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Intimate opposition: Perceived closeness as a moderator of the impact of third-party opposition on romantic relationships

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Research has examined how third parties (e.g. parent-child relationships and peer relationships) affect the quality of romantic relationships. For instance, a pair of studies investigated the "Romeo & Juliet effect," to see whether parental disapproval of a child's romantic partner results in pushing the child closer to his/her love interest. A study by Driscoll & colleagues (1972) found that feelings of romantic love were intensified by parental disapproval. Yet, a more recent study by Sprecher & Feilmlee (1992) found the complete opposite results, finding that romantic relationships without social support were likely to fail. Neither of these studies, however, examined how closeness with a disapproving friend or parent might moderate the effects of their disapproval. For example, if an adolescent did not feel close to his/her parent - as was the case in the story of Romeo and Juliet - s/he might be less likely to yield to his/her parent's opinion and might instead be driven to rebel against it. Consequently, we examined whether the impact of a disapproving party's opinion depends upon the closeness between the disapproving party and the adolescent in the romantic relationship. To examine the role of closeness, participants completed a survey asking about the degree of disapproval from friends and family, as well as degree of closeness to friend, family member and romantic partner. We found that degree of parental disapproval did negatively affect relationship closeness and love for partner, and that this effect was strengthened the closer the participant reported being to their parent.