Problem Talk in Adolescents’ Friendships: Implications for Girls’ and Boys’ Emotional Well-Being and Future Romantic Relationships

By adolescence, friends are primary companions and important sources of social support in the lives of youth. Friendships are critical to the development of both girls and boys; however, there are important gender differences in adolescents’ friendships. One of the strongest differences is that girls tend to talk with friends, especially about problems, more than do boys. Girls also tend to talk with friends in ways that are especially sensitive and responsive. What are the implications of these gender differences?

In terms of the quality and closeness of the friendships, if boys behave more like girls (talking about problems more, and in a more sensitive and responsive manner), would this benefit boys’ friendships? Or might there be understudied pathways to friendship quality and closeness that are unique to boys? Regarding emotional adjustment, does seeking support and talking about problems always contribute to positive emotional adjustment? Or are there ways of talking about problems that can actually undermine emotional well-being and contribute to depressive symptoms? And how do young men and women feel about disclosing problems in the context of their romantic relationships?