



# Association of Adolescent Gender Typed Communication Style on Adult Romantic Relationships

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## INTRODUCTION

- Studies have found youths tend to socialize and converse with their same-gendered peers over those of the opposite sex (Xiao 2018).
- Boys tend to be more controlling and less collaborative with peers, whereas girls tend to express more self-disclosure, intimacy, and agreement (Hall 2010, Rose and Rudolph 2006).
- It has been theorized that this difference in communication styles between males and females may lead to conflict in romantic relationships (Maccoby 1990).
- In the present study, communication and personality variables are assessed in adolescence; some are expected to be higher in boys (masculinity, controlling statements), some higher in girls (femininity, unmitigated communion, collaborating and obliging statements) and some gender neutral (informing statements, affiliative off-topic statements)
- The present study will investigate how adolescents' characteristics relate to feelings of comfort and influence in both conflict and decision making with a romantic partner as adults.
- A large body of literature indicates healthy heterosexual romantic relationships, especially marriage, are related to increased psychological health (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005).

## HYPOTHESES

**Hypothesis 1:** Gender differences in the present study will replicate those found in past research

**Hypothesis 2:** Gender-typed female adolescents (e.g., high on femininity, obliging) will experience the least comfort/influence in conflict and decision making with a male romantic partner; whereas female adolescents who are less gender-typed (e.g., high on masculinity) will experience the most comfort/influence

**Hypothesis 3:** In contrast, gender-typed male adolescents (e.g., high on masculinity) will experience the most comfort/influence in conflict and decision making with a female romantic partner, whereas less gender typed male adolescents (e.g., high on obliging) would experience the least comfort/influence

## METHODS

- Participants are 151 individuals who participated in a research study as adolescents (7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade) in 2007-2009 and again as young adults (in their 20s) and are now in romantic relationships

	92 females	55 males
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>EA: 62.8%</b>	<b>AA: 29.2% Other: 8%</b>

### Adolescent Assessment: Observation

- During MU laboratory visit, adolescents completed questionnaires and an observed joint-decision making task in which they planned a party.
- The transcript was separated into thought units; each thought unit was coded as Collaborate, Inform, Oblige, or Control (Leaper et al., 1999).
- Scores were given for number of thought units of each type they produced

### Adolescent Assessment: Questionnaires

**Gender role orientation.** Participants responded to the 30-item (10 masculine, 10 feminine, and 10 neutral) Children's Sex Role Inventory- Short Form (Boldizar, 1991). Each participant was given a score for masculinity and femininity based on the means of the items.

**Unmitigated Communion.** Participants responded to a 9-item scale and indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each item on a 5-point scale (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). This questionnaire gauges to what extent they place others' needs before one's own and their distress over concern for others.

### Adult Assessment: Online Survey

**Communication style.** Participants responded to 4 items. The items assessed felt comfort and influence both during conflict with romantic partner and during decision making with romantic partner. Items were rated on five-point Likert scales

## RESULTS

**Gender difference:** *T-tests* were performed to determine whether males and females differed in study variables. Of the twelve *t*-tests, two were significant. In adolescence, females scored higher than males for *femininity*,  $t(147) = 6.32$ ,  $p < .001$  (females = 3.23; males = 2.71), and *unmitigated communion*,  $t(147) = 4.123$ ,  $p < .001$  (females = 3.47, males = 3.07).

### Relations between adolescents' variables and comfort / influence in adult romantic relationships:

#### Analyses for females:

Females higher on *masculinity* as adolescents were *more comfortable* in conflict situations with a romantic partner as adults,  $r = .23$ ,  $p = .03$ .

#### Analyses for males (see Table 4):

Males who produced more *obliging thought units* as adolescents felt *less influential* in decision making situations and in conflict situations as adults.

Males who produced more *informative thought units* felt *less comfortable* in decision making situations and felt *less comfortable and less influential* in decision making situations

Males who produced more *affiliative/ off-task thought units* felt *more influential* in conflict.

Table 4  
Correlations for Males

	N	Comfort in Decision Making	Influence in Decision Making	Comfort in Conflict	Influence in Conflict
Masculinity	55	.15	.03	-.03	.19
Femininity	55	.04	-.03	-.07	-.03
Unmitigated Communication	55	-.01	-.16	-.26	-.19
Control	50	.01	.11	.00	.05
Affiliative/ Off-task	50	.04	.15	.20	.31*
Oblige	50	-.19	-.32*	-.16	-.35*
Inform	50	-.35*	-.17	-.28*	-.28*

Note. \* $p < .05$ .

## DISCUSSION

**Hypothesis 1: Partially supported** – As expected, women scored higher on femininity and unmitigated communication. Other gender differences, such as masculinity scores and communication style, were not observed, possibly due to small sample size.

**Hypothesis 2: partially supported** – Consistent with hypotheses, females who were less sex typed (i.e., high on masculinity) were more comfortable in conflict. There were no other significant relations.

### Hypothesis 3: partially supported –

- Fitting with the hypothesis, men who engaged in more *obliging thought units* felt less influential with a romantic partner.
- The other effects, males who engaged in more informative talk felling less comfort and influence and males who engaged in more off-talk felling increased influence in conflict, were unexpected and warrant further investigation

**Limitations:** Sample size is small as not all adolescent participants have completed the questionnaire. This may account for the few significant gender differences. The relations should be examined again when more data are available.

**Implications** Given previous research on the benefits of romantic relationships, it is important to know how individuals' characteristics are associated with comfort and influence in these relationships. The current findings suggest that personality characteristics and communication style in adolescence are associated with comfort and influence in these relationships om adulthood.

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