily depict the intent of the influence.

Although we are impressed by the influence such short-term romantic relationships may have, it is important to note that we do not know how long such influences last. In other words, some changes could reflect adaptations to a lifestyle that makes the romantic dyad function, but individuals may change back after a relationship has ended. Of course, such adaptations could have a significant impact on the course of their life; for example, being willing to engage in antisocial behavior for a partner could lead to incarceration. Sometimes changes may be lasting as well. In our romantic interviews, participants commonly discuss how they've changed as a consequence of relationship experiences. Work is needed to identify when changes endure and when they do not.

Future Directions

Multiple influences of romantic relationships. In the present paper, we have focused on how the characteristics of a romantic partner may influence an adolescent. Partner characteristics, however, are not the only way in which romantic experiences may have an impact on adolescents. The *quality* of the romantic relationship may affect the adolescent. For example, unsupportive relationships are linked to depression (Daley & Hammen, 2002). Similarly, *specific events* in romantic relationships may have an effect. For example, a romantic breakup is one of the strongest predictors of adolescent depression and suicide attempts (Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999). Finally, the *quantity of romantic experience* may predict facets of social competence (Furman, Ho, & Low, 2007; Furman, Low, & Ho, 2007; Neeman, Hubbard, & Masten, 1995) and contribute to psychosocial development and adjustment (see Furman & Shaffer, 2003). At the same time, such romantic involvement, especially in early adolescence, is associated with poor academic performance, externalizing and internalizing symptoms, and substance use (see Furman, Ho, & Low, 2007).

Almost all of the work to date has focused on the effects of dating or romantic involvement, and we know virtually nothing about the effects of relationship quality, specific events, or partners. Not only does this void result in an underestimation of the influences of romantic experiences or facets of romantic experiences, but it may also lead us to misidentify the specific basis of the influence as these different facets are not likely to be independent of one another. For example, high-risk girls are more likely to date early, date older boys involved in problem behavior, have conflictual and unsupportive relationships, and become pregnant (Pawlby, Mills, & Quinton, 1997). Is their risk for pregnancy because of the timing of their dating, the characteristics of their partner, the nature of the relationships, or their own pre-existing

characteristics? Unless we simultaneously examine the role of all of these factors, we simply cannot determine which factors are primarily responsible.

In many respects, this point about romantic relationships is analogous to the idea that having a friendship, the quality of a friendship, and the characteristics of a friend may all be influential (Hartup, 1996). The point is particularly important for romantic experiences, however, as most (though not all) adolescents have friends and most friendships seem at least reasonably supportive, so understandably investigators studying friendships have focused on individual differences in the characteristics of the friend. In the case of romantic relationships, however, adolescents vary substantially in terms of whether they have a relationship and the quality of the relationship, as well as the characteristics of their partner. Thus, studying all facets of romantic experiences is particularly important.

Individual differences in selection and social influence. Work is needed on individual differences in selection, socialization, and deselection processes. For instance, simple main effects of partners were not found in the study of early adolescence. Instead, partner characteristics interacted with participant characteristics to predict stability. As an example, having a partner low in depressive symptoms made change more likely than having a partner who was high on depressive symptoms. Likewise, similarity, or certainly similarity on some characteristics, may be more important to some individuals than others. Some partners may be more influential than others, and some individuals may be more influenced. For example, rejection sensitive individuals are more willing to engage in deviant behavior to keep their partner (Purdie & Downey, 2000). Boys are more likely to have an effect on girls' substance use than the reverse (Gaughan, 2006). The number of partners potentially available to an adolescent could also influence the selection or socialization processes.

In summary, this paper presents some of the first evidence of homophily in adolescent romantic relationships. In some respects such evidence is not surprising in light of the seeming universality of homophily in relationships (McPherson et al., 2000). Yet the extension to adolescent romantic relationships is important given the typical nature of these relationships. They are new; they usually are short in length, and most adolescents would not want them to last them for a very long time. Yet, similarity still seems to play an important role in these relationships. In fact, we found evidence of both selection and socialization even in early adolescent relationships. And the homophily that does exist seems distinct from other homophily with friends. As intriguing as these findings are, they are just the initial step into a topic that may give us some clues into the factors that draw romantic partners together at different ages and their effects on people over time.

References

- Achenbach, T. M. (1991). *Integrative guide for the 1991 CBCL/4-18, YSR, and TRF Profiles*. Burlington: University of Vermont, Department of Psychiatry.
- Acitelli, L. K., Kenny, D. A., & Weiner, D. (2001). The importance of similarity and understanding of partners' marital ideals to relationship satisfaction. *Personal Relationships, 8*, 167-185.
- Adams R. E., Bukowski, W.M., & Bagwell, C. (2005). Stability of aggression during adolescence as moderated by reciprocated friendship status and friend's aggression. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 29*, 139-145.
- Anderson, C., Keltner, D., & John, O. P. (2003). Emotional convergence between people over time. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 1054-1068.
- Blackwell, D. L., & Lichter, D. T. (2004). Homogamy among dating, cohabiting, and married couples. *Social Quarterly, 45*, 719-737.
- Brown, B. B. (1999). "You're going out with who?": Peer group influences on adolescent romantic relationships. In W. Furman, B. B. Brown & C. Feiring (Eds.), *The development of romantic relationships in adolescence* (pp. 291-329). New York, NY: US : Cambridge University Press.
- Buss, D. M. (1985). Human mate selection. *American Scientist, 73*, 47-51.
- Butterworth, P., & Rodgers, B. (2006). Concordance in the mental health of spouses: Analysis of a large national household panel survey. *Psychological Medicine, 36*, 685-697.
- Byrne, D. (1971). *The Attraction Paradigm*. New York: Academic Press.

- Cairns, R. B., Cairns, B. D., Neckerman, H. J., Gest, S. D., & Garipey, J. (1988). Social networks and aggressive behavior: Peer support or peer rejection? *Developmental Psychology, 24*, 815-823.
- Caspi, A., & Herbener, E. S. (1990). Continuity and change: Assortative marriage and the consistency of personality in adulthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58*, 250-258.
- Cillessen, A. H., & Mayeux, L. (2004). From censure to reinforcement: Developmental changes in the association between aggression and social status. *Child Development, 75*(1), 147-163.
- Connolly, J., Craig, W., Goldberg, A., & Pepler, D. (2004). Mixed- gender groups, dating, and romantic relationships in early adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 14*, 185-207.
- Connolly, J., Pepler, D., Craig, W., & Taradash, A. (2000). Dating experiences of bullies in early adolescence. *Child Maltreatment, 5*, 299-310.
- Daley, S. E., & Hammen, C. (2002). Depressive symptoms and close relationships during the transition to adulthood: Perspectives from dysphoric women, their best friends, and their romantic partners. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology, 70*, 129-141.
- Dishion, T., & Dodge, K. A. (2005). Peer Contagion in Interventions for Children and Adolescents: Moving Towards an Understanding of the Ecology and Dynamics of Change. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 33*, 395-400.
- Dishion, T., McCord, J., & Poulin, F. (1999). When interventions harm: Peer groups and problem behavior. *American Psychologist, 54*, 755-764.

- Duncan, G., Boisjoly, J., Kremer, M., Levy, D., & Eccles, J. (2005). Peer Effects in Drug Use and Sex Among College Students. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 33, 375-385.
- Eder, D. (1985). The cycle of popularity: Interpersonal relations among female adolescents. *Sociology of Education*, 5, 154-165.
- Epstein, E. & Guttman, R. (1984). Mate selection in man: evidence, theory, and outcome. *Social Biology*, 31, 243-278.
- Erickson, E.H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. NY: Norton.
- Espelage, D.L. & Holt, M. K. & Henkel, R.R. (2003). Examination of peer-group contextual effects on aggression during early adolescence. *Child Development*, 74, 205-220.
- Feingold, A. (1988). Matching for attractiveness in romantic partners and same-sex friends: A meta-analysis and theoretical critique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 104, 226-235.
- Feingold, A. (1990). Gender differences in effects of physical attractiveness on romantic attraction: A comparison across five research paradigms. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 981-993.
- Feingold, A. (1992). Gender differences in mate selection preferences: A test of the parental investment model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, 125-139.
- Feingold, A. (1998). Gender stereotyping for sociability, dominance, character, and mental health: A meta-analysis of findings from the bogus stranger paradigm. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 124, 253-270.
- Furman, W., & Buhrmester, D. (1992). Age and sex differences in perceptions of networks of personal relationships. *Child Development*, 63, 103-115.

- Furman, W., & Flanagan, A. (1997). The influence of earlier relationships on marriage: An attachment perspective. In W.K. Halford & H.J. Markman (Eds.), *Clinical Handbook of Marriage and Couples Interventions*, (pp. 179-202). John Wiley & Sons.
- Furman, W., Ho, M. H. & Low, S. M. (2007). The rocky road of adolescent romantic experience: Dating and adjustment. In R. C. M. E. Engels, M. Kerr & Stattin, H. (Eds.), *Friends, lovers, and groups: Key relationships in adolescence* (pp. 61-80). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Furman, W., Low, S. M. & Ho, M. H. (2007). *Romantic experience and psycho-social adjustment in middle adolescence*, Manuscript under review.
- Furman, W., & Shaffer, L. (2003). The role of romantic relationships in adolescent development. In P. Florsheim (Ed.) *Adolescent romantic relations and sexual behavior: Theory, research, and practical implications* (pp. 3-22). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gaughan, M. (2006). The gender structure of adolescent peer influence on drinking. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 47, 47-61.
- Giordano, P. C., Manning, W. D., & Longmore, M. A. (2006). Adolescent romantic relationships: An emerging portrait of their nature and developmental significance. In A. C. Crouter, and A. Booth (Eds.), *Romance and sex in adolescence and emerging adulthood: Risks and opportunities*. (pp. 127-150). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gruber-Baldini, A. L., Schaie, K. W., & Willis, S. L. (1995). Similarity in married couples: A longitudinal study of mental abilities and rigidity[^]flexibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 191-203.
- Hanson, S. L. (1977). Dating choices of high school students. *Family Coordinator*, 27, 133-138.

- Hartup, W. (2005). Peer Interaction: What Causes What? *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 33, 387-394 .
- Hartup, W. (1999). Constraints on peer socialization: Let me count the ways. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly Special Issue: Peer Influences in Childhood and Adolescence, 45, 172-183.
- Hartup, W. W. (1996). The company they keep: Friendships and their developmental significance. *Child Development*, 67, 1-13.
- Haselager, G. J. T., Hartup, W. W., van Lieshout, C. F. M., & Riksen-Walraven, J. M. A. (1998). Similarities between friends and nonfriends in middle childhood. *Child Development*, 69, 1198-1208.
- Hill, C. T., Rubin, Z., & Peplau, L. A. (1976). Breakups before marriage: The end of 103 affairs. *Journal of Social Issues*, 32, 147-168.
- Hogue, A., & Steinberg, L. (1995). Homophily of internalized distress in adolescent peer groups. *Developmental Psychology Vol*, 30, 897-906.
- Houts, R. M., Robins, E. & Huston, T. L. (1996). Compatibility and the development of premarital relationships. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, 58, 7-20.
- Huston, T., & Levinger, G. (1978). Interpersonal attraction and relationships. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 29, 115-156.
- Juhasz, A. M., Kaufman, B., & Meyer, H. (1986). Adolescent attitudes and beliefs about sexual behavior. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 3, 177-193.
- Kalmijn, M. (1998). Inter marriage and homogamy: Causes, patterns, trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 395-421.

- Kendrick, D. T., Gabrielidis, C., Keefe, R. C., & Cornelius, J. S. (1996). Adolescents' age preferences for dating partners: Support for an evolutionary model of life-history strategies. *Child Development, 67*, 1499-1511.
- Klohnen, E., & Mendelsohn, G. (1998). Partner selection for personality characteristics: A couple-centered approach. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 24*, 268-278.
- Larson, R.W., Clore, G.L., & Wood, G.A. (1999). The emotions of romantic relationships: Do they wreck havoc on adolescents? In W. Furman, B.B. Brown, & C. Feiring (Eds.), *The development of romantic relationships in adolescence* (pp. 19-49). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University.
- Laursen, B. F., & Williams, V. A. (1997). Perceptions of interdependence and closeness in family and peer relationships among adolescents with and without romantic partners. In S. Shulman, & W. A. Collins (Eds.), *Romantic relationships in adolescence: Developmental perspectives* (pp. 3-20). San Francisco, CA: US : Jossey-Bass.
- Laub, J. H., Nagin, D. S., & Sampson, R. J. (1998). Trajectories of change in criminal offending: Good marriages and the desistence process. *American Sociological Review, 63*, 225-238.
- Laursen, B., & Williams, V. A. (1997). Perceptions of interdependence and closeness in family and peer relationships among adolescents with and without romantic partners. In S. Shulman & W.A. Collins (Eds.), *Romantic relationships in adolescence: Developmental perspectives.* (pp. 3-20). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lazarsfeld, P. & Merton, R. K. (1954). Friendship as a social Process: A Substantive and Methodological Analysis, in M. Berger, T. Abel, & C. H. Page (Eds.) *Freedom and Control in Modern Society* (pp.18-66). New York: Van Nostrand.

- Levinger, G. (1976). A social psychological perspective on marital dissolution. *Journal of Social Issues*, 32, 21-47.
- McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J.M. (2001). Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 415-444.
- Monroe, S. M., Rohde, P., Seeley, J. R. & Lewinsohn, P. M. (1999). Life events and depression in adolescence: Relationship loss as a prospective risk factor for first onset of major depressive disorder. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 108, 606-614.
- Neeman, J., Hubbard, J. & Masten, A. S. (1995). The changing importance of romantic relationship involvement to competence from late childhood to late adolescence. *Development and Psychopathology*, 7, 727-750.
- Newcomb, T. M. (1961). *The acquaintance process*. Oxford, England: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
- Pawlby, S. J., Mills, A. & Quinton, D. (1997). Vulnerable adolescent girls: Opposite-sex relationships. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 38, 909-920.
- Pawlby, S. J., Mills, A., Taylor, A. & Quinton, D. (1997) Adolescent friendships mediating childhood adversity and adult outcome. *Journal of Adolescence*, 20, 633-644.
- Purdie, V., & Downey, G. (2000). Rejection sensitivity and adolescent girls' vulnerability to relationship-centered difficulties. *Child Maltreatment: Journal of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children*, 5, 338-349.
- Regan, P.C. & Joshi, A. (2003). Ideal partner preferences among adolescents. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 31, 13-20.

- Quinton, D., Pickles, A., Maughan, B., & Rutter, M. (1993). Partners, peers, and pathways: Assortative pairing and continuities in conduct disorder, *Development and Psychopathology*, 5, 763-783.
- Richards, M. H., Crowe, P. A., Larson, R., & Swarr, A. (1998). Developmental patterns and gender differences in the experience of peer companionship during adolescence. *Child Development*, 69, 154-163.
- Roscoe, B., Diana, M. S., & Brooks, R. H. (1987). Early, middle, and late adolescents' views on dating and factors influencing partner selection. *Adolescence*, 22(85), 59-68
- Rose, A.J., Swenson, L.P. & Waller, E. M. (2004). Overt and relational aggression and perceived popularity: Developmental differences in concurrent and prospective relations. *Developmental Psychology*, 40(3), 378-387.
- Rosenblatt, A., & Greenberg, J. (1988). Depression and interpersonal attraction: The role of perceived similarity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 112-119.
- Simon, R. W., Eder, D. & Evans, C. (1992). The development of feeling norms underlying romantic love among adolescent females. *Social Psychological Quarterly*, 55, 29-46.
- Simon, V. A., Wargo Aikens, J. & Prinstein, M. (2007). *Romantic partner selection and socialization in early adolescence*. Manuscript under review.
- Stevens, E.A. & Prinstein, M.J. (2005). Peer contagion of depressogenic attributional styles among adolescents: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 33, 25-37.
- Sullivan, H.S. (1953). *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry*. New York: Norton & Co.

- Thompson, S. (1994). Changing lives, changing genres: Teenage girls' narratives about sex and romance, 1978-1986. In A. S. Rossi (Ed.), *Sexuality across the life course* (pp. 209-232). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Trost, M., Langan, E. J., & Kellar-Guenther, Y. (1999). Not everyone listens when you “just say no”: Drug resistance in relational context. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 27, 120-138.
- Wenzlaff, R. M., & Prohaska, M. L. (1989). When misery prefers company: Depression, attributions, and responses to others' moods. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 25(3), 220-233.
- Werner, E. E., & Smith, R. S. (2001). *Journals from childhood to midlife: Risk, resilience, and*
- Wenzlaff, R. M., & Prohaska, M. L. (1989). When misery prefers company: Depression, attributions, and responses to others' moods. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 25(3), 220-233.

Author Note

Preparation of this manuscript was supported by Grant 50106 from the National Institute of Mental Health (W. Furman, P.I.) and Grant HD049080 from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (W. Furman, P.I.). We thank Julie Wargo Aikins and Holly Escudero for their help with the data analyses. Appreciation is also expressed to Sarah Devine, Johanna Bick, Sharon Lewellyn, Lindsay Bannon, Alison Shainline, Annie Fairlie, Robin Carter, Daryn David, Carrie Hommel, Erica Foster, and the project staff for Project Star and Project ADAPT for their assistance in the data collection of the projects. Thanks also go to the adolescents, families, and schools who are participating in Project STAR and Project ADAPT.

Table 1. Homophily in Middle Adolescent Romantic Relationships

Variable	Degree of Correspondence
Demographic Characteristics	
Ethnicity	.29**
Dichotomized Ethnicity	.40**
Maternal Education	.41**
Grade Point Average	.41**
Peer Networks	
Number of Same Gender Friends	.42**
Number of Other Gender Friends	.45**
Symptoms	
Externalizing Scale	.23*
Internalizing Scale	.06

Note. Numbers are correlations between adolescent boy and girl scores, except for ethnicity

which are kappas. ** $p <$

Table 1

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Examining Main and Moderated Effects of Romantic Partner Characteristics on Target's Time 2

Outcomes

	PR Attractive ΔR^2 β	PR Popularity ΔR^2 β	SR Depression ΔR^2 β	PR Sadness ΔR^2 β	SR Anxiety ΔR^2 β	PR Anxiety ΔR^2 β	Physical Aggression ΔR^2 β	Relational Aggression ΔR^2 β	Physical Victimization ΔR^2 β	Relational Victimization ΔR^2 β
Step 1										
T1 target participant	.61***	.79***	.50***	.74***	.46***	.25***	.78***	.11***	.35***	.58***
(TP) functioning	.77***	.82***	.54***	.22*	.53**	.45***	.85***	.24*	.49***	.90***
Step 2										
T1 romantic partner	.00	.01	.01	.03	.00	.02	.00	.00	.01	.01
(RP) functioning	.00	.14	.11	.03	.09	-.16	.10	.77**	.40**	-.02
Step 3										
T1 TP x RP	.01	.05*	.04*	.14***	.01	.04*	.02*	.06**	.08***	.07**
Functioning	-.08	-.22*	.24*	.74***	-.11	.20*	.31*	.74**	.40***	.30**
Total R^2	.62***	.85***	.55***	.91***	.47***	.31***	.80***	.17***	.44***	.66***

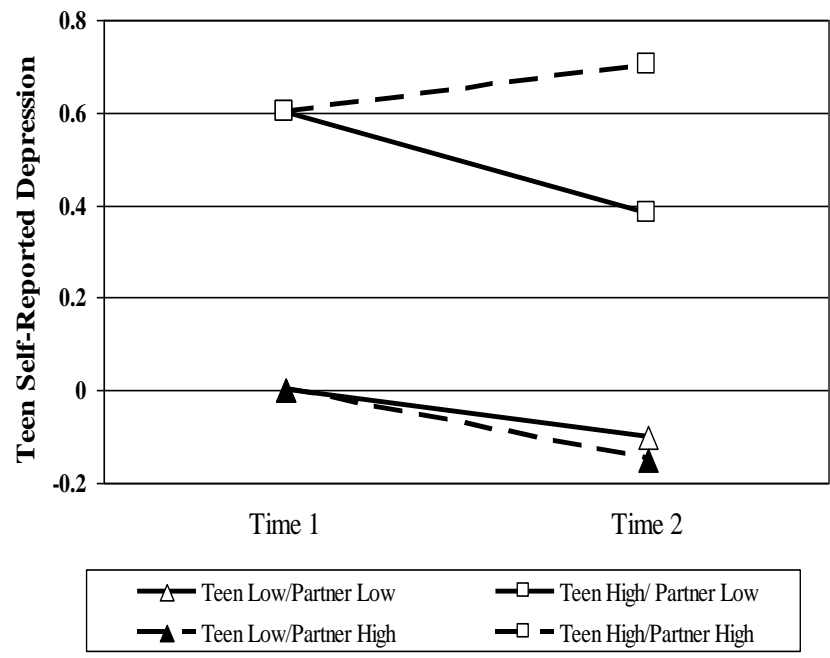
Note: At each step, ΔR^2 presented is for the step and β presented is for the final model

SR = self-rated; PR = peer rated; T1 = Time 1 assessment

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Graph of Adolescents' Self-Reported Depression at Times 1 and 2 by Levels of Adolescent and Partner Levels of Depression at Time 1



Note: Depression scores are reported as standardized scores. High depression at Time 1 ($M + S.D.$) = .6 Low depression at Time 1 ($M - S.D.$) = .0