

*Chapter 8*

**HANGING OUT OR HANGING IN?:  
YOUNG FEMALES' SOCIOEMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING  
AND THE CHANGING MOTIVES  
FOR DATING AND ROMANCE**

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**ABSTRACT**

Drawing from recent theories of the development of heterosexual romantic relationships during adolescence and emerging adulthood, the associations among females' socioemotional functioning (positive well-being, negative affect, loneliness), romantic affiliation and support, and qualities of relationships with family and best female friends were investigated. Female participants completed assessments at ages 18, 20 and 23. As predicted, age-related differences in associations between females' socioemotional functioning and aspects of romantic relationships were found. After adjusting for the quality of relationships with family and best friends at each age, findings showed that an estimate of the amount of time spent (i.e., *affiliation*) with romantic partners was associated with only one aspect of socioemotional functioning at age 18 (reduced loneliness), but at age 20, more romantic affiliation was associated with all three aspects of socioemotional functioning, including better psychological well-being and reduced negative affect and loneliness. In addition, quality of relationships with family and best female friends significantly covaried with socioemotional functioning at age 18, but not at age 20. In contrast to the findings for romantic affiliation, only one of aspect of females' socioemotional functioning at age 20 - positive well-being – was improved with higher levels of romantic support (e.g., intimacy and nurturance). However, a higher level

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of romantic support at age 23 was accompanied by more positive well-being, and reduced negative affect and loneliness. These age-related associations among romantic affiliation, romantic support and socioemotional functioning suggest that girls most salient motivation for romance at each age is largely associated with their socioemotional functioning at that age. At age 18 and 20, affiliation – someone to spend time with - is the most salient motivation for romantic involvement, while at age 23 the motivation for romance has shifted to intimacy, support and security. These findings are consistent with recent theories of qualitative changes in romance from early adolescence to emerging adulthood (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999), but show that romantic support, apart from family and friend support, may provide independent benefits for individual functioning somewhat later than expected.

**Keywords:** romantic relationships, loneliness, psychological well-being, dating, friendship

## INTRODUCTION

Recently, *Friends*, the popular U.S. television show, ended after a decade. Many, if not most, of the 20 million plus viewers began watching this weekly show in their teens. As the show continued year after year, these viewers went through late adolescence, emerging adulthood and were young adults by the last year of this series. Just as the characters on *Friends* made many social transitions throughout their years of the show, recent theories (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999) have described how middle and late adolescents focus on affiliation with friends and dating -- hanging out, having fun, doing things together, meeting new people. As they get older, maintaining close friendships remains important, but there is increasing emphasis on intimacy, commitment and close dyadic relationships with romantic partners – having a partner who is committed and a source of security – someone who hangs in there during good and bad times. In fact, recent research has supported this developmental progression. In reviews of developmental studies conducted in recent years, authors have concluded that there are age-related changes in friendships and heterosexual romantic relationships during adolescence and emerging adulthood that support the generalization of these observed changes (Brown, 1999; Collins, 2003; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999; Shulman & Seiffge-Krenke, 2001; Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999). In the romantic domain, romantic affection and commitment that comes with an increase in motives for intimacy with another become more salient during emerging adulthood (age 18 to 25; Arnett, 2000), while the affiliative motives that inspire romantic relationships in the earlier years of adolescence (perhaps prior to age 20 or so) decline with age. Authors of two recent reviews of the empirical literature have proposed stage theories of heterosexual romantic relationship development that reflect these changes (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999).

It is clear that the nature of romantic relationships changes during the age periods of adolescence and emerging adulthood, and it is likely that the motives for relationship formation also show age changes. Romantic involvements are one type of interpersonal relationship that becomes increasingly important in adolescence and emerging adulthood (Larson et al., 1999). For example, more time is spent with romantic partners in late adolescence (age 18 and after) than in middle or earlier adolescence (Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999), adolescent romantic experiences can be less defined as they may be casual and

relatively shorter when compared to young adult romance (Feiring, 1996), and a focus on the future and commitment in relationships increase with age (Furman, Brown, & Feiring, 1999; Collins, 2003). However, there has been no investigation of whether the motives of romantic relationships and the different aspects of romantic involvement that come from these motives *within each age period* are the most important correlates of socioemotional functioning *at that age*. The aim of the study reported in this chapter was to determine whether particular qualities of romantic relationships that reflect and fulfill the most salient motives of a particular age period would be predictive of psychosocial well-being, negative affect and loneliness within the same age period.

### **FEMALES, GENDER DIFFERENCES, SOCIOEMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING, AND RELATIONSHIPS**

The participants in the current study were young females followed forward from age 18 to 23. Only females were included because of the focus in this study on negative affect, well-being, and interpersonal relationships with romantic partners, friends, and family. There is evidence that females have more difficulties with depressive affect and reduced socioemotional well-being during adolescence and emerging adulthood when compared to males. In addition, females may be more vulnerable to interpersonal problems than males, and the meaning of romantic relationships in adolescence and emerging adulthood may be different for girls compared to boys.

There have been many reports of adolescent sex differences in negative affect and other aspects of well-being. At about the same age that interests in romantic relationships increase, rates of depressive symptoms rise, and this increase is especially prominent among girls (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). By adolescence, females have higher rates of depression than males, and multiple theories link these gender differences to females' greater exposure to interpersonal stress and elevated reactivity to these stressors when they occur (e.g., Cicchetti & Toth, 1998; Crick & Zahn-Waxler, 2003; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; Rudolph, 2002). Girls do seem to be more likely than boys to respond negatively to interpersonal stress (Crick & Nelson, 2002; see Rudolph, 2002 for a review). Hence, compared to males, the well-being of females is more likely to be negatively influenced by the difficulties and positive support within romantic relationships during adolescence and emerging adulthood. For example, in one longitudinal study that followed young people from age 12 to 16, romantic relationships were more strongly associated with changes in functioning among girls than boys (Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner, & Collins, 2001) and a study relying on a U.S. national sample (AddHealth) also found that the well-being of girls was more negatively affected by romantic involvement (Joyner & Udry, 2000).

Additionally, during the adolescent years, the nature of close relationships for females and males has been found to differ. Although limited information is available, some studies have reported that females are more likely to be involved with older romantic partners, while males are often involved with same age females until late adolescence when they begin to have romantic partners who are younger in age (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003; Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, Jr., & Verma, 2002). On average, adolescent girls report longer romantic relationships than boys (Carver et al., 2003). Females have also reported more

interest in romantic involvements, and more intimacy and commitment with their romantic partners when compared to same age males (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Carver et al., 2003; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1993). Also, gender differences in the association between friendship and self-esteem have been reported (Azmitia, 2002; Franco & Levitt, 1998). In one cross-sectional study of students in grades 11 and 12 (Thomas & Daubman, 2001), qualities of girls' relationships with friends were associated with their self-esteem, but there was no association between qualities of males' friendships and their self-esteem. In this study, it also was revealed that girls had significantly lower self-esteem than boys, and girls rated their relationships as stronger, more interpersonally rewarding, and more stressful than boys did. Further, girl's self-esteem was positively correlated with the quality of their cross-gender best friend, however self-esteem was not correlated with the quality of their same-gender friendship. For boys, self-esteem did not correlate with the quality of their same or cross gender best friendships. Overall, females may be more vulnerable to negative relational experiences, but they also may benefit more from closeness and intimacy. Further, this study highlighted the importance of cross-gender relationships particularly for adolescent girl's self-esteem.

At least three explanations have been proposed to account for the greater vulnerability to the negative features of interpersonal relationships among females as compared to males. First, girls are more likely to be socialized to value relationships and connectedness while males are more likely to be socialized to value individuality and self-reliance (Gilligan, 1982; Thomas & Daubman, 2001). Hence, girls may attend to and place more importance on relationships. When these relationships are supportive or stressful, the impact may be greater for females than males because of these gender differences in salience. Second, girls' self-esteem may be more dependent on approval from others (Franco & Levitt, 1998), as girls have been found to use relationships to define themselves more than males (Thomas & Daubman, 2001). Third, females typically report greater closeness, exclusivity, and intimacy in their friendships and hold higher expectations of loyalty and commitment than do males (Azmitia, 2002; Franco & Levitt, 1998). This may result in girls experiencing more dyadic stress and support within very intimate relationships than boys.

## **HETEROSEXUAL ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS DURING ADOLESCENCE AND EMERGING ADULTHOOD**

The majority of young people have their first steady romantic relationship between the ages of 13 and 18 (Collins, 2003; Furman et al., 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999, 2002). Romantic relationships are very important to most young people. In one study, adolescents were more likely to attribute strong emotions, such as depression and happiness, to romantic relationships than to school or family (Larson, Clore, & Wood, 1999). Further, even at age 17-18, romantic relationships often last longer than 6 months, with more than 50% continuing for 11 months or longer (Carver et al., 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999).

Dating and romantic relationships represent a major developmental marker in adolescence (Adams, Laursen & Wilder, 2001; Quatman, Sampson, Robinson & Watson, 2001; Shulman & Kipnis, 2001). In eleventh and twelfth grade, adolescents think about romantic relationships on average five to eight hours a week (Richards et al., 1998). In

addition to this time spent thinking, older adolescent girls spend about 10 hours/week with a boy, while older adolescent boys spend about 5 hours/week with a girl (Richards et al., 1998). By tenth grade, those with romantic partners report social interaction to be most frequent with romantic partners, over and above interaction with parents, friends, and siblings. Young people also perceive their romantic relationships as one of the most influential and closest relationships that they have (Laursen & Williams, 1997). These statistics underscore the salience of romantic relationships for many adolescents even by age 16-18.

### **Functions and Risks of Romance**

There are many functions of dating and romantic relationships during adolescence and emerging adulthood. In classic studies, relationship functions were identified, such as recreation, socialization, status achievement, intimacy, companionship, sexual experimentation, and mate selection (McCabe, 1984; Rice, 1984; Skipper & Nass, 1966). Furman and Buhrmester (1992) emphasized the function of providing a source of support, and found that romantic partners become significant sources of support by the late teens or early 20s (university age). Among emerging adults (aged 20 years), romantic love has been found to consist of closeness, friendship, affection, support, attraction and sexual intimacy (Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman and Klessinger, 2001). Evidence has indicated that adolescents regard the influence of romantic relationships as equal to that of parent-child relationships and greater than that of friendships (Adams et al., 2001). Adolescent romantic relationships offer opportunities to develop interdependent interconnections, a description used to define the term closeness (Adams et al., 2001). Conversely, romantic partners may be a source of stress, conflict and other negative interactions, especially as young people get older and increasingly depend on a partner as a source of intimacy and support (Joyner & Udry, 2000; Kasian & Painter, 1992; Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke, 2001). Romantic partners also function as a source of affiliation and companionship – someone to do things with either alone or in a friendship group (Brown, 1999), especially in the teen years.

Romantic interests are also associated with much emotional upheaval (Larson, Clore, & Wood, 1999). Adolescents tend to report higher rates of both extremely positive and extremely negative emotions than adults and from hour to hour, adolescents experience wide variability in their emotional states (Larson & Richards, 1994; Larson, Clore & Wood, 1999). These highly variable emotional states have been linked to romantic relationships, with two studies using diary methods finding that those who had a boyfriend or girlfriend during the week of sampling reported wider daily emotional swings than those who did not (Larson et al., 1980; Richards & Larson, 1990). In another study by Richards et al., (1998) adolescents in the company of the opposite sex had moods that were more positive, reporting that they felt more attractive, great, and more important than when with their same sex peers. In contrast, when not with members of the other sex, adolescents reported less favorable moods and had lowered emotional and motivational states due to dysphoria associated with missing and longing for the person not with them (Richards et al., 1998).

In terms of mental health then, it is not surprising that romantic relationships can be a context for positive functioning and support, as well as maladaptation. While some developmental models have underscored the potential risk dating poses for adolescent development and well-being (Caffman & Steinberg, 1996; Wright, 1982), others have

characterized dating as a critical stage-salient task that provides a healthy forum for fostering interpersonal skills and competence (Feiring, 1996; McCabe, 1984; Samet & Kelly, 1987; Sullivan, 1953). Furthermore, relatively few studies (e.g., Davies & Windle, 2000; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2001) have integrated the positive and negative perspectives on the association between dating and psychosocial functioning. Assessments of negative and positive functioning were included in the current study.

### **Theories of Romantic Development during Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood**

Theories (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999) have described how the primary purpose of romantic relationships in the middle and late teen years may be affiliation rather than the provision of support and security. Brown (1999) theorized that in the late teen years, most adolescents are in one of two romantic development phases. He labeled these two phases as status and affection. Similarly, Connolly and Goldberg (1999) labeled similar phases affiliative and intimate. Early in romantic development (i.e., in the status / affiliation phase), young people would be expected to have either fairly superficial romantic relationships that revolve around affiliation and group activities or begin to take initial steps to develop more sustained relationships with greater affection and intimacy. However, in either case, relationships in these stages are not marked by long-term commitments and attachment formation. As such, romantic relationships in the late teen years would not be expected to replace the support of parents and friends, but may be most important because of the capacity to promote and maintain positive relationships within the friendship group, while providing an additional source of status and companionship (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000). In the current study, it was expected that romantic relationships in the late teen years (i.e., age 18 in the current study) would fulfill affiliative rather than intimacy motives. Therefore, it was not expected that support by romantic partners (e.g., intimacy and nurturance), would be associated with well-being after accounting for support from family members and same-sex friends. In contrast, a marker of affiliation, time spent with romantic partners, was expected to be associated with well-being at age 18 even after accounting for qualities of other relationships with family and friends.

Romantic interests and involvements progress during adolescence and emerging adulthood until they eventually come to more closely resemble adult romantic attachments (Furman et al., 1999). Brown (1999) has labeled this last phase of romantic relationship development the bonding phase. He proposed that later marriage (on average age 25 to 27) has pushed the bonding phase back to the emerging adult years (about age 23-25; see also Larson et al., 2002). Similarly, Connolly and Goldberg (1999) called this the committed phase. Among individuals in committed relationships, satisfaction with the couple relationship has been associated with the provision of social support, and, in turn, support from partners has been associated with better individual mental and physical well-being (see reviews by Burman & Margolin, 1992; De Jong-Giervald, 1986). In the current study, an association between these positive qualities in romantic relationships and well-being was expected to emerge by age 23 even after accounting for relationships with family and friends. As affiliation motives were anticipated to be less prominent with increasing age, the

importance of time spent with romantic partners for well-being was predicted to decline by age 23.

## **SOCIOEMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS, FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

### **Romantic Relationships**

Negative affect is one aspect of well-being that was assessed in the current study. The emotions of adolescent romance have been associated with depressive symptoms (Joyner & Udry, 2001; Monroe et al., 1999). Two short-term (approximately 1-year) longitudinal studies of adolescent affective functioning identified romantic relationships, especially romantic dissolution, as interpersonal stressors that directly influenced depressive symptoms (Joyner & Udry, 2001) and predicted the onset of new major depressive disorder (Monroe et al., 1999). A handful of other studies have reported that romantic involvement during adolescence is associated with individual behavioral, emotional and social functioning (e.g., Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2001; Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998).

In addition to measuring negative affect, positive well-being and loneliness were also assessed in the current study. Adolescents who have had success with long-term romantic relationships do perceive themselves to be more socially competent and to have greater romantic appeal (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2001). Spending time with members of the other sex has also been associated with greater social competence (Darling, Dowdy, Lee Van Horn, & Coldwell, 1999; Feiring & Lewis, 1991). Social competence and romantic appeal have been associated with self-esteem in past research (Harter, 1999) providing some support for the alternative hypothesis – that some forms of romantic involvement may promote well-being rather than increase negative affect. Other support for the positive impact of romantic relationships on well-being comes from a longitudinal study of high school student. Davies and Windle (2000) observed that the transition to a steady relationship among 701 adolescents (M age = 16) was accompanied by a significant decrease in depressive symptoms, but also associated with a significant increase in minor problem behavior. However, no past studies have accounted for qualities of relationships with parents and friends when examining the influence of romantic relationships on emotional and social functioning. Since romantic relationships do not exist in an interpersonal vacuum and there is some evidence that individuals who have good relationships with family and friends also have good relationships with romantic partners (Collins & Sroufe, 1999), other close relationships should be considered in order to make conclusions about the independent association between well-being and qualities of romantic involvement and relationships.

### **Family Relationships**

Attachment theory has provided a foundation for understanding close relationships that are based on security and commitment (Overbeek, Vollebergh, Engels, & Meeus, 2003; Weiss, 1998). For most people, attachment relationships with primary caregivers are expected

to be the first sources of validation and support (Feiring & Taska, 1996; Overbeek et al., 2003). Attachment theorists have shown the importance of secure parent-child relationships as a foundation for positive functioning (Berlin & Cassidy, 1999). In the area of parental attributes, classic research by Coopersmith (1967) found that some of the parenting attributes important for children's self-esteem include being accepting, affectionate, involved, encouraging and democratic, while disciplinary methods should be non-coercive.

Although relationships with caregivers are transformed during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Collins & Repinski, 1994; Collins & Sroufe, 1999), attachment features of the parent-adolescent relationship are usually maintained. Parents continue to be a source of support and security for young people throughout adolescence. Parents usually maintain this role in emerging adulthood, even as romantic relationships may begin to emerge as attachment relationships by providing a source of emotional security (Ainsworth, 1989; Van Wel, Ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2002). The relationships that young people have with their parents have been found to continue to impact well-being into late adolescence and emerging adulthood. For example, in a cross-sectional study of students age 16 to 20 years, those with better parent relationships had relatively higher self-esteem and life satisfaction, and reduced negative affect (depression and anxiety; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Similarly, in cross-sectional analyses by Overbeek et al. (2003), it was reported that adolescents age 15-19 with relatively lower levels of parental attachment had more emotional disturbance. Yet, in this study, earlier parental attachment did not predict disturbance three years later.

## **Friends**

Independent of the impact of parents and romantic relationships, the quality of friendships, especially same-sex friendships, has been associated with positive adaptation (Bagwell, Schmidt, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 2001; Franco & Levitt, 1998; Roberts et al., 2000). Friends can be an important additional source of advice, support and respect, especially as young people move outside the family home (Berndt, 2002). Multiple studies have found that peer relationships have an influence on adolescent development and adaptation that is independent of the influence of family relationships (Franco & Levitt, 1998; Roberts et al., 2000). Adolescents with supportive friends have been found to have higher global self-esteem, better social adjustment, and are better able to cope with stressors compared to those with lower quality friendships (Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee, & Sippola, 1996; Hartup & Stevens, 1999; Keefe & Berndt, 1996). Also, having close friendships in adolescence has been associated with higher self-worth in emerging adulthood (Bagwell et al., 2001), and adult female friendships have been shown to be important to many aspects of individual well-being (Knickmeyer, Sexton, & Nishimura, 2002).

Furthering from Sullivan's (1953) hypothesis that intimate friendships can increase feelings of self-worth in adolescence, researchers have studied a number of positive indicators of friendship quality including trust, loyalty, affection, emotional support, and prosocial behavior as well as a number of negative indicators including conflict, rivalry, competition, and domination tactics (Berndt, 2002). The literature reveals that, consistent with Sullivan's theory, adolescents who have high quality friendships (i.e., friendships high in positive features and low in negative features) in general have higher global self-esteem, improved social adjustment, and an increased ability to cope with stressors compared to those

adolescents with low quality friendships (i.e., friendships low in positive features and high in negative features, Gauze, Bukowski, & Aquan-Assee, 1996; Hartup & Stevens, 1999; Keefe & Berndt, 1996; Townsend, McCracken, & Wilton, 1988).

## Study Aims

In this longitudinal study of girls from age 18 to 23, positive well-being, negative affect, and loneliness were expected to be associated with different aspects of romantic relationships at different ages. The different associations were expected to reflect age-related changes in the motives for romantic relationships. The two motives of interest were affiliation and intimacy/security (e.g., nurturance, intimacy, support). In other words, one reason for involvement in romantic relationships is to affiliate with others, spend time together, and have fun; this motivation was expected to be most salient in the teen years. A second reason for involvement in romantic relationships is to develop an intimate and nurturing association with another that includes a sense of security and trust, and provides support and happiness in stressful and other times of life; this motivation was expected to emerge as most salient after the teen years. Hence, one aim of the current investigation was to determine whether socioemotional functioning was associated with support within romantic relationships, measured as a range of positive qualities including intimacy and nurturance, after the teen years but not during the teens years.

In the current study, a second aim was to examine the other motive of romance - affiliation with romantic partners. Therefore, an additional aspect of romantic involvement, a measure of affiliation (i.e., time spent with romantic partner) was investigated. Based on theories of the development of romantic relationships during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999), it was expected that the associations between romantic affiliation and socioemotional functioning would be stronger in the teen years than later, as affiliation motivation in the romantic domain was expected to be more salient than intimacy/security motivation during the teenage years.

Finally, negative interactions (e.g., conflict) in romantic relationships were also examined. It was expected that the association between negative interactions and socioemotional functioning would be stronger in emerging adulthood than in adolescence for two primary reasons. First, more committed relationships have formed by emerging adulthood and these relationships can have both positive and negative qualities simultaneously (Kasian & Painter, 1992). Second, by emerging adulthood, young people have more experience with balancing and negotiating both the positive and negative aspects of their close relationships.

Additionally, the issue in the current study was one of asking when qualities of romantic relationships have independent influences on well-being. There have been many investigations that have established the importance of family and friends in adolescence for individual functioning (Berndt, 2002; Eccles, Early, Fraser, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1997; Overbeek et al., 2003; Parker & Asher, 1987) and continuity between qualities of parent and peer relationships, and romantic relationships have been found (Conger, Cui, Bryant & Elder, 2000; Möller & Stattin, 2001; Taradash, Connolly, Peplar, Craig, & Costa, 2001).

In sum, age-related differences in associations between females' socioemotional functioning and qualities of romantic relationships (support and intimacy, affiliation, and

negative interactions) were tested in the current study. Independent effects of relationships with family and friends on socioemotional functioning were also investigated. After accounting for support from family and friends, it was expected that females' socioemotional functioning would be more strongly associated with romantic support and conflict at ages 20 and 23 as compared to age 18. Conversely, it was hypothesized that females' socioemotional functioning would be more strongly associated with romantic affiliation at age 18 compared to ages 20 and 23.

## METHOD

### Participants

At Time 1 (T1), participants were 101 white females between the ages of 17 and 19 who had recently graduated from high school ( $M = 18.2$ ;  $SD = 0.7$ ). There is evidence that patterns of dating vary by race/ethnicity (Phinney, Jensen, Olsen, & Cundick, 1990) and evidence of gender differences in the nature and importance of peer relationships (see Introduction). Because of this, only white females were included in the current study.

Participants were recruited from two sites, including the graduating senior class from a large urban high school in the Northwestern United States and the incoming first year class of a large urban university in the Northwestern United States. The study was announced in five senior English classes of the high school. If interested, students supplied their names, ages, race/ethnicities, addresses, and phone numbers. Only three students did not supply their names. Of these students, 49 white females expressed interest in participating in the study and 37 (76%) were interviewed in the summer after their senior year. Three potential participants changed their minds, two did not attend scheduled interview sessions, and seven could not be contacted. Structured interviews and questionnaires were completed with each participant separately at the high school or at the interviewees' homes. These participants were entered into a drawing to win prizes (\$50 or \$100 or movie passes).

The remaining 64 participants were recruited through random telephone calls made to female freshman in the first few weeks of university (74 females were contacted). Participants were required to have graduated from high school in the school year prior to data collection. Interviews were conducted at the university or the interviewees' homes. These individuals were paid \$10 for their participation.

For the second assessment (T2), 63 participants were located and 61 (60%) participated. Because this study was not originally designed to be longitudinal, T2 data collection faced extra challenges to re-contact participants. By the third assessment (T3), Internet searching tools were much improved. As such, 77 individuals were located and 72 (71%) participated.

At T1, 57% of participants were in a steady romantic relationship, no participant was married and one person reported a steady relationship with a female. At T2, 67% of participants reported they were involved in a steady romantic relationship. The mean length of steady romantic relationships was similar at T1 and T2 interviews,  $M = 14.19$  and  $14.97$  months with ranges from 2 to 50 and 1 to 48, respectively. At T3, 72% of participants reported they were involved in a steady romantic relationship, 13 participants (18%) were married, and the average length of relationship with a romantic partner was 28 months with a

range from 1 to 84 months. At T3, three participants reported current, steady romantic relationships with females.

Only two participants had the same romantic partner throughout the study and only 15 participants had a romantic partner at all three waves of data collection. Hence, most participants changed partners and most had no steady romantic partner at least one time. As such, data were analyzed for each wave of data collection separately and results were compared between waves.

## Procedure

The T1 assessment included an individual interview about involvement with romantic relationships from grades 9 to 12, as well as the completion of a self-report questionnaire. Only data from the questionnaire were used in the current study. T2 (1998) and T3 (2001) assessments were completed approximately two and five years later when almost all participants were age 20 and 23. T2 and T3 data collection were completed via mail.

Upon the T1 interview, a participant signed consent forms. Parental consent was obtained for participants under 18-years-old. The consent form informed participants and their parents that this was a study of high school relationships to learn how relationships with friends and boyfriends change while in high school and about their current relationships and well-being. The portion of the interview and survey described here took between 20 and 40 minutes to complete. Appropriate ethical approvals were obtained for all phases.

## Measures

### *Qualities of Relationships with Romantic Partners and Best Female Friends*

The Networks of Relationships Inventory (NRI; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) was used to assess support from romantic partners and friends. All items were completed about the current (or most recent past) romantic partner and current female best friend (other than a romantic partner). As suggested by the authors of the measure, *social support* scores were calculated based on seven subscale scores (21 items) - reliable alliance (“How sure are you that this relationship will last no matter what?”), affection (“How much does this person like or love you?”), admiration (“How much does this person treat you like you’re admired and respected?”), instrumental aid (“How much does this person help you figure out or fix things?”), companionship (“How much do you play around and have fun with this person?”), intimacy (“How much do you share your secrets and private feelings with this person?”) and nurturance (“How much do you take care of this person?”). Only individuals with a romantic partner at the time of questionnaire completion were included in analyses that involved support from partners.

The support composites had high reliability, Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .93$  for current romantic partner, Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .90$  for best friend when averaged across T1, T2 and T3. Romantic partner support was not significantly correlated with friend support at any age,  $r$  ranged from .03 to .17.

### ***Negative Interactions with Romantic Partners***

Nine items of the NRI (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) were used to assess negative interactions with romantic partners. Items assessed conflict (“how much do you and this person get upset with or made at each other?”), antagonism (“How much do you and this person get on each other’s nerves?”) and punishment (“How much does this person scold you for doing something you’re not supposed to do?”). The reliability of the measure was high, average Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .88$ .

### ***Affiliation with Romantic Partners***

To measure affiliation with romantic partners, each participant reported the amount of time (outside of school and work) that she spent with her romantic partner in a typical week. A visual-analog scale with a range from 0 to 100 was used. Individuals without a romantic partner at the time of survey completion were instructed to respond with a zero. Because of these zero scores and the resulting positive skew of this variable, a  $\log_{10}$  transformation was conducted after adding 1 to all scores. These transformed values for time spent with romantic partners were used in all analyses. Correlations between transformed values of time spent with romantic partners and support from partners at T1, T2 and T3 were moderate,  $r = .37$ ,  $r = .28$  and  $r = .45$ , all  $p < .05$ , respectively.

### ***Quality of Family Relationships***

Participants completed the Self-image Questionnaire for Young Adolescents (SIQYA; Peterson, Schulenberg, Abramowitz, Offer, & Jarcho, 1984). The subscale of family relationships was used in the current study. This subscale included 17 items that assess various aspects of parent-adolescent relationships including warmth and support (e.g., “I can count on my parents most of the time”, “I feel that I have a part in making family decisions”). This scale had high internal consistency in this study,  $\alpha = .89$ .

### ***Socioemotional Functioning***

Negative affect (depression/anxiety), positive well-being and loneliness were the indicators of individual well-being. Negative affect was measured with the anxiety and depression subscales (seven items) of The Psychological General Well-Being Index (PGWB; Dupuy, 1984; Veit & Ware, Jr., 1983). An example item is ‘Have you felt sad, discouraged, hopeless, or had so many problems that you wondered if anything was worthwhile during the past month?’ Items had response options from 1 (*extremely* or *definitely*) to 6 (*not at all*). Positive well-being was assessed with a three-item subscale of the PGWB. An example item is “How happy, satisfied, or pleased have you been with your life during the past month?” with options from 1 (*could not be more satisfied or pleased*) to 6 (*very dissatisfied*). In previous research, there is evidence of high internal consistency, Cronbach’s  $\alpha > .90$ , and validity of the PGWB measure with a correlation of  $r = .47$  with interviewer’s ratings of depression, an average correlation of  $r = .69$  with six other depression scales, and an average correlation of  $r = .64$  with three other anxiety scales (Fazio, 1977). Reliability also was high in the current study, all  $\alpha > .90$ .

The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980) was used to measure loneliness at each time of measurement. An example item is “I feel left out” with response options from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often*). Reliabilities of measures were good, all

Cronbach's  $\alpha > .75$ . In previous research, this scale has had high internal consistency,  $\alpha = .94$ , and good concurrent validity with measures such as introversion-extroversion, anxiety, a self-labeling loneliness index, involvement in social activities and number of friends (Russell et al., 1980). Reliability also was high in the current study, all  $\alpha > .90$ .

## RESULTS

### Females' Socioemotional Functioning and Romantic Relationship Qualities

Table 1 summarizes bivariate correlations among positive well-being, negative affect, loneliness, and qualities of interpersonal relationships. Positive well-being, negative affect, and loneliness were more strongly associated with romantic partner support and negative interactions with partners at age 23 compared to age 18. Similarly, negative affect was more strongly negatively associated with romantic partner support at age 23 compared to age 20. Only after the teen years was positive well-being significantly better and loneliness significantly lower when romantic partners were more supportive; at age 20 and 23, support from romantic partners was significantly associated with positive well-being,  $r = .40$  and  $.39$ , both  $p < .01$ , and loneliness,  $r = -.31$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $r = -.51$ ,  $p < .01$ . Additionally, at age 23, romantic support was significantly associated with negative affect  $r = -.49$ ,  $p < .01$ . At age 18, no significant associations between females' socioemotional functioning and romantic support were found.

Similar findings emerged when associations between measures of socioemotional functioning and negative interactions with romantic partners were examined. Significant associations between socioemotional functioning and negative interactions were only found at age 23. Individuals with relatively more negative interactions with partners had lower positive well-being,  $r = -.46$ ,  $p < .01$ , higher levels of negative affect,  $r = .47$ ,  $p < .01$ , and higher levels of loneliness,  $r = .48$ ,  $p < .01$ .

As predicted and in contrast with findings regarding support and negative interactions with romantic partners, well-being was significantly associated with affiliation with romantic partners (i.e., time spent with partners) at age 18 and 20, but not at age 23. At age 18, females who spent more time with partners were also relatively lower in loneliness,  $r = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ . At age 20, females who spent more time with partners had relatively better positive well-being,  $r = .47$ ,  $p < .01$ , while affiliation with romantic partners was negatively associated with negative affect,  $r = -.36$ ,  $p < .01$ , and loneliness,  $r = -.28$ ,  $p < .05$ .

### The Independent Contribution of Romantic Relationships to Well-being

#### *Socioemotional Functioning, Support and Negative Interactions within Romantic Relationships*

Hierarchical regression analyses were used to examine independent associations between the dependent variables of positive well-being, negative affect and loneliness, and support from romantic partners after accounting for support from family and friends at each age. At age 18, all measures of socioemotional functioning were significantly associated with quality

**Table 1. Pearson correlations between Experiences in Interpersonal Relationships and Well-being at Ages 18, 20 and 23**

Relationship Experiences	Time 1 (age 18)			Time 2 (age 20)			Time 3 (age 23)		
	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness
Quality of family relationships	.26 <sup>†</sup>	-.51 <sup>†</sup>	-.40 <sup>†</sup>	.14	-.11	-.19	.19	-.23 <sup>*</sup>	-.32 <sup>†</sup>
Friend social support	.25 <sup>†</sup>	-.29 <sup>†</sup>	-.33 <sup>†</sup>	-.17	.15	-.20	-.05	.14	-.10
Romantic partner social support	.14	-.06	-.09	.40 <sup>†</sup>	-.13	-.31 <sup>*</sup>	.39 <sup>†</sup>	-.49 <sup>†</sup>	-.51 <sup>†</sup>
Romantic partner negative interactions	-.15	.20	.12	-.27	.04	.18	-.46 <sup>†</sup>	.47 <sup>†</sup>	.48 <sup>†</sup>
Romantic partner affiliation (time spent) <sup>a</sup>	.00	-.08	-.23 <sup>*</sup>	.47 <sup>†</sup>	-.36 <sup>†</sup>	-.28 <sup>*</sup>	.21	-.12	-.13

\* $p < .05$ . <sup>†</sup> $p < .01$ .

Time 1  $N$  ranged from 57 to 101. Time 2  $N$  ranged from 41 to 61. Time 3  $N$  ranged from 52 to 72.

<sup>a</sup> $\log_{10}$  transformed.

**Table 2. Standardized results of regressing measures of well-being on qualities of friend and family relationships and support from romantic partners**

Independent variables	Time 1 (age 18)			Time 2 (age 20)			Time 3 (age 23)		
	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness
Step 1, $R^2$	.16 <sup>†</sup>	.37 <sup>†</sup>	.26 <sup>†</sup>	.10	.08	.18 <sup>*</sup>	.07	.06	.12 <sup>*</sup>
Quality of family relationships, $\beta$	.32 <sup>*</sup>	-.56 <sup>†</sup>	-.46 <sup>†</sup>	.30	-.10	-.40 <sup>*</sup>	.26	-.25	-.31 <sup>*</sup>
Friend social support, $\beta$	.20	-.15	-.15	-.12	.27	-.13	.06	.06	-.11
Step 2, $\Delta R^2$	.03	.01	.02	.11 <sup>*</sup>	.01	.03	.10 <sup>*</sup>	.21 <sup>†</sup>	.18 <sup>†</sup>
Quality of family relationships, $\beta$	.32 <sup>*</sup>	-.56 <sup>†</sup>	-.46 <sup>†</sup>	.19	-.07	-.34 <sup>*</sup>	.17	-.13	-.19
Friend social support, $\beta$	.23	-.18	-.17	-.13	.27	-.12	.02	.13	-.05
Romantic partner social support, $\beta$	.19	-.11	-.13	.34 <sup>*</sup>	-.11	-.20	.34 <sup>*</sup>	-.48 <sup>†</sup>	-.45 <sup>†</sup>

\* $p < .05$ . <sup>†</sup> $p < .01$ .

Time 1  $N = 57$ , Time 2  $N = 41$ , Time 3  $N = 52$ .

**Table 3. Standardized results of regressing measures of well-being on qualities of friend and family relationships and negative interactions with romantic partners**

Independent variables	Time 1 (age 18)			Time 2 (age 20)			Time 3 (age 23)		
	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness
Step 1	Same as Table 2								
Step 2, $\Delta R^2$	.01	.02	.01	.06	.00	.02	.16	.17	.15
Quality of family relationships, $\beta$	.32*	-.56†	-.46†	.27	-.10	-.39*	.11	-.09	-.15
Friend social support, $\beta$	.18	-.13	-.14	-.13	-.27	-.12	.07	.05	-.12
Romantic partner negative interactions, $\beta$	-.12	.16	.08	-.25	.04	.14	-.32†	.44†	.42†

\* $p < .05$ . † $p < .01$ .

Time 1  $N = 57$ , Time 2  $N = 41$ , Time 3  $N = 52$ .

**Table 4. Standardized results of regressing measures of well-being on qualities of friend and family relationships, and time spent with romantic partners**

Independent variables	Time 1 (age 18)			Time 2 (age 20)			Time 3 (age 23)		
	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness	Positive well-being	Negative affect	Loneliness
Step 1, $R^2$	.11†	.31†	.22†	.04	.06	.05	.04	.07	.12*
Quality of family relationships, $\beta$	.22*	-.47†	-.36†	.15	-.11	-.20	.19	-.24*	-.32†
Friend social support, $\beta$	.20*	-.22*	-.24*	-.14	.22	-.10	-.02	.12	-.14
Step 2, $\Delta R^2$	.00	.01	.06	.24†	.12*	.12*	.04	.01	.02
Quality of family relationships, $\beta$	.22*	-.48†	-.38†	.15	-.17	-.25	.18	-.23	-.31†
Friend social support, $\beta$	.20*	-.21*	-.22*	-.14	.14	-.17	.01	.11	-.16
Romantic partner affiliation <sup>a</sup> , $\beta$	.01	-.12	-.25†	.50†	-.36†	-.36*	.20	-.10	-.14

\* $p < .05$ . † $p < .01$ .

Time 1  $N = 99$ , Time 2  $N = 61$ , Time 3  $N = 72$ .

<sup>a</sup>time spent,  $\log_{10}$  transformed.

of family relationships, but not significantly associated with support from friends and romantic partners (see Table 2). At age 20, positive well-being was positively associated with support from romantic partners after accounting for support from friends and partners, while loneliness was the only aspect of well-being associated with family support. By age 23, all three measures of socioemotional functioning were independently associated with support from romantic partners, but not associated with support from family and friends.<sup>1</sup>

Similar, but separate, hierarchical regression analyses were used to examine the parallel associations between females' socioemotional functioning and negative interactions with romantic partners after accounting for the influence of support from family and friends (see Table 3). When associations between socioemotional functioning and negative interactions were compared to associations between socioemotional functioning and support from romantic partners, similar results emerged with only one exception; there was no significant association between socioemotional functioning and partner negative interactions at age 20.

### ***Affiliation: Time Spent with Romantic Partners***

Again, separate hierarchical regression analyses were used to examine the associations between females' socioemotional functioning and affiliation with romantic partners after accounting for the influence of support from family and friends (see Table 4). In contrast to the earlier models which only included participants with romantic partners, all participants, whether they had a romantic partner at the time of survey completion or not, could be included in analyses; those without romantic relationships at the time of survey completion indicated a score of 0 for time spent.

Table 4 shows that all three measured aspects of females' socioemotional functioning at age 18 were associated with support from family and friends. Regarding associations between socioemotional functioning and romantic affiliation at age 18, females were less lonely when they spent more time with their romantic partners, but positive well-being and negative affect were not significantly associated with time with partners. At age 20, somewhat the converse was found. There was little association of well-being measures with support from family or friends, but all aspects of socioemotional functioning were significantly associated with affiliations with romantic partners. At age 23, socioemotional functioning was not associated with affiliation with partners.

## **DISCUSSION**

During the years of adolescence and emerging adulthood (about age 18 to 25) a number of developmental tasks are faced in preparation for the transition into adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Developing close, intimate couple relationships and finding satisfying life directions, work and other interests may be of most importance. Foundations that are built at this time of life may have enduring ramifications for positive social relationships, individual development, and success or problems in later adult life (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002). During emerging adulthood, young people have experiences and make choices that can impact their success transitioning into adulthood and their future well-being. For example, the choice of

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<sup>1</sup> We also included marital status (married or not) in the age 23 models as a covariate. The findings were similar to those reported in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

close relationships at this time may be critical as these are the relationships that may go with adolescents into the future, providing them with their major sources of support to cope with challenges, helping them to find satisfying life experiences, and assisting them to feel competent, connected and cared for. These relationships add significantly to their social capital.

These relationships, and the positive and negative emotions that accompany them, likely result in problems for some and provide opportunities for growth for others. Overall, these relationships frequently become new sources of support and stress during adolescence (Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002), and often act as a vehicle for the adolescent to work through self-concept and individuation issues, as well as gaining access to these additional sources of intimacy and support. Yet, even though romantic relationships become a major source of support and stress, the associations between romantic relationship qualities and well-being, such as negative affect, depression, loneliness and positive aspects of well-being, during this time of life has only begun to be examined.

As described in this chapter, a group of females participated in three assessments between late adolescence and emerging adulthood (at age 18, 20, and 23). A pattern of findings emerged that provide support for recently proposed stage theories of the development of romantic relationships during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999). The patterns of associations between individual socioemotional functioning and the various aspects of romantic relationships showed that females' positive well-being, negative affect and loneliness are influenced by romantic relationships in ways consistent with age-related differences in affiliation and intimacy/security motives within the romantic domain.

In particular, at age 18, affiliation motives for romantic relationships were expected to be more salient and prominent than intimacy/security motives in the romantic domain. This was supported by finding that, at age 18, reduced loneliness is associated with spending more time with romantic partners and, in contrast, no measure of socioemotional functioning is associated with romantic support, including such aspects as intimacy, nurturance and satisfaction. Hence, consistent with the expectation that affiliation motives would be predominant at age 18, girls at age 18 are less lonely when they spend more time with their romantic partners, but romantic support did not affect socioemotional functioning, and this was true even after accounting for associations between individual well-being and support from family and same-sex best friend relationships. Importantly, features of family relationships seemed to most strongly covary with socioemotional functioning at this age, and there were some findings that indicated that support from best female friends may also be important at age 18.

Although it was not predicted that affiliation motives would still predominate at age 20, it seemed that these motives remained more salient than intimacy motives within the romantic domain when the girls were age 20. At this age, all measured aspects of well-being, including positive well-being, negative affect and loneliness, are relatively more positive when girls' spend more time with their romantic partners. In contrast, consistent with the conclusion that intimacy/security motives are not as salient in the romantic domain at this age, only one measured aspect of socioemotional functioning, psychological well-being, was associated with support from partners at 20 and no aspect of socioemotional functioning was associated with negative romantic interactions. In total, findings at age 18 and 20 suggest that affiliation with romantic partners is important for socioemotional functioning at age 18, but affiliation

motives are even more prominent at age 20 than at age 18. In contrast, the importance of intimacy/security motives in the romantic domain for socioemotional functioning is just emerging at age 20. Hence, even as late as age 20, affiliation seems to be the primary motive and benefit of romantic relationships for individual functioning. In other words, before and at age 20, the benefit of romantic relationships primarily comes with spending time together, regardless of the level of intimate interactions that form the content of this time together.

In contrast to the expected age-related declines in the importance of affiliation motives in romance, intimacy motives in romantic relationships were expected to be most salient by age 23. This hypothesis was supported. By age 23, all measured aspects of socioemotional functioning were associated with support from romantic partners, suggesting that intimacy motives are important at this age. At age 23, females with more support from romantic partners had elevated positive well-being and lower negative affect and loneliness. Also in support of this hypothesis, no measure of well-being was significantly associated with affiliation with romantic partners at age 23. This suggests that intimacy had become a more salient romantic motive than affiliation by age 23.

### **Family, Friends, and Romantic Partners**

It is important to note that, at each age, the independent contributions of family relationships and same-sex friendships were simultaneously investigated in multivariate regression analyses. Somewhat surprisingly, current study findings indicated the primary importance of support from family relationships and same-sex friends for well-being, rather than romantic relationships, at age 18. Higher levels of positive well-being and reduced depressive affect and loneliness were found when girls had more support from family members and same-sex best friends. Social support from family and friends seem to be important correlates of girls' socioemotional functioning at age 18. However, evidence presented in this chapter shows that these relationships may have smaller independent links with well-being when girls are in their 20s and romantic relationships become the strongest correlate of girls' socioemotional functioning.

In the past, most research on socioemotional functioning and social relationships has focused on family relationships, same-sex friendships and peer groups (e.g., Gauze et al., 1996; Hartup & Stevens, 1999). Examinations of the impact of adolescent and emerging adult romantic relationships, independent from the influence of friends and family, have been much less common. Because relationships with family and same-sex friends have been found to be important to females' socioemotional functioning in both adolescence and emerging adulthood, and there has been some evidence on continuity of qualities between family, friend and romantic relationships (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Furman & Wehner, 1994, 1997), qualities of family relationships and same-sex friendship were important to consider along with romantic relationships. As such, there was an additional focus on controlling for the influence of other relationships to determine when well-being was independently associated with qualities of romantic relationships.

Although findings support theory (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999) and hypotheses, it was somewhat unexpected that females' affiliation with romantic partners was associated with *all* of the measured aspects of socioemotional functioning at age 20 and not after. It was also surprising that support and intimacy with partners was associated with *all*

these aspects of more support from romantic partners socioemotional functioning at age 23 and not before. It must be concluded that positive well-being, negative affect and loneliness do not have much of an independent association with romantic relationship support until after age 18, possibly not most consistently until the mid-20s. It appears from the findings that family and same-sex friends remain critical supports for girls prior to this time of life. This evidence supports the current writing about the extended period of adolescence in Western societies of today (Arnett, 1999; Larson et al., 2002), with delays in the formation of close couple relationships until the mid-20s or beyond and marriage or similar commitments not made until the late 20s for both females and males (Brooks-Gunn & Paikoff, 1997; Collins, 2003; Modell, 1989). Hence, many adolescents may continue to gain a sense of belonging and most of their support from family and friends until they have aged into the third decade of life. This also suggests that the social competencies needed in later phases of romantic development, such as trust, negotiation and intimate communication, disclosure, reciprocity, and the ability to provide security for another and commitment, may not be experienced until beyond age 20 (Brown, 1999; Feiring, 1996; Furman & Wehner, 1994).

### **Limitations of the Current Study**

Although this study was longitudinal in design, cross-sectional segments were examined and compared. Hence, limitations are the inability to draw causal conclusions, including the potential of converse associations between well-being and relationship qualities; well-being may promote more support from friends and family at age 18, more affiliation with partners at age 20, and more intimate interactions with partners at age 23. Another limitation was the lack of information that would allow for a consideration of the specific content of support within romantic relationships (see Collins, 2003; Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke, 2001). Consideration of interactional content, and the potential for support and intimate interactions to change with age yields another possible explanation of study findings that could be an alternative to the motivational or functional explanation that has been proposed in this chapter. For example, in the late teen years, the support from romantic partners may be of a form that is not as beneficial to socioemotional functioning, while the content of support provided by partners as individuals move into their mid-20s may change so that interactions are more relevant to maintaining positive well-being and reducing negative affect. For example, support and intimate interactions may be based increasingly on a history of knowledge of the other, their perceptions of stress, their coping behaviors and other factors, making it more beneficial to each partner's happiness. Romantic partners may increasingly converse about their day-to-day hassles and assist each other to cope by problem-solving and strategizing. Romantic partners in the mid-20s compared to the late teen years may be more reliable sources of instrumental aid, and they may be more knowledgeable about stress and coping from their own experiences and changing developmental level, and be better able to cope themselves and assist others. Yet, there is evidence that continuity in the content of support at ages in this study should have occurred making a motivational explanation of results more feasible. Brown (1999) has noted that the affection stage of romantic development is marked by these kinds of interactions, which include relational longevity and some level of commitment into the future. Others have claimed that longevity and commitment begin to emerge as early as age 17 (Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke, 2001). Many

adolescent relationships are lengthy with approximately 60% of older teens having relationships of 11 months or longer (Carver et al., 2003). Adolescents this age also have conceptions of romantic relationships that are comparable to adults' conceptions (Levesque, 1993).

Another possibility is that stress, such as relationship dissolution, may be a more common experience in the teens than in the 20s and this stress of romance may cancel out or not outweigh the support provided by romantic partners. Hence, there may be no net impact of support on well-being in the late teen years, but stress may decline with age allowing support to provide benefits in the mid-20s. No studies could be located that have examined this in the late teens and 20s. In a study of younger adolescents, Nieder and Seiffge-Krenke (2001) reported that romantic stress declined from age 14 to 15 and remained stable until age 17. It is uncertain whether this stability is maintained into the 20s. Nevertheless, this seems to be an unlikely explanation for the findings presented in this chapter; negative interactions were measured and there were no association between any measure of socioemotional functioning and negative interactions with romantic partners at age 18 and 20, while these associations were found at age 23. This suggests that conflict becomes more, rather than less, strongly associated with socioemotional functioning with increasing age. Even controlling for relationships with family and friends, romantic relationships are both a source of support and conflict, with the potential to influence well-being by age 23.

## **Future Research and Conclusions**

Overall, study findings show that a range of features of romantic relationships needs to be considered when examining the impact on individual socioemotional functioning. Only a few features of relationships were examined here. There are many other factors to consider in future research including, for example, the characteristics of the other in the relationship, the similarity or difference between partners, the activities that partners share, and expectancies or perceptions about relationships (Collins, 2003). In addition, replication of this study with a larger sample of young females, and studies of males are, of course, necessary. There is some evidence that males may not value close dyadic intimacy as greatly as females (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Eaton, Mitchell & Jolley, 1991; Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1993; Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981). Given these differences, males may have somewhat different motives for romantic relationships or males' motives may follow a different age-related developmental progression than those of females.

In conclusion, romantic relationships are important to middle and late adolescents and deserve our attention (Collins, 2003; Furman et al., 1999), but they may be even more central to the social worlds and have more impact on the socioemotional functioning of emerging adults. In addition, it is useful to take a developmental approach to understanding the important features of interpersonal relationships at any age and to include examinations of how these relationship features are associated with individual development and well-being. Although previous research has shown that there are individual differences in the developmental trajectories of romance (Davies & Windle, 2000; Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999) with some adolescents forming first steady romantic relationships earlier than others or having sexual interactions at earlier or later ages (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006; Siebenbruner, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Egeland, in press; Zimmer-Gembeck & Helfand, 2006),

evidence presented in the current chapter provides some evidence that there are aspects of romantic development that may be fairly common within age periods. Considering this study in combination with previous research suggests that, as argued in Life-span Developmental Theory (Baltes, Reese, & Lipsitt, 1980), age-related patterns of development and individual differences in developmental trajectories may exist simultaneously when studying romantic development and well-being.

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