

# COMMUNICATION WITHDRAWAL IN ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the widely-held notion that communication is essential to the maintenance of adult romantic relationships, few studies have tested whether communication is similarly important to adjustment in the romantic relationships of adolescents. It was hypothesized that because these early relationships are typically shorter and less committed than those of young adults that withdrawing from communication (e.g. becoming silent during a conflict, withholding grievances from partners, responding to partners in perfunctory ways) would contribute less to romantic relationship adjustment in adolescence. Samples of 26 adolescent couples ( $N = 52$ ) and 60 young adult couples ( $N = 120$ ) were recruited to examine withdrawal in late adolescent and young adult romantic relationships. A mixed-method design was employed whereby partners each provided self-report data on withdrawal in general and immediately following a laboratory task designed to examine relationship conflict in “real-time” that was later observationally coded. In addition, self-report measures were developed and administered to both partners in order to assess various reasons why partners might withdraw from communication (e.g., avoid getting hurt, protect the relationship, maintain privacy). No age differences in communication withdrawal emerged; however, several age differences, as well as gender differences, did emerge in the motives individuals cited for why they withdrew from their partners. Although it was hypothesized that withdrawing from communication would be more damaging to the

relationships of young adults, withdrawal was linked to poor relationship adjustment regardless of age, suggesting that communication is an important factor to consider in adolescent romantic relationships.