



# Adolescent relationships: Love

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# Adolescents' romantic relationships research

- Romantic love and adolescence → natural association
- Empirical research → relatively brief history
- Romantic relationships (RR) as a conclusion of social relationships research line: mother/child; father/child; siblings relationships; peer relationships; friendship; romantic relationships.



# Adolescent romantic relationships research has a short history: Why?

- Good research is theoretically driven.
- Main theories of emotional and social development offer relatively poor fit with the realities of the most adolescents' experiences with love and partnership.
- Adolescents' RR are short-term and characterized by transiency and fluidity.



# The importance of studying adolescent romance

- Romance is in the forefront of adolescents' minds.
- Romance is an important content of fantasy and real adolescents' world. Adolescent romance is one of the basic building stones for future partnerships in adulthood.
- Exploring of adolescent romance is inherently connected with other areas – e.g. identity development, self-esteem.



# Research approaches

are focused primarily on:

- previous experiences in close relationships and its formative influences on RR in adolescence
- RR possible consequences and correlates in other areas of psychosocial development
- RR description



# Previous experiences and its formative influences

- Parent-child relationship  
(attachment theory)
- Marital relationship of parents  
(social learning theory)
- Peer relationships and friendship  
(peers as a context for formation of early partnership)



# Romantic relationships – correlates and consequences

- intimacy and identity development
- self-concept
- depressive symptomatology
- risk behavior



# Descriptions studies

The high variability of RR form is the reason of this research approach.

- timing of early RR
- romantic experiences intensity or quantity
- relationships quality
- individual RR representations





# Theories of romantic relationships development in adolescence

■ W. Furman & E. A. Wehner (1997)

■ B. B. Brown (1999)

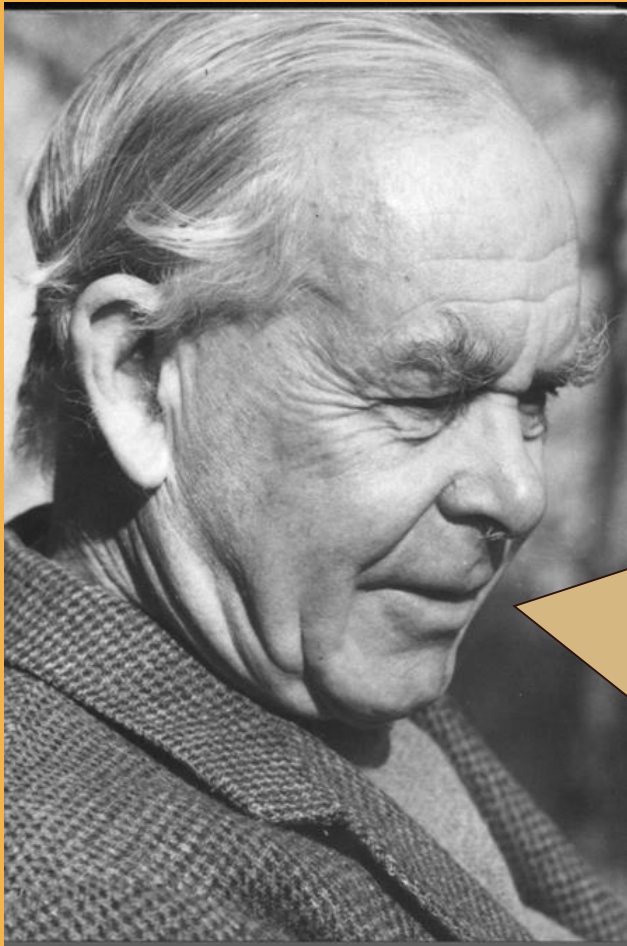


# W. Furman & E. A. Wehner

- characterize RR in adolescence as a gradual emergence of four behavioral systems:
- attachment
- affiliation
- caregiving
- sex/reproduction.



# Interlude - attachment theory



John Bowlby (1969)

„An enduring emotional tie to a special person, characterized by a tendency to seek and maintain closeness, especially during times of stress.“



# Early and middle adolescence



- *Affiliation* prevails in this period.
- *Sex/reproductive* system emerges.
- *Attachment and caregiving* behavioral system is less likely in early and middle adolescence.





# Late adolescence and early adulthood



- *Attachment/caregiving system* is present in late adolescence or early adulthood.
- In early adulthood romantic relationships involve all **four behavioral systems**.



## B. B. Brown (1999)

- emphasizes the **peer context** role for development of RR in adolescence;
- describes **four development stages** characterised by a specific form of mutual partnership of adolescents as well as by peer context, in which romantic activities occur.



# Initiation stage: 11 – 13 years of age

- cca 11 – 13 years of age represents imaginary turning point of social activity of adolescents in peers context
- re-orienting social needs on peers of the opposite sex
- basic goal of this period is to obtain confidence in the own ability to establish romantic relationship and make sure about one's own attractiveness to the opposite sex
- adolescents gradually expand their self-image by the role of self as a potential romantic partner
- romantic activities usually take place with the support of peer groups



## Status stage: 14 – 16 years of age

- growing social pressure from the peer group to have a partner that is positively assessed and accepted by this group
- an inappropriate partner can lower adolescent's social status





# Affectionate stage: 17-20 years of age

- significant change of the meaning of romance
- compared to previous stages relationship with romantic partner has a value in itself (previously, RR was more significant in shaping their own self-image or status in the adolescent peer group)
- adolescents experience deeper feelings of commitment and more frequent sexual activity
- caregiving behavior appears in this stage



## Bonding stage: around 21 years of age

- the relationship depth in all features of the previous stage is preserved and extended by a pragmatic perspective
- there is a common future perspective of partners
- relationship combines attraction, intimacy, mutual caregiving and many times leads to a marriage



# Adolescents and their representation of romantic relationships: ELSPAC

Semistructured interview (at 13, 15 and 17 years) captures:

- representation of the meaning of term “*dating somebody*”.
- the responses were analyzed as a whole, i.e. we examined the occurrence of individual answers belonging to pre-prepared categories within answers to all the following questions:



# Questions

- 1) What do you think dating somebody means?
- 2) In what do you think it can be nice?
- 3) In what do you think it may not be nice?
- 4) Which qualities should your life partner have, what is most important for you?
- 5) Which qualities should he/she not have?
- 6) Are you dating somebody?
- 7) Which qualities do you like about your boyfriend/girlfriend?
- 8) Which qualities do you not like about him/her?



# Categorization and sample

- to categorize adolescents' responses about what "*they think dating somebody means*", above mentioned concept by W. Furman and E. A. Wehner (1997) was adopted
- responses of a sub-sample composed of 96 respondents were analyzed (54% boys; 46% girls), with whom a semi-structured interview was conducted in three waves of data collection (in 13, 15, 17 years) ■



# Description of categories

- *attachment* (e.g. safe place, source of security, trust, support, help with problem-solving);
- *affiliation* (e.g. time spent together, having fun, humor, shared hobbies);
- *physical contact* (e.g. kissing, holding hands, hugging);
- *commitment* (common future, fidelity, declared willingness to make sacrifice for one another, restricting oneself for the benefit of the relationship or the partner).



## Frequency of the categories (in %)

**13 years    15 years    17 years**

Attachment	12.5	66.7	66.7
Affiliation	61.5	68.8	75.0
Physical contact	17.7	22.9	24.0
Commitment	1.0	47.9	55.2



The *developmental trends* of the representation of the meaning of “dating somebody” (in %)

Trend	Attachment	Affiliation	Physical contact	Commitment
Growing	54.2	28.1	15.6	54.2
Declining	0.0	14.6	9.4	0.0
Mixed	21.9	14.6	17.7	17.7
Constant (0)	14.6	5.2	52.1	28.1
Constant (1)	9.4	37.5	5.2	0.0





# Conclusion

- The development of the representation of romantic relationships in the period between early and late adolescence stemming from the description of individual trends in the frequency of categories that adolescents use to delineate it is in accordance with the above-mentioned theoretical conceptions by W. Furman & E. A. Wehner (1997) and B. B. Brown (1999).

