The Role of Peer and Romantic Relationships in

Adolescent Affective Development

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"Before and after I was involved with Colin Sugarman, I heard a thousand times

that a boy, or a man, can't make you happy, that you have to be happy on your

own before you can be happy with another person.  All I can say is, I wish it were

true" (p. 419).

These sentiments of Lee, the protagonist in Curtis Sittenfeld's (2005) coming of age

novel *Prep*, are not atypical of adolescent girls or boys.  Boyfriends, girlfriends, friends, and

other peers are central to the social and affective lives of adolescents.  They are primary triggers

and recipients of adolescents' affect.  In this chapter we explore the normative links between

adolescent peer relationships and affective experiences.  Our chapter complements the one by La

Greca, Davila, and Siegel which focuses on the links between these processes and the emergence

of depressive disorders.  We begin with a discussion of general peer relations, and then consider

sociometric status, peer groups, friendships, and romantic relationships in particular.  We

describe the nature of these relationships in adolescence, developmental changes within them,

and their potential implications for affective development.  Finally, we describe the limitations of

our current knowledge and implications for subsequent research.

Consistent with Scherer (1984), we use the term *affect* to refer to valenced states in

general, including emotions, emotional episodes, moods, dispositional states (e.g. hating), and

traits (e.g. agreeableness).  The existing literature on peer and romantic relationships typically

does not differentiate among these facets of affect.  Although much of the research has focused

on depressed affect, we include research on other negative affects and positive affects when

available.  We also briefly discuss the small literature on the role of adolescent peers in the development of affect regulation skills.

<div align="center">Peer Relationships</div>

Early adolescence marks a shift in the importance of peer relationships.  Interaction with family members decreases substantially; ninth graders spend time with family members half as often as fifth graders do (Larson & Richards, 1991).  Similarly, ratings of support from mothers, fathers, and siblings decrease during adolescence, and the frequency of negative interactions with parents increases.  In contrast, ratings of support from friends and romantic partners increase.  In elementary school, parents are perceived as the most supportive; in junior high, friends and parents are comparable; in high school friends are the most supportive, followed by mothers and romantic partners (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

The changes in these patterns of interactions also are reflected in affective experiences.  Overall, affective states become more negative in junior high than in late elementary school (Larson & Lampman-Petraitis, 1989).  However, affective states with friends or peers are relatively more positive than those with family members, and they become increasingly more positive from elementary school to high school (Larson & Richards, 1991).

Although interactions with peers are generally characterized by positive affect, peers are also a frequent source of negative affect.  In fact, negative affect generated by peer interactions increases from preadolescence to adolescence, and for girls such negative affect occurs more often with peers than family members in adolescence (Larson & Asmussen, 1991).

Peer relationships have several distinct features that may account for the affective experiences that are associated with them. Relationships with peers are relatively egalitarian in nature, whereas in relationships with adults, an imbalance exists in the distribution of power and

knowledge.  Peer relationships are also voluntary in nature, and can be initiated or terminated at the choice of either person.  In contrast, most familial relationships are not voluntary, at least not until adulthood.

As a consequence of these features, peer relationships entail much more give and take than other relationships.  They appear to provide opportunities for enhancing positive affective experiences, yet also opportunities for affect getting out of control (Larson, 1983).  Peer interactions also provide chances for growth and self-knowledge as youth confront and master the strong affects of adolescence (Douvan & Adelson, 1966).  Because of their similar developmental status, adolescent peers may also be in a better position than parents to understand the intensity and intricacies of each other's affective life.

The processes of establishing and maintaining peer relationships have significant implications for adolescent affective development.  Adolescents need to learn how to be sensitive toward others' wishes and needs and be willing to negotiate areas of conflict in order to maintain a relationship that is mutually satisfactory.

Although peer relations are central in adolescence, spending a moderate amount of time alone is normative.  In fact, the amount of time young adolescents spend alone increases 50% between fifth and seventh grade (Larson & Richards, 1991).  Some time alone is associated with healthy psychosocial adjustment, but when excessive, it is associated with negative mood states and poor adjustment (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1978).  Approximately ten percent of children and early adolescents report feeling very lonely (Kupersmidt, Sigda, Sedikides, & Voegler, 1999).  Lonely adolescents are more depressed, report poorer quality relationships, and are less emotionally sensitive than their peers (Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999).

Sociometric Status

Up to this point, we have described experiences with peers as if they were relatively uniform.  Adolescents' social status in the broad network of peers, however, substantially influences their experiences, including their affective experiences. Measures of sociometric status typically identify five social groups: a) popular—those who are liked by many and disliked by few, b) neglected—those who are neither liked nor disliked, c) controversial—those who are both widely liked and widely disliked by others, d) rejected—those who are liked by few and disliked by many, and e) average (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982).

Sociometric status has been associated with distinct behavioral profiles.  Popular children, for example, skillfully initiate and maintain social interactions and demonstrate good understanding of social situations (Asher, Crenshaw & Hymen, 1982).  They respond to their peers with cooperation and sensitivity (Rubin, Murkowski & Parker, 2006).  As a result, popular children are often admired by their peers and are considered fun to hang out with, kind and trustworthy (Lease, Musgrove & Axelrod, 2002; Rubin et al. 2006).  Thus, they elicit positive interactions, which may contribute to their confidence in affectively regulating themselves and having peers there to support them.

Neglected children tend to be ignored by their peers.  These children are rarely named as friends but are not actively disliked (Bierman, 2004).  Some investigators have found that neglected children are not very distinguishable from others (see Rubin et al. 2006), but others have found them to be withdrawn, socially isolated, and struggling with social anxiety (Inderbitzen, Walters & Bukowski, 1997).  When coping with a stressful event, neglected adolescents are more likely to receive instrumental support from their peers than emotional support (Munsch & Kinchen, 1995), possibly reflecting a lack of depth and closeness in their peer relationships.

Controversial children are aggressive and disruptive and thus are prone to alienate their peers (Coie & Dodge, 1988). Nevertheless, these children have some redeeming qualities in the eyes of their peers. Controversial children show more pro-social behaviors than rejected children and show similar levels of cooperation, leadership, helpfulness, and social sensitivity as average and popular children (Coie & Dodge, 1988). Controversial children also have less social anxiety than rejected and neglected children (Inderbitzen, et al. 1997).

The majority of sociometric research has focused upon children who are rejected by their peers. Unlike the status of neglected children which tends to be transient (Bierman 2004), peer rejection tends to persist throughout childhood and adolescence (Bukowski & Newcomb, 1984) and often results in negative psychosocial outcomes (see Bierman, 2004; Parker & Asher, 1987).

Peer rejection may occur as the result of several interpersonal difficulties. The most commonly identified characteristic of rejected children is aggression, including unregulated anger, frustration, disruptiveness, verbal acts, and physical aggression (Rubin et al. 2006). Socially withdrawn behavior can also elicit peer rejection. Those who are sullen and reticent to engage peers are often rejected (Deater-Deckard, 2001). Social withdrawal becomes an increasingly common source of rejection during middle childhood and adolescence (Ladd, 1999).

Finally, although a distinct construct, peer victimization is consistently related to peer-rejection (Deater-Deckard, 2001). Children who are socially withdrawn and peer-rejected become easy targets of physical and relational/social aggression (Rubin et al. 2006). In turn, victimization has been shown to predict increases in internalizing symptoms such as depression and social anxiety (Hodges & Perry, 1999; LaGreca & Harrison, 2005). Similarly, children who are aggressive and peer-rejected are often themselves victims of aggression. The disruptive and

irritating behavior of aggressive-rejected children can provoke retaliatory behavior from peers

(Rubin et al. 2006).

*Perceived Popularity*

Recently, researchers have recognized the importance of distinguishing between

sociometric popularity and perceived popularity in adolescence.  Whereas sociometric popularity

represents how well-liked an adolescent is among peers, perceived popularity serves as an index

of social reputation and salience (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004).  Sociometric popularity is

assessed by nominations of who adolescents actually like, whereas perceived popularity is

assessed by having them identify the popular students in their grade.  Perceived popularity is

only moderately associated with being well-liked by peers, especially in adolescence (LaFontana

& Cillessen, 1999).  It is, however, associated with being attractive, athletic, having desirable

possessions, and being accepted by others who are perceived as popular (Rose, Swenson &

Waller, 2004). Moreover, the connection between sociometric status and aggression becomes

more complex in adolescence.  Overt and relational aggression are negatively related to

sociometric status and perceived popularity among elementary school children (Cillessen &

Mayeux, 2004; Rose et al. 2004).  Relational aggression continues to be negatively related to

sociometric popularity in middle school, but it is *positively* related to perceived popularity. For

those adolescents who are perceived to be popular, indirect and relational aggression may be a

means to obtain—and to maintain—their status.  These individuals are socially sophisticated and

dominant, often arriving at their position at the expense of lower status peers (Farmer, Estell,

Bishop, O'Neal & Cairns, 2003).  Nevertheless, they are not necessarily well-liked (Parkhurst &

Hopmeyer, 1998).  As yet, little is known about the affective experiences of children with

perceived popularity, but the links with relational aggression suggest a different picture will

emerge from that of sociometric popularity.

<div align="center">Peer Groups</div>

*Cliques*

Cliques also become more common and more established in early adolescence (Gavin &

Furman, 1989).  Approximately half of adolescents are members of a clique, although a

significant number are not connected to any specific clique or are liaisons between cliques.

Cliques are relatively stable over the course of a given school year, and members tend to be

homogenous both in terms of demographic characteristics and personal attributes (Ennett &

Baumann, 1996).

These small groups of friends provide regular social interactions, which are primarily

positive in nature (Gavin & Furman, 1989).  Such positive interactions peak during early and

middle adolescence, when group membership is most valued (Gavin & Furman, 1989).  Small

group interactions may contribute to the development of affect regulation as friends interpret

experiences and influence behaviors by discussing their own ideas concerning how to act, feel,

and express affect (Simon, Eder, & Evans, 1992).  Group expectations concerning social norms

may be communicated and clarified through the use of humor or gossip about others.  In effect,

affective socialization becomes a negotiated process as adolescents discuss alternative ways of

handling situations.

Antagonistic interactions within cliques also occur and, in fact, peak in early and middle

adolescence; group conformity is emphasized the most during this time (Gavin & Furman,

1989).  Moreover, a clear status hierarchy exists within cliques; those with higher status

determine membership and find ways to tease and control the lower status members, thus reinforcing their place in the hierarchy (Eder, 1985)

Antagonistic interactions with peers who are not part of the clique are equally commonplace and increase from preadolescence through late adolescence.  Although boys engage in more negative interactions with those outside of their cliques, girls are more troubled by such interactions (Gavin & Furman, 1989).

Interestingly, we know relatively little about the effects of clique membership or clique dynamics on affective or psycho-social adjustment, as most investigators have either examined the role of dyadic friendships or peer group status.  The descriptive information on cliques, however, suggests that these social groups are a major context for affective experiences and potentially contribute to adjustment problems, such as depression.

*Mixed-Gender Groups*

Another significant change in early adolescence is the formation of mixed-gender groups. During childhood, most children interact primarily with friends and peers of the same gender (Maccoby, 1990).  A distinct shift in peer relations occurs during early adolescence as interest in and interactions with other-gender peers increase**.**  Initially, early adolescents spend time thinking about members of the other gender, and it is not until later that they actually begin to spend much time with them (Richards, et al., 1998).  Typically, these interactions begin when same-gender friend groups start to "hang out" with groups of other-gender peers (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004).  As adolescents get older, partying on weekend nights with several other-gender peers or a romantic partner is increasingly associated with positive affect, whereas being alone on the weekend nights is associated with loneliness (Larson & Richards, 1998).

Through the course of childhood, girls and boys develop somewhat different ways of structuring relationships and expressing and regulating affect (Maccoby, 1990).  The different styles of boys and girls can clash, and the two genders must find ways to accommodate each other.  Such accommodations may be particularly difficult for girls, who have been used to facilitative reactions to their partners and may feel less powerful in their interactions with boys.  Girls' cooperative style is likely to lead to demoralizing experiences with boys, which may contribute to the marked increase in depression in girls in early adolescence. Additionally, girls are taught to value relationships more than boys (Block, 1983).  The imbalance in relationship importance between genders may result in girls having a relatively greater preoccupation with relationships, particularly romantic ones, and perhaps becoming more vulnerable to negative experiences that occur within relationships (Gilligan, 1996).

*Crowds*

A final developmental change associated with adolescence is the emergence of crowds. Crowds are reputation-based labels given to individuals with similar perceived stereotypical behaviors, attitudes, and personality (Brown 1990; Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994).  Although different crowds may exist, some types are found in most American high schools: "populars", "jocks", "brains", "druggies", and "loners" (Brown, 1999).  One's crowd label affects how peers expect an adolescent to behave, and influences overall status among peers.  Although crowd membership is based on reputation and not interactions per se, they do channel adolescents' interactions, and friends are often in the same crowd (Brown, et al. 1994).  Crowds also provide a means of bolstering one's identity, as the attributes and members of one's own crowd are looked at favorably and other crowds may be denigrated.  Crowd membership is also associated with affective experiences; those in high-status crowds are less depressed, anxious, and lonely

and display decreases in these internalizing symptoms over time (La Greca & Harrison, 2005:

Prinstein & La Greca, 2002).

<div align="center">Friendships</div>

Friendships are defined as voluntary dyadic relationships in which both members have

positive affective feelings toward the other.  Most are with peers of the same-sex, although other-

sex friendships become increasingly salient in adolescence as well.

Friendships first emerge much earlier in life, but undergo significant developmental

changes during preadolescence with the emergence of chumships (Sullivan, 1953).  A chumship

is a collaborative relationship, in which each person adjusts his or her behavior in order to meet

the needs of the other so as to attain satisfying and shared outcomes.  Such relationships are

based on extensive self-disclosure and consensual validation of personal worth.  The need for

such intimate exchange is thought to be motivated by the desire to experience love and avoid

loneliness (Buhrmester & Furman, 1986).  During preadolescence the focus of chumships or

friendships often centers on shared activities, with a child's best friend typically being the person

with whom he or she spends the most time.  Consistent activity with the same person indirectly

promotes interpersonal sensitivity and provides validation of each individual's self-worth

(Sullivan, 1953).

A primary component of chumships and adolescent friendships is intimate self-

disclosure.  Theoretically, preadolescents begin to express thoughts and affect within their

friendships as they recognize and value the intimacy, trust, mutual support, and loyalty that can

be found within these close relationships (Youniss & Volpe, 1978).  Such affective expressions

increase further in adolescence.  Intimate disclosures are associated with feeling less lonely

(Franzoi & Davis, 1985).  Moreover, supportive interactions with friends are associated with lower feelings of social anxiety (La Greca & Harrison, 2005).

Adolescents may actively recruit or engage their friends to boost arousal or to cheer them up (Masten 2000).  Sometimes friends repeatedly discuss the problems they are experiencing (Rose, 2002).  Such co-rumination often entails mutually encouraging each other to discuss problems, speculating about problems, and focusing on the negative feelings of problems.  Co-rumination increases from childhood to adolescence with girls being more likely to co-ruminate with their friends than boys.  Although co-rumination is associated with closeness in adolescent friendships, it is also associated with internalizing symptoms.  As such, co-rumination may provide an account for why adolescent girls have closer friendships than boys (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992), yet more internalizing symptoms as well.

Approximately one-third of adolescent boys report that their friendships are characterized by an absence of support (Youniss & Smollar, 1985).  The consequences of such relationships have not received much attention to date.

Conflict is common in adolescent friendships and is not, by itself, related to relationship quality (Laursen, 1993, 1995).  Important, however, is the manner in which conflict is resolved (Perry, Perry & Kennedy, 1992).  Unbridled affective expression, power assertion, and third-party mediation result in disengagement and poorer quality friendships (Shulman & Laursen, 2002).

Though disagreements still occur, open conflict among late adolescents becomes less common (Collins & Steinberg, 2006).  This decrease may be due to increased awareness of the negative impact conflict may have on relationships and to increased skill in conflict resolution. In healthy, late adolescent relationships, conflict resolution often involves compromise and

presents an opportunity for adolescents to adjust their expectancies within a particular

relationship (Collins & Steinberg, 2006).  Such resolution often leads to increased intimacy and

understanding.

Although friendships do end because of conflicts or friendship violations, they more

typically end less dramatically due to diverging interests or friends moving away.  In any case,

the dissolution of friendships is frequently associated with depression, loneliness, physiological

dysregulation, guilt, and anger (Laursen, Hartup & Keplas, 1996; Parker & Seal, 1996).

<div align="center">Romantic Relationships</div>

Of course, one of the most noteworthy features of adolescence is the emergence of

romantic relationships.  Surprisingly, relatively little research had been done on this topic until

recently (see Brown, Feiring, & Furman, 1999), and most of the work to date has focused on

heterosexual relationships.  In this section, we principally describe heterosexual relationships,

but discuss gay and lesbian relationships when research is available.

As noted in the prior section, interest in and interactions with other-gender peers

increases during early adolescence.  Initially, adolescents simply spend time thinking about the

other gender and then increasingly interact with them. These interactions first occur in mixed-

gender groups (Connolly, et al. 2004); then dating begins, often in the company of other peers.

Today such dating is much less formal or planned than in the past, but it still has the feature of

romantic or sexual interest.  Finally, adolescents begin to form dyadic romantic relationships,

especially as they reach middle adolescence.  These relationships also increase in their typical

length over the course of adolescence (Carver, Joiner, & Udry, 2003) and become more intense

and central over time, as interdependence and closeness between romantic partners increases

with age (Furman & Buhrmester, 1982; Laursen & Williams, 1997).

We know less about the developmental course of romantic experiences for gay and lesbian youth.  On average, self-labeling as a sexual minority occurs at an average age of 16 for boys and 17½ for girls (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000).  In the past, few sexual minority youth had romantic relationships with same-gender peers during adolescence because of the limited opportunities to do so (Sears, 1991), but the opportunities appear to be increasing in some locations, especially with the increase in internet dating.  Importantly, sexual attraction, sexual behavior, and sexual identity are not as closely related to one another as traditionally thought (Savin-Williams, 2006).  Many gay and lesbian youth report that they had dated and had sexual experiences with other-gender peers during adolescence (Russell & Consolacion, 2003).  Lesbians particularly report a high degree of fluidity in their sexual behavior and identity (Diamond, 2000).  Experiences with the other sex may help clarify sexual orientation for gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths and can provide a cover for their sexual identity (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999).  Conversely, some youth who identify as heterosexual may be attracted to or engage in sexual behavior with same sex peers.

For both homosexual and heterosexual youth, romantic experiences can be highly rewarding.  Adolescents commonly report that romantic partners provide support, companionship, and intimacy (Feiring, 1996; Hand & Furman, 2006), and they become increasingly supportive over the course of adolescence.  By middle adolescence, the degree of support is comparable to relationships with mothers and second only to friends (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).  In late adolescence, romantic relationships are the most supportive relationship for boys and are among the most supportive relationships for girls.  Members of the other gender are also the most common source of strong positive affect for heterosexual adolescents (Wilson-Shockley, 1985 cited in Larson, Clore, & Woods, 1999), and presumably

same-gender peers are the most common source of strong positive affect for sexual minorities.

Such positive affect can have beneficial effects on thinking and judgment, but can also cloud

judgments, such as decision-making about sexual behavior (Larson, et al. 1999).

At the same time, other-gender peers are also the most common source of strong negative

affect for heterosexual adolescents (Wilson-Shockley, 1985 cited in Larson et al. 1999), although

we do not yet know who is the most common source of strong negative emotions for sexual

minorities.  Adolescents also have more negative interactions with romantic partners than with

close friends (Kuttler & La Greca, 2004), and the frequency of such negative interactions is

linked to social anxiety (La Greca & Harrison, 2005).  Disappointments in such relationships can

be associated with negative affect (Larson & Asmussen, 1991); for example, a lack of intimacy

is associated with a cognitive vulnerability to depression in girls (Williams, Connolly, & Siegel,

2001).

In effect, romantic experiences are a primary source of both positive and negative

experiences, and as such are an emotional cauldron for adolescents.  Not surprisingly,

adolescents experience more frequent mood swings than adults, and such mood swings are

associated with having a romantic partner, thinking about romantic relationships, and thinking

about their appearance (Larson, Csikszentmihalyi, & Graef, 1980).  Because romantic

experiences are both central and new in adolescents' social worlds, they provide a series of

challenging experiences that are affectively-laden.

For example, there is the issue of finding a romantic partner.  Most adolescents would

like to be romantically interested in someone and have someone interested in them.

Unreciprocated love is thought to be a significant source of negative affect (Larson & Asmussen,

1991; Seiffge-Krenke, 1995).  A lack of interest may be particularly disappointing to early

adolescent girls, many of whom expect to be in love all the time (Simon, Eder, & Evans, 1992). Certainly, romantic relationships are a key topic of conversation among most adolescents (Eder, 1993; Thompson, 1994).  Not having a romantic interest makes it more difficult to participate in the ongoing peer exchanges and could be detrimental to their status in the group, especially in early and middle adolescence (Brown, 1999).  If they rarely or never have a romantic interest, their peers may make negative attributions about why they do not, and they themselves may be affectively troubled by not having such an interest.

Interestingly, we know relatively little about the experiences and adjustment of non-daters except by comparison to the experiences and adjustment of daters, and that picture is mixed.  As noted previously, romantic relationships are a source of both positive and negative affect and interactions.  Moreover, romantic experiences are associated with facets of social competence (Furman, Ho, & Low, 2006, in press; Neeman, Hubbard, & Masten, 1995) and are thought to contribute to psychosocial development and adjustment (see Furman & Shaffer, 2003).  At the same time, romantic involvement, especially in early adolescence, is associated with poor academic performance, externalizing and internalizing symptoms, and substance use (see Furman, et al. 2006, in press; Neeman et al. 1995).  Non-normative behavior seems more associated with adverse outcomes.  For example, relatively early romantic involvement with boys by girls is associated with depressive symptoms, but platonic involvement with boys is not (Compian, Gowen, & Hayward, 2004).

As yet, only limited information is available concerning the extent to which these findings regarding adjustment and romantic experiences reflect the effects of romantic experiences per se or differences in those who are and are not romantically involved at different ages.  The mixture of positive and negative correlates can be understood, however, by

recognizing that the emergence of romantic experiences is a developmental task undertaken in the peer social world.  Accordingly, romantic experiences would be expected to be associated with social competence, but also associated with the risky behaviors that occur in peer contexts.

Of course, not only is the presence or absence of romantic involvement important, but the identity of the romantic partner also has significant affective consequences.  Adolescent romantic relationships tend to be closely supervised by mixed-gender groups, especially in early adolescence (Brown, 1999).  Dating a particularly popular person could improve one's status in the peer network (Brown, 1999). Conversely, disapproval of a new partner by peers may also lead to a decrease in one's status and potentially negative affective consequences.  Additionally, girls' early dating partners are frequently older boys, who may be more likely to exploit young adolescents, which often leads to adverse affective consequences (Pawlby, Mills, & Quinton, 1997).

Sexual minorities face particular challenges.  They have relatively fewer role models than heterosexual youth to emulate and fewer partners with whom to develop relationships. Moreover, they are frequently teased, harassed, or ostracized by heterosexual peers because of their sexual preferences.  Sexual minority adolescent males have fewer friends, and sexual minority adolescents tend to lose more friends (Diamond, 2004).  Sometimes they develop passionate same-gender friendships—intense yet avowedly non-sexual relationships—which may serve purposes similar to romantic relationships of heterosexual youth (Diamond, Dube, & Savin-Williams, 1999).  Sexual minorities report higher levels of negative affect than heterosexual youth (Diamond, 2004).  These differences in affect are mediated by greater fears of not finding a desired type of romantic relationship, perceived lack of control in romantic relationships, the loss of friends, and greater fears of losing friends.

Romantic relationships also entail some severe risks.  More than 25% of adolescents are victims of dating violence or aggression (see Wolfe & Feiring, 2000) and estimates of sexual victimization range from 14% to 43% of girls and 0.3% to 36% for boys (Hickman, Jaycox & Aronoff, 2004).  Dating violence is associated with anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and posttraumatic stress symptoms (Callahan, Tolman, & Saunders, 2003; Holt & Espelage, 2005; Howard & Wang, 2003).

Finally, one common romantic experience that elicits strong, negative affect is a romantic breakup (Larson, Clore & Wood, 1999).  Although adolescent romantic relationships begin and end frequently, making such breakups a normative experience, not all adolescents are able to effectively cope with this type of loss.  In fact, romantic dissolution is one of the strongest predictors of adolescent depression and suicide attempts (Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999).  As yet, we know relatively little about why some adolescent breakups have major effects and other ones do not.  However,  the literature on adult romantic dissolution suggests that factors such as gender, the quality and investment in the relationship, and the manner in which a break-up occurs may be influential (Frazier & Cook, 1993; Simpson, 1987).  In any case, as these descriptions indicate, romantic experiences are associated with significant affective experiences from the beginning stages of initiation through the end of a relationship.

Peer and Romantic Relationships, Affect, and Affect Regulation

It seems safe to say that peer and romantic relationships are related to affective experiences and affect regulation.  However, the specific nature of these links and the theoretical models accounting for these relationships are yet to be delineated.  In effect, much of the literature consists of demonstrations that some facet of peer relations is associated with some

aspect of affective experience.  Such work has all the intrinsic limitations of correlational

research, including several ones particularly relevant to this topic.

First, although we have talked about sociometric status, crowds, friendships, and

romantic relationships in separate sections, they are intrinsically related.  For example, popular

children are more likely to have friends (Franzoi, Davis, & Vasquez-Suson, 1994), be part of a

high-status crowd (La Greca, Prinstein, & Fetter, 1991) and enter romantic relationships

(Franzoi, et al. 1994).  Conversely, rejected children are more likely to be friendless (Zettergren,

2005) or victimized (Deater-Decker, 2001).  Moreover, experiences in one type of relationship

affect the other relationships.  For example, 52% of girls and 32% of boys report having felt

excluded by a friend because of the friend's romantic involvement (Roth & Parker, 2001).

Finally, one aspect of peer relations may moderate the impact of another aspect of peer relations.

For example, having friends buffers a child from the negative effects of being victimized

(Hodges, Malone & Perry, 1997).  Similarly, the negative aspects of early romantic involvement

may be limited to those adolescents who are not well accepted by their peers (Brendgen, Vitaro,

Doyle, Markiewicz, & Bukowski, 2002).  In a similar vein, it is often not clear if the links are

specific to a particular aspect of adjustment or maladjustment, such as depression, or if the links

may be more general.  Moreover, research with adolescents has focused more on affective

experiences than affect regulation.  Happily, more recent studies have begun to examine the role

of multiple facets of peer relations or multiple aspects of affective experiences or adjustment

simultaneously (e.g. La Greca & Harrison, 2005).  As yet, however, relatively little work exists

on affect regulation (vs. affective experiences).

Second, the organization of this chapter would seem to suggest that peer relations affect

experiences, but such inferences cannot be drawn from correlational and cross-sectional studies.

In fact, relatively few studies have examined such links longitudinally, but existing work suggests the links may be reciprocal in nature (e.g., Vernberg, 1990).  Longitudinal examinations will also help determine the effects of relationship experiences at different developmental periods.  For example, most studies have examined contemporary peer experiences, but peer relations prior to adolescence may be at least as important, especially as many facets of peer relations are at least moderately stable (see Rubin, et al. 2006).

Third, research needs to directly examine the processes that may lead to depression or have other affective consequences and not just examine the affective experiences associated with individual differences in early adolescents' peer relations.  For example, research has shown that adolescents who are romantically involved are more likely to be depressed (Joyner & Udry, 2000).  Yet, more detailed analyses suggest that it is romantic breakups that account for the association of depression with romantic involvement; similarly, having friendships may reduce feelings of loneliness, but specific processes in friendship such as co-rumination may contribute to the emergence or maintenance of depressive symptoms (Rose, 2002).

In a related vein, existing work has primarily examined the links between affective experiences and relatively stable, general characteristics of a person, such as sociometric status or quality of relationships.  Larson and colleagues are among the few investigators to examine links between adolescents' moods in different interactional contexts using electronic pagers (e.g. Larson & Richards, 1991).  It is important to complement existing work with molecular work examining such links in ongoing interactions.  For example, it would be important to examine how adolescents react to specific acts of disclosure or rejection.

In sum, the particular pathways between relationships and affective experiences are not well delineated yet, but the salience of peer and romantic relationships in adolescence suggests

that they are likely to be implicated in the emergence of affective disorders, such as depression.

It is hoped that this chapter can stimulate further work leading to a greater understanding of these

pathways and the roles that peer and romantic relationships play.

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