



# The Association Between Parental Proximity and Young Adults' Future Romantic Pursuits



Zoe Bogan, Quantitative Analysis Center, Wesleyan University

## Introduction

- According to attachment theory, children form emotional bonds with their caregivers in order to protect against potential threats and harm and to regulate negative emotions following threatening or harmful events
- Unstable parent-child relationships lead to varying levels of instability in the child's romantic relationships, and overall mental health and social stability, as an adult.
- Most research on this topic has focused on how the parenting styles a parent employs when interacting with their child has a direct correlation on a child's trust and feelings of "closeness" to their significant other.
- However, there has been little work done determining whether or not feeling close to one's parents leads to a more positive romantic relationship in the future. Nor is it known whether or not they are able to form more positive relationships, in terms of being able to get married or not based on the level of closeness and openness they feel they have with their parents.

## Methods

### Sample

- The data included 20,000 adolescents in grades 7-12 during the 1994-1995 school year, as well as their parents, over five waves until the most recent collection in 2016-2018.
- The samples were drawn from the U.S. National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health) represent the demographic, social, familial, socioeconomic, behavioral, psychosocial, cognitive, and health survey data

### Measures

- Lifetime psychiatric disorders were assessed using the NIAAA, Alcohol Use Disorder and Associated Disabilities Interview Schedule – DSM-IV (AUDADIS-IV).
- The tobacco module includes questions on symptom criteria for DSM-IV nicotine dependence.
- Current smoking was evaluated through quantity ("On the days that you smoked in the last year, about how many cigarettes did you usually smoke?").

## Research Questions

- What is the level of significance of the relationship between one's proximity to their parent's as a child and their ability to feel vulnerable enough with their significant other to commit to them in marriage?
- Does the gender of the child being observed affect their ability to feel proximate to their parents and therefore their ability to attach to their future significant other properly?

## Results

### Univariate

- 51% of the participants were committed in marriage
- 31% of the participants felt a medium amount of proximity to their parents. While 30% felt a high level of proximity and 16% felt a low amount.

### Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that adolescents with a closer proximity to their parents were significantly more likely to commit to their partner in marriage, **young adolescents with a closer proximity to their parents were significantly more likely to commit to their partner in marriage (64%)** than those with a lower level of proximity.
- As expected, the **number of people who were married** was significantly associated with **their level of proximity to their parents during adolescence.**

### Multivariate

- The level of closeness one felt with their parent (Parental Proximity), the relationship they held with their parent (Parent Relationship), and the gender of the participant (Sex) were each associated with Marriage after controlling for gender.
- At each level of proximity, the probability of the participants being committed in marriage is significantly higher among the males than the females (Figure 1).

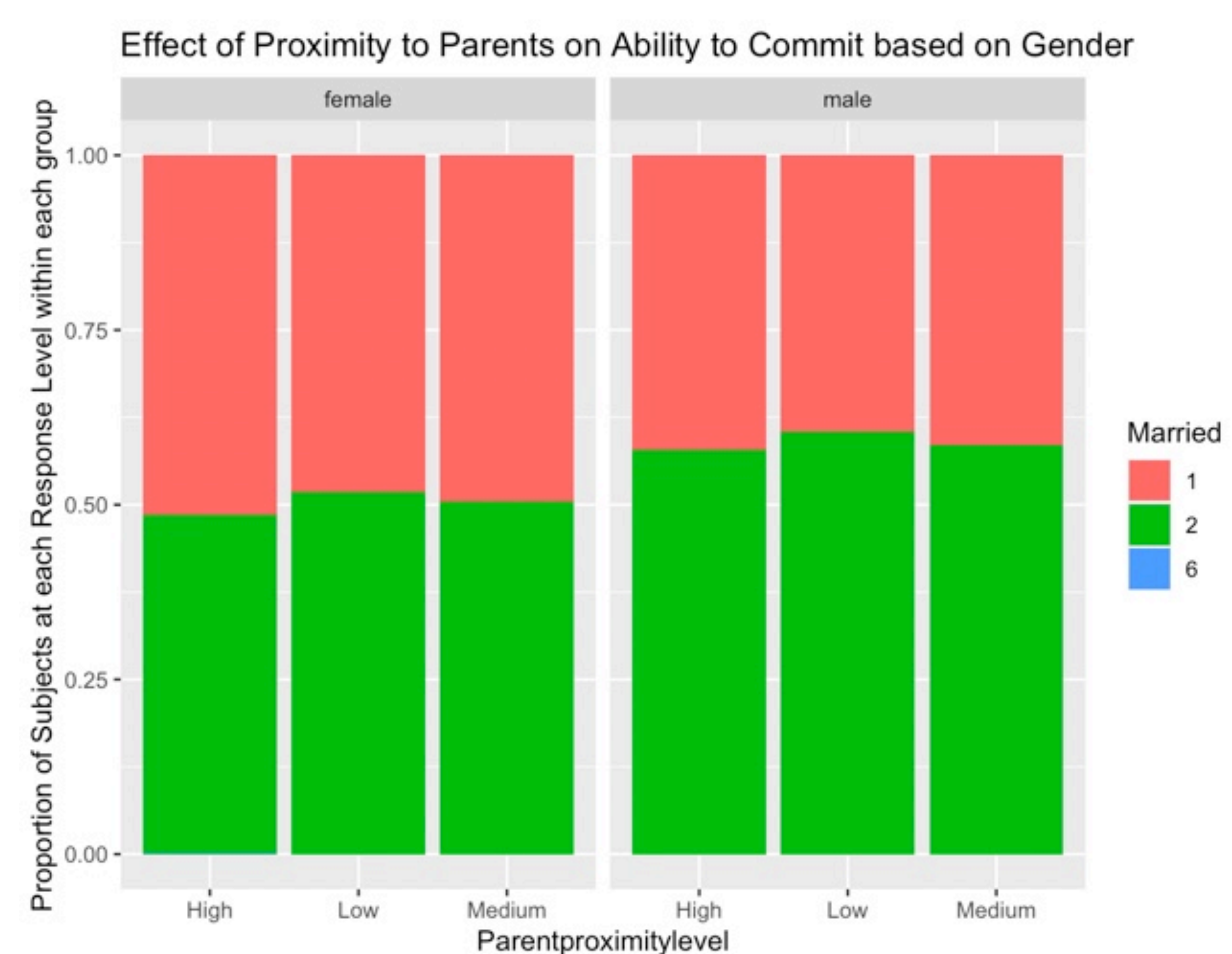


Figure 1. Effect of Proximity to Parents on Ability to Commit based on Gender

- At lower levels of smoking, individuals with alcohol dependence have substantially elevated rates of nicotine dependence compared to those without alcohol dependence.
- At highest levels of use (30+ cigarettes/day), rates of nicotine dependence are statistically similar for those with and without alcohol dependence.

## Discussion

- Individuals with closer relationships to their parents may be more likely to develop more intimate romantic relationships in their adult years.
- Males are more likely to feel more committed to their partner when they felt more proximate to their parents than females are.
- Notably, the present findings are based on longitudinal data and do not reflect all the possible results because the participants are not at an age where the data needed would be relevant.
- Further research is needed to determine whether or not children form more comfortable relationships with parents of intact or divorced families. Or if they are able to form more positive relationships in terms of the specificity of the parent-child relationship (i.e. closeness)

American Psychological Association. "Marriage and Divorce." *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, www.apa.org/topics/divorce-child-custody.

Alm, Susanne, et al. "Poor Family Relationships in Adolescence and the Risk of Premature Death: Findings from the Stockholm Birth Cohort Study." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, MDPI, 14 May 2019, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6571769/.

Del Toro, Monica. "The Influence of Parent-Child Attachment on Romantic Relationships." *Scholarworks Boise State*, Psychology Department of Boise State, scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1105&context=menair\_journal.

"Early Family Experience Affects Later Romantic Relationships." *National Institutes of Health*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 14 Aug. 2018, www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/early-family-experience-affects-later-romantic-relationships.

Santona, Alessandra, et al. "The Mediating Role of Romantic Attachment in the Relationship Between Attachment to Parents and Aggression." *Frontiers*, Frontiers, 23 July 2019, www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01824/full.