

Specifics of Closeness at Various Age Stages of Adulthood in the Contemporary World

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Abstract

Introduction. The article discusses the acute problem of researching the specifics of close relationships between men and women at different ages. Changes in living space and context, as a sociocultural factor, affect the quality and dynamics of close relationships. However, relationships with the significant Other throughout a person's life are the most important resource for development, a factor in psychological well-being and a condition for socialization. The authors focus on dynamic changes in the parameters of close relationships, resulting from internal processes that take place against the backdrop of unprecedented changes in the modern world. The academic originality of the study lies in identifying the specifics of close relationships at different stages of adulthood. **Methods.** The sample included 558 adults aged 18 to 65 years (288 women, 270 men) of different age categories. The design of the study included the collection of socio-biographical information about the respondents; self-assessment of the degree of closeness and relationship problems; standardized methods to verify the main categorical features of close relationships. **Results.** In adolescence, avoidance of closeness is well seen. In early maturity, sexual, recreational, intellectual types of closeness with a partner are most pronounced, relationships are characterized by a high degree of involvement, positive emotional colouring, and are a resource for coping with the high uncertainty of the future and the stressfulness of the present. In the period of middle maturity, flexible coping develops, relationships are characterized by emotional ambivalence. At the stage of late maturity, relationships become more predictable, the importance of sexual closeness decreases, trust and mutual support come to the fore, and a high level of life

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satisfaction is achieved. **Discussion.** Age in adulthood predicts a decrease in indicators of sexual, intellectual, recreational closeness in relationships with a partner and an increase in indicators of social closeness, life satisfaction, and coping rigidity. Gender differences in the severity of the parameters of close relationships, characteristic of adolescence and youth, are levelled by the time of late maturity. It is concluded that there are age and gender differences in close relationships at different stages of adulthood.

Keywords

adulthood, age-related tasks, close relationships, type of closeness, socialization, attachment, emotional experiences, involvement, resourcefulness, support, coping behaviour

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Introduction

Close relationships play a significant evolutionary role, are the most important resource for development and a key condition for human socialization throughout life, contribute to maintaining the integrity of the individual in a complex highly uncertain world, support individual and dyadic well-being, and maintain physical and psychological health (Laursen & Bukowski, 1997; Collins & Laursen, 1999).

The importance of close relationships becomes especially relevant in the context of new contemporary challenges, alarming everyday life and unprecedented uncertainty of the future (Li et al., 2021; Xiang et al., 2022). The natural shifting of norms, the emergence of new functionality and dysfunction are clearly represented in close relationships. This results from the fact that in the situation of a "linear life route" loss, a stable sociocultural context, as well as the "fluid" nature of many communities and social groups, modern people are forced to seek and construct their identity in more or less stable and unambiguously interpretable social contacts and connections, labelled with such

concepts as "trust", "love", "attachment", etc. This is the key socializing function of close relationships (including family) in modern society.

In recent decades, an ambivalent process has been observed in the study of close relationships. On the one hand, there is an active processing of the accumulated theoretical and empirical material that clarifies the phenomenology and typology of close relationships (Gruzdev, Ekimchik & Ershov, 2020). On the other hand, against the background of the structural complexity of the phenomenon and the active change in sociocultural contexts, it is difficult to study the age-dynamic characteristics of close relationships and their role in solving age-related problems and implementing life strategies.

We consider close relations as a type of interpersonal relationships, as significant, selective relationships between subjects aimed at satisfying the need for love and belonging, based on affiliate feelings and affection for a partner, characterized by closeness, informality, significance, long-term existence, emotional depth (Saporovskaya et al., 2021). Close relationships are stable over time (Berscheid, Snyder & Omoto, 1989). At the same time, they are extremely dynamic due to changes in the links between the structural components and the impact of the sociocultural factor throughout the lifetime of individuals. In ontogenesis, the range of relationships that are defined as close expands, their content changes. In childhood, close relationships are usually established with family members; in adolescence and youth, relationships with friends and romantic partners dominate; at more mature ages - marital, "ideological" sense-forming and supportive relationships. It should be noted that the nature of close relationships in adolescence and early adulthood has been studied most (Shulman, 1993; Adams, Laursen & Wilder, 2001; Giordano, 2003; Morosan et al., 2022). There are extremely few works devoted to the study of close relationships at different stages of adulthood, which is the longest and most productive period of life. At the same time, the developmental structure in adulthood is "significantly more complex than any homogeneous and unidirectional structure of periods of maturation and aging" (Ananiev, 2001, p. 352). The effect of heterochrony law is enhanced; development is, to a greater extent, determined by the subjective position of a person, the processes of self-consciousness, reflection, solving life problems (Golove & Manukyan, 2003).

According to the epigenetic concept by E. Erickson, at the adult stages of the life path, a person solves bipolar age-related tasks, each of which is directly related to the formation of identity and the quality of established close relationships (Erickson, 1996). With regard to the middle age, D. Levinson (the study was conducted on a male sample) expands the list of age-related tasks, considering attachment/separation, destructiveness/creation; masculinity/femininity, youth/old age. The author notes that both poles of polarity coexist within one "I" (Levinson, 1979) and colour the relationships established with partners. L. Wrightsman completes the list of "dialectical unresolved issues" that require a person to self-determine in the sphere of close relationships during adulthood (Wrightsman, 1994). In addition, R. Havinghurst defines the developmental tasks in adult life that are directly

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related to the implementation of the main types of close relationships: educate children, help them grow up as happy people who are able to take responsibility (child-parent relationships in the position of a parent); choose a spouse, establish relations with him/her (marital relationship); separate from parents, adapt to the life of aging parents (child-parent relationship in the position of a child); find a congenial social group (friendships) (Havighurst, 1972). In this paper, we limit the perspective of considering close relationships only to intergenerational relationships, without considering the intergenerational aspect (child-parent relationships).

On the one hand, the nature of close relationships that a person has developed by a certain age is the most important resource for effectively solving age-related developmental problems, since relationships with "close" people provide emotional support, mitigate the consequences of stressful events, help structure time and ensure social and role continuity. In particular, intergenerational close relationships promote understanding of life, shared experiences, and enable faster and easier adaptation to changing life contexts (Allen, Blieszner & Roberto, 2000). On the other hand, the individual way and nature of a person's solution of bipolar age-related tasks determine the quality of close relationships in which he is included at a given age stage. Parameters such as the degree of attachment, closeness, involvement, the specifics of emotional experiences, psychological distance, value-semantic unity, trust, empathy, which are invariant categorical features of close relationships (Saporovskaya et al., 2021), are largely determined by the way there is a formation of a person's identity (closeness/isolation, productivity/self-absorption, attachment/separation, destructiveness/creation, etc.).

Nowadays, there are several models that describe the dynamics of close relationships during adulthood: the equilibrium model of maintaining relationships (Murray, Holmes, Griffin & Derrick, 2015); the functional model (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008; Murray et al., 2013); the model based on emotional dynamics in intimate and close relationships (Schoebi & Randall, 2015). The meta-analytic review on relationship dynamics contains fragmentary studies aimed at studying the predictors of the development of relationships and maintaining their qualitative parameters. Thus, psychological flexibility (Twiselton, Stanton, Gillanders & Bottomley, 2020), empathy and empathic accuracy (Ickes & Hodges, 2013), the degree of consistency between the ideal idea of relationships and their real implementation (Fletcher, 2000) are considered as relationship-satisfaction factors. Variables such as devotion, sexuality, passion, coping behaviour (including dyadic behaviour) also play a large role (Shaver & Miculincer, 2002; Li & Chan, 2012).

As far as the transformation of close relationships in an adult couple (in the long term and in a favourable scenario) is concerned, such dynamic features are noted as a tendency to increase similarity in a couple over time, including in the area of sharing values and interests (Tobore, 2020; Schul & Vinokur, 2000; Davis & Rusbult, 2001), striving for togetherness and coexistence, maintaining mutual attraction (Sprecher, Christopher & Cate, 2006); moving from a model of closeness based on passion to a model based on friendships, shared interests, mutual respect and concern for each other's well-being

(Grote & Frieze, 1994); decreased sexual desire and emotional attachment (Freud & Rieff, 1997; Sprecher et al., 2006; Berscheid et al., 2010), increased social closeness (Seshadri, 2016).

Thus, the following questions remain relevant in psychological discourse: Is there a specificity of close relationships at different stages of adulthood (from 18 to 65 years)? How do the main categorical signs of close relationships change at different stages of adulthood? Are there gender differences in close relationships at different stages of adulthood?

These problematic issues have determined the purpose of the study – to identify the specifics of close relationships in men and women at different stages of adulthood.

Methods

Sample

The study involved 558 people, including 288 women from 18 to 65 years old, $M = 31.28$, $SD = 11.88$; 270 men aged 18 to 64, $M = 32.46$, $SD = 12.62$. The male and female samples were unrelated, the respondents were not in a marital or romantic relationship with each other. Four research groups were formed based on the epigenetic concept of E. Erickson, taking into account the adjustments made to the age boundaries of the stages of adulthood by a team of scientists led by G. E. Vaillant (Malone, Liu, Vaillant, Rentz & Waldinger, 2016). The first group included adolescent respondents from 18 to 20 years old, on the verge of adulthood ($N = 129$; $M = 18.85$; $SD = 0.94$), 71 of which were women and 58 were men. The second group included young people (stage of early maturity) from 21 to 25 years old ($N = 130$; $M = 22.97$; $SD = 1.58$), 69 women and 61 men. The third included adults at the stage of middle maturity from 26 to 40 years ($N = 159$; $M = 31.45$; $SD = 4.75$), 77 women and 82 men. The fourth - adults at the stage of late maturity from 41 to 65 years ($N = 140$; $M = 47.61$; $SD = 5.82$), 72 women and 68 men. All respondents are in a relationship. Relationship length is directly related to the age of the respondents ($R = 0.82^{**}$).

Data collection was carried out from May to November 2022, during a period of high social tension associated with the start of a special military operation, partial mobilization in Russia, and dramatization of people's consciousness. The study was based on the principles of voluntariness, environmental friendliness, anonymity and confidentiality.

Study design

At the **first** stage, the researchers collected of socio-biographical information about the respondents was: gender; the occupation of the respondent and the partner; duration of relationship with a partner; the nature of the relationship with the partner (married residence, residence without marriage registration, periodic meetings, etc.); the presence

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of joint / non-joint children, their gender and age; family members living in the same territory as the respondent; close people who need special care and living in the same household. To expand the explanatory possibilities of the methodological complex, parameters for self-assessment in relationships were outlined: how happy they are in a relationship, the degree of closeness with a partner, affection for a partner, trust, positive colouring of feelings, manifestations of violence from a partner, psychological distance, interest/involvement, mutual support, resourcefulness - how relationships help to cope with stress, build relationships with other people, are a support in life, stimulate self-development. The assessment was based on a ten-point Likert scale.

Standardized methods that enabled verifying the basic empirical referents - categorical signs of close relationships, were selected according to their reliability, predictive value, adequacy to the levels of closeness analysis: cognitive (understanding, assessment of close relationships), affective (affiliate emotions and feelings), behavioural and regulatory (coping difficulties that arise in close relationships and resources that contribute to their constructive overcoming).

The methodological complex included:

- Method of Mark T. Schaefer, David H. Olson PAIR "Personal assessment of closeness in relationships" (Schaefer & Olson, 1981), primary testing of the Russian version by E. V. Tikhomirova, O. A. Ekimchik, 2021, diagnosing emotional, social, sexual, intellectual, recreational closeness;
- "Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Adult Attachment questionnaire" method by K. Brennan and R. K. Frehley, adapted by T. V. Kazantseva to assess the type of attachment, level of anxiety, avoidance in loved ones relations (Kazantseva, 2008);
- Methodology "Self-assessment of the generalized type of attachment" ("RQ") by K. Bartholomew, L. Horowitz, 1991, adapted by T. V. Kazantseva, which reveals the dominant type of attachment in close relationships ("reliable", "over-involved", "avoidant", "fearful") (Kazantseva, 2011);
- Evaluation of the affective component of closeness was made on the basis of the concept of K. E. Izard, where respondents assessed their feelings towards a partner on a five-point Likert scale;
- E. Diener's Life Satisfaction Method, adapted by E. Osin, D. Leontiev, to assess the subjective well-being of a person (Osin & Leontiev, 2020);
- "Trust Scale" (TS) J. K. Rempel, J. G. Holmes, M. R. Zanna, 1985) adapted by N. O. Belorukova to determine the degree of trust in close relationships (faith, reliability and predictability) (Belorukova, 2008);
- The self-perception of flexible coping with stress questionnaire (M. J. Zimmer-Gembeck, E. A. Skinner et al. (2018), adapted by T. L. Kryukova, O. A. Ekimchik, which detects multiple, rigid and situational coping (Ekimchik & Kryukova, 2020).

Statistical processing of empirical data was done with the SPSS Statistics V.19.0 software. Spearman's correlation analysis was carried out to identify the interrelationships of variables; in order to assess the significance of differences the Kruskal-Wallis test and the Mann-Whitney U-test was administered; to identify the predictive load of age – the linear regression analysis; free statements of the respondents were processed by ranking.

Results

The analysis of the structure of invariant categorical features and their correlations, i.e. indicators of close relationships with the age of respondents in the total sample (Table 1), showed that the most age-related categories are all types of perceived closeness with a partner, life satisfaction of subjects in close relationships, emotions and feelings that fill close relationships. The over-involved type of attachment to a partner and rigid coping are also found to be associated with age. The variables "trust", anxiety and avoidance of closeness in relationships were found not to be associated with age.

Table 1

Correlation analysis results (N = 558)

Variables related to the age of the respondents	Age of respondents
	R-Spearman test values
<u>Scales of standardized methods</u>	
Sexual type of closeness	-0.26*
Intellectual Closeness type	-0.15*
Recreational closeness type	-0.27**
Social type of closeness	0.17*
Emotional type of closeness	-0.19*
Social desirability in closeness assessment	-0.12**
Attachment style B (over-involved)	-0.16*
Satisfaction with life	0.19**
Rigid coping	0.12*

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Variables related to the age of the respondents	Age of respondents
	R-Spearman test values
<u>Self-esteem scales</u>	
The level of happiness in close relationships with a partner	-0.11*
The degree of attachment to a romantic partner / spouse	-0.19*
The degree of manifestation of positive feelings and emotions in relationships that contribute to closeness	-0.13*
Joy	-0.11*
Surprise	-0.12**
Contempt / haughtiness	0.11*
Interest / attentiveness	-0.15*
Physical abuse by a partner	-0.16*
Relationships with a partner as a resource for building relationships with other people	0.18*

Note: * – significance of differences $p \leq 0.05$; ** – significance of differences $p \leq 0.01$.

To identify the predictive load of age, a linear regression analysis was performed, where age was an independent variable (Table 2).

Table 2

Results of linear regression analysis. The independent variable is the age of the respondents. The dependent variable– close relationship variables (N = 558)

Variables related to the age of the respondents	Age of the respondents	
	Value of criterion β	Significance level
<u>Scales of standardized methods</u>		
Sexual type of closeness	- 0.26	0.00
Intelligent closeness type	- 0.15	0.03
Recreational closeness type	- 0.27	0.00
Social type of closeness	0.17	0.03

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Variables related to the age of the respondents	Age of the respondents	
	Value of criterion β	Significance level
Social desirability in closeness assessment	- 0.12	0.01
Attachment style B (over-involved)	-0.1	0.04
Satisfaction with life	0.17	0.00
Rigid coping	0.12	0.01

It was found that age predicts an increase in social closeness between partners, an increase in life satisfaction, and coping rigidity. At the same time, age predicts a decrease in indicators of social desirability in assessing proximity, that is, with age, the objectivity and realism of assessing a partner and relationships with him increases, and the over-involved type of attachment weakens, that is, a certain level of personal autonomy is achieved. This occurs against the backdrop of a weakening of sexual, intellectual and recreational closeness between partners.

To identify differences in the parameters of close relationships between groups of respondents of different age categories, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used (Table 3).

Table 3

Results of a comparative analysis of close relationship variables with the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test for different age groups

Variables	Average ranges				Chi-square	Significance level
	18-20 years old	21-25 years old	26-40 years old	41-65 years old		
Sexual type of closeness	266.6	282.5	255	211.1	17.69	0.00
Intellectual type of closeness	250.6	296.5	244.3	227.1	11.92	0.02

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	Average ranges				Chi-square	Significance level
Recreational type of closeness	275.7	295	244.3	204.5	26.45	0.00
Closeness avoidance scale	251.3	201.3	257.5	262.2	15.96	0.00
Predictability	238	276.8	239	251.6	9.44	0.05
Satisfaction with life	224.3	216.9	262.3	265.3	16.62	0.00
Surprise	265.4	271.6	254.1	218	12.38	0,02
Contempt	232	228.7	255.8	266.2	9.87	0.04
Mutual support	250.9	292	242.5	229.5	13.3	0.01
Relationship as a life support	225	295.1	247.7	246.1	14.86	0.01
Relationship as a resource to overcome stress	252.1	288.3	242.8	230.6	10.32	0.04
Involvement	249	300.9	246.7	224.2	13.97	0.00

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	Average ranges				Chi-square	Significance level
Positive feelings contributing to closeness	255.5	285.1	248	223.6	10.5	0.03
Trust	241.8	286.9	251.2	230.3	11.79	0.02
Attachment level	258.1	295.5	242.7	223.8	12.75	0.01
Closeness level	246.5	291.3	247.3	229.8	10	0.04

Reliably significant differences in the four age groups were obtained for a number of indicators. Thus, out of five types of closeness, differences are fixed in three: sexual, intellectual, recreational. There are no significant differences in emotional and social types. In addition, a significant change in indicators by age is typical for the parameters "avoidance of closeness", "life satisfaction", their highest values are observed in the age group from 41 to 65 years. Interestingly, "predictability", which emphasizes the consistency of the partner's behaviour with the previous experience of interaction with him, takes the highest values in young people (from 21 to 25 years old). In this age group, the subjective assessment of "degree of closeness with a partner", "attachment to a partner", "happiness", "positive feelings contributing to closeness", "involvement", "relationship as a resource", "trust", "mutual support" prevail.

The results of a pairwise sequential comparative analysis of the parameters of close relationships according to the Mann-Whitney U test are presented in Tables 4-6.

Table 4
Significant differences in levels of close relationships in adolescence and early adulthood

Variables	Average range of Group 1 (18-20 years old)	Average range of Group 2 (21-25 years old)	U-criterion	p-level of significance
Intellectual type of closeness	91.37	109.67	3401.5	0.032
Closeness avoidance	104.15	84.31	3335	0.019

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Variables	Average range of Group 1 (18-20 years old)	Average range of Group 2 (21-25 years old)	U-criterion	p-level of significance
Closeness level	91.95	108.51	3477	0.04
Trust level	91.84	108,73	3462.5	0.04
Involvement	90.57	111.26	3298	0.013
Relationship as a life support	88.8	114.76	3070.5	0.002
Relationships with a partner as a resource for building relationships with other people	90.6	111.19	3302.5	0.015
Relationship as a joint effort to solve problems	91.62	109.18	3433.5	0.035

In the period from 18 to 20 years old, against the background of lower indicators of trust and involvement in relationships, the indicators of avoidance of closeness are significantly higher than in the period from 21 to 25 years old (Table 4). In the period up to 20 years old, relationships are viewed to a lesser extent as a support, as a resource for building a significant social network and solving difficult life situations. By types of closeness, significant differences were revealed only in the intellectual type, emotional, recreational, sexual and social types of closeness in these age groups do not differ.

Table 5
Significant differences in levels of close relationships in early and middle maturity

Variables	Average range of Group 2 (21-25 years old)	Average range of Group 3 (26-40 years old)	U-criterion	p-level of significance
Intellectual type of closeness	128.85	105.81	4104.5	0.015
Emotional type of closeness	128.03	106.15	4158	0.021
Recreational type of closeness	128.6	105.9	4121	0.017
Avoidance of closeness	93.97	120.08	3963	0.006
Life satisfaction	98.08	118.4	4230	0.033
Toxicity in relationship	125.09	107.35	4349	0.039
Closeness level	126.61	106.73	4250.5	0.01
Psychological distance in relationship	126.62	106.73	4249.5	0.033
Involvement	129.42	105.58	4068	0.01
Relationship as a life support	128.08	106.13	4155	0.016
Attachment	129.56	105.53	4058.5	0.01
Relationship as a mechanism of coping with stress	127.25	106.47	4209	0.025
Mutual support	128.8	105.84	4108	0.013

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When comparing the data of the age groups, significant differences were revealed in three types of closeness, namely intellectual, emotional and recreational, which prevail in the period of youth. In middle maturity, as well as in adolescence, the value of the "avoidance of proximity" indicator is higher, thus, signs of cyclical dynamics are seen. In the period of youth, there is a certain ambivalence: on the one hand, the values for "attachment in relations with a partner", "resourcefulness of relations" (relationships help to cope with stress), "partner involvement", "mutual support" are higher, on the other hand, the indicator "relationship toxicity" (Table 5) also increases.

Table 6
Significant differences in levels of close relationships in middle and late maturity

Variables	Average range of Group 3 (26-40 years old)	Average range of Group 4 (41-65 years old)	U-criterion	p-level of significance
Sexual type of closeness	162.5	135.81	9143	0.008
Recreational type of closeness	160.99	137.52	9383	0.019
Interest/ attentiveness	159.4	139.33	9636	0.037
Surprise/ Amazement	159.9	138.76	9556.5	0.029
Anger/Irritation	161.74	136.67	9264	0.008
Rigid coping	139.69	161.71	9490	0.028

Comparing the periods of middle (from 26 to 40 years) and late maturity (from 41 to 65 years), the authors revealed the least significant differences in the characteristics of close relationships (Table 6). Thus, significant differences exist in sexual and recreational types of closeness with a partner towards their weakening in the period of late maturity against the background of a partial loss of interest in a partner and a decrease in the flexibility of coping with stress.

It should be noted that all other variations of the groups were also subject to a comparative analysis. The smallest number of differences was found between indicators of close relationships in the age periods from 17 to 20 years old - group 1 and from 26 to 40 years old - group 3: an indicator of happiness in relationships with a predominance in youth ($U = 8899.5$, $p = 0.04$), life satisfaction with a predominance in the period of middle maturity ($U = 8683$, $p = 0.03$). The largest number of differences was registered between groups 2 (from 21 to 25 years old) and 4 (from 41 to 65 years old) with a predominance of indicators of attachment, trust in a partner, involvement in relationships, resourcefulness of relationships and closeness in the period of early maturity. Closeness avoidance ($U = 3466$, $p = 0.006$) and contempt ($U = 3865.5$, $p = 0.033$) are predominant in late adulthood.

Further, to test the assumption about the presence of specific differences in the parameters of close relationships in men and women at each age stage, a pairwise comparative analysis of age groups was carried out (Tables 7–10).

Table 7
Gender differences in close relationship in adolescence

Variable	Average range in female sample (N = 71)	Average range in male sample (N = 58)	U-criterion	p-level of significance
Style C (detached avoidance)	71.65	56.85	1586.5	0.024
Style D (fearful)	70.68	58.05	1656	0.054
Surprise	59.06	72.27	1637.5	0.036
Satisfaction with life	56.39	75.53	1448	0.004

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In the period of adolescence, in the female sample, compared to the male sample, the detached-avoidant and fearful types of attachment prevail, life satisfaction is lower, girls are less inclined to experience surprise in relationships (Table 7).

Table 8
Gender differences in close relationship in early maturity

Variables	Average range in female sample (N = 69)	Average range in male sample (N = 61)	U-criterion	p-level of significance
Style C (detached avoidance)	39.15	24.88	290.5	0.002
Recreational type of closeness	37.19	27.46	363	0.039
Situational coping	38.01	26.38	332.5	0.014
Interest in the partner	38.14	26.21	328	0.008
Joy/happiness	37.49	27.07	328	0.008
Faith	38.26	26.05	323.5	0.009

In the period of early maturity in the female sample, compared to the male sample, significantly higher indicators of the recreational (entertainment) type of closeness, interest in a partner, experiencing happiness and joy in relationships are recorded, but against the background of persistently high values for the detached-avoidant type of attachment to a partner (Table 8).

Table 9
Gender differences in close relationship in middle maturity

Variables	Average range in female sample (N = 77)	Average range in male sample (N = 82)	U-criterion	p-level of significance
Style D (cautious)	87.86	72.62	2552	0.035
Closeness scale	72.56	86.98	2584.5	0.048
Physical abuse	85.12	75.19	2762.5	0.05

In the period of middle maturity, women, unlike men, are more inclined to wishful thinking, to adjust relationships to socially approved patterns and requirements (conditional closeness scale). At the same time, it is women who note the presence of physical violence in relationships and show a cautious style of attachment (Table 9).

Table 10
Gender differences in close relationship in late maturity

Variables	Average range in female sample (N = 72)	Average range in male sample (N = 88)	U-criterion	p-level of significance
Reliability of the partner	63.73	77.67	1960.5	0.042

In the period of late maturity, no significant differences were actually found between men and women in terms of indicators of close relationships, the only exception being the assessment of partner reliability, which prevails in the male group (Table 10).

Discussion

The results showed that with age there is a decrease in indicators of sexual, intellectual, recreational closeness in relationships with a partner and an increase in indicators of social closeness. This happens against the background of a decrease in libido, the actualization of the self, the launch of separation processes from a partner, a more complete, deeper understanding of oneself, one's interests and capabilities. Due to this, a balance of autonomy-connectedness in relations with a partner is achieved. On the other hand, inclusion in common social and communication networks with age contributes to the achievement of a high level of social closeness with a partner, the boundaries between "friends" and "close partners" are gradually blurred. Relationships begin to be perceived more realistically, the assessment of closeness with a partner through the "prism of social expectations and requirements" goes away. With age, there is a decrease in the flexibility of the coping system, coping strategies are applied more rationally, based on the presence of positive experience of their use in similar situations, coping becomes more rigid.

Because the length of relationship in our sample closely correlates with the age of the respondents ($R = 0.81$; $p = 0.01$), we can assume that the obtained picture of the dynamics of close relationships by age reflects the situation in terms of length of relationship. There is a tendency to reduce anxiety in relations with a partner over time, the partner is no longer perceived as part of himself, there is a healthy separation from the partner, which is expressed in the achievement of personal integrity. One's own goals, values, meanings are fulfilled; at the same time there is an existential rapprochement. As the duration of relationship increases, there is a decrease in indicators of sexual and recreational closeness, but there is a convergence at the level of social ties, a common social network.

The findings are consistent with researchers' view that many of the variables that affect a partner's initial attractiveness remain important in long-term relationships, but other factors come into play over time. Thus, it is noted that as the relationship develops, the partners get to know each other better, show mutual care to a greater extent, feel compassion towards the partner, which is directly related and based on increased trust in the relationship (Clark & Monin, 2006, Salazar, 2015). In successful relationships, partners feel more and more close to each other over time, while in a less successful version, closeness can develop into distance, isolation, which, in turn, enhances the feeling of loneliness and inseparability of feelings. In addition, one of the reasons for the ambiguity and instability of the social situation among the subjects of relationships is the fundamental dilemma of approach-avoidance (Kryukova, 2017). At almost any stage of the relationship, partners can be motivated to decrease - increase the distance of closeness and closeness. Proximity means satisfying the fundamental need for belonging, affection, but at the same time associated with the restriction of freedom, mutual control (Cavallo, Murray & Holmes, 2014).

The most detailed characteristic of the close relationship system is observed at the ages from 21 to 25 years. Young people highly appreciate sexual, recreational, intellectual types of closeness with a partner, are less focused on avoiding closeness, are characterized by a high degree of involvement in relationships with a partner, and experience positively collared feelings and emotions towards the partner. At the same time, at this age, such closeness is achieved against the background of low life satisfaction. Lower satisfaction with life during this period is primarily explained by the fact that young people begin to perceive the surrounding reality more deeply and critically, react painfully to the destructive processes taking place in modern society, reach a separation peak, begin to measure ambitions, development tasks and achieved results. It is at this age that close relationships with a partner, to a greater extent than in adjacent age groups, are considered as a resource for coping with high uncertainty of the future, with emerging difficulties, increase the stability of the subject in the face of modern challenges and level out the risks associated with possible dissatisfaction with life.

By late maturity, relationships become more predictable, the behaviour of a partner is predicted, there are fewer personal discoveries in relationships, and sexual closeness is levelled against the background of a decrease in sexual activity. At the same time, the resource capacity of relations is growing, they are considered as a life support, as a means of overcoming difficulties and stresses. Trust and mutual support come to the fore. A high level of life satisfaction is achieved. This is consistent with the opinion of foreign researchers that at a time when a couple begins to run a household together, have children and, possibly, have to take care of elderly parents, the requirements in a relationship become correspondingly higher. As a result of this complexity, partners in close relationships increasingly turn to each other not only for social support, but also for help in coordinating activities and completing tasks (Wegner, Erber & Raymond, 1991). Thus, as the complexity of relationships increases, interdependence may increase.

The analysis of cross sections shows that in adolescence, compared with early maturity, the exchange of thoughts, ideas, conversations about vital events, goals, values is less pronounced, trust in a partner has not yet been formed, there is no experience of cohabiting difficult situations, no existential closeness. Therefore, there is avoidance of closeness, relationships are not yet considered as a significant resource for coping with stress. In addition, there is an imbalance of closeness and autonomy in relationships, as a result of which excessive openness to a partner, self-disclosure on his part, an attempt to closer rapprochement can be perceived as an indicator of potential risk of subjective integrity, personal psychological well-being, personal vulnerability. Partners look at each other more closely.

At the ages from 21 to 25, a person is faced with the task of establishing closeness, overcoming the feeling of loneliness, determining a life partner, and begins to make more flexible, creative, confident efforts to solve this problem. In this regard, we observe the prevalence of indicators of emotional, intellectual, recreational closeness with a partner in comparison with the period of youth and middle maturity. The attitude to avoid closeness

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is levelled, self-disclosure and readiness for closer ties and relationships are enhanced. The boundaries of personal space become more permeable to a significant other, the psychological distance is reduced, and attachment is strengthened. Relationships, to a greater extent than in youth and middle adulthood, are perceived as a support and resource for increasing resilience. At the same time, such closeness becomes an indicator of growing dependence, and relationships are more often than in other periods of life perceived as toxic, hindering personal development. There is a growing risk of dissolving in relationships, losing one's identity.

When comparing middle and late adulthood, it is natural that in the period from 26 to 40 years, sexual closeness in relations with a partner prevails. It is at this age that the peak of sexual activity of both men and women is observed, doubt and shame give way to emancipation in the intimate sphere, search and discoveries, and the task of obtaining a new sexual experience is solved. Coping is even more flexible, variable, and contributes to the realization of the adaptive potential of partners. At the same time, relationships to a greater extent than at a more mature age are characterized by ambivalence, there is an effect of "emotional swings": from anger and irritation to surprise and interest. Between the ages of 41 and 65, important indicators of close relationships sag compared to the previous stage, coping becomes more rigid, and the indicator of sexual closeness decreases. This is consistent with a study that found passion and closeness to be negatively associated with relationship duration, and social commitment positively (Lemieux & Hale, 2002).

An analysis of the obtained differences between men and women in different age groups allows us to speak of a gradual levelling of gender differences with age in assessing the parameters of close relationships with a partner. The most striking differences are observed between the ages of 21 and 25, with a predominance of values in the female sample. At this age, women are characterized by an ambivalent perception of the partner and close relationships. On the one hand, the attitude towards a certain distance from the partner remains – it is associated with the existing negative model of the Other and self-centeredness. On the other hand, women are more interested in their partner than men at this age, they believe him, the perception of relationships is different: they more often note that they experience happiness, joy in relationships, do not perceive relationships as predictable, resort to situational coping, which softens negative emotions in difficult situations, and reduces situational anxiety. Of the specific differences at a younger age, one can note the "fearful" and "aloof-avoidant" types of attachment, which also prevail in girls. The beginning of adult life in girls, the need to establish intimate relationships with a partner are often accompanied by a high level of anxiety, which leads, on the one hand, it results in emotional restraint in relationships and a certain degree of detachment from close contacts. On the other hand, it can lead to dependence in relationships.

By middle maturity in women, the "fearful / cautious" type of attachment again prevails compared to men, which may be associated with the passage of a midlife crisis, a decrease in trust in a partner against the background of developing personal complexes. Indeed, as

a number of studies have shown, attachment styles can be specific, depending on the stage and experience of the relationship, the specific situational context, and age, that is, they may show less stability and stability. Some evidence suggests that adults' general attachment style may not always predict their attachment style in specific relationships (Pierce & Lydon, 2001; Ross & Spinner, 2001; Chopik, Edelstein & Fraley, 2013).

It was found that in middle maturity women face manifestations of "physical violence from a partner", which, in turn, reduces a woman's self-esteem, making her vulnerable in a relationship with a partner. This may be a sustainable social practice of gender violence for this age group, the causes of which may lie in gender ideology, in particular generational affiliation. Men, at the same time, are prone to social desirability in assessing closeness with a partner, since recognition, acceptance of existing problems and the absence / loss of closeness in relationships is a powerful stress factor, an alarm signal, an indicator of a violation of a stable, familiar, convenient system of relationships, undermining social status in the eyes of others.

After 40 years, women are less confident in the reliability of a partner, which can be explained by a whole range of reasons – from the stereotype of perceiving a man as "retaining the ability to reproduce and sexual activity for a longer time", "strives to a new life after 40 years and the search for a younger partner" to the emotional stagnation of relationships, the withering sexual function of a woman and developing inferiority complexes.

Conclusion

The focus of the study is the relationship of a person with the significant Other in an era of exciting everyday life and unprecedented uncertainty of the future. Natural is the desire of a person at any age to "be in a couple", which gives emotional closeness. However, today the continuum of closeness with the Other, belonging to the inner circle, is much longer than it used to be before (Muniruzzaman, 2017). Often, closeness with a partner is perceived as a threat to personal autonomy, and the interests of the group (dyad, family) as an obstacle to personal well-being and success. On the one hand, the strengthening of traditional and family values is being lobbied at the state level as the most important direction in the development of Russian society. On the other hand, experimental forms of close relationships are developing at the level of society, which can be viewed either through the prism of the intensity of the existence of the union (for example, "guest" marriages, "fluid" marriages, involving a constant change of partner), or through the peculiarities of the relationship between partners. It should be emphasized that the systemic changes in the institution of close relationships are closely intertwined with the personal changes of a person at different stages of life, with natural changes in the quality of his relationship with a partner.

In this regard, the authors set the task to comprehend the features of close relations in different age groups at the present stage of development of society.

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The results of the study enable us to come to a number of conclusions.

- Age in the period of adulthood predicts a gradual decline in sexual, intellectual, recreational closeness with a partner and an increase in social closeness. This happens against the background of a decrease in libido, the actualization of the self, the launch of separation processes from a partner, a more complete, deeper understanding of oneself.
- There is a specificity of close relationships at different stages of adulthood (from 18 to 65 years). In adolescence, against the background of low trust in a partner and the lack of experience of living together in difficult situations, avoidance of closeness is observed, relationships are not yet considered as a significant resource for overcoming stress. The sensitive period for establishing favourable close relationships is the age from 21 to 25 years: sexual, recreational, intellectual types of closeness with a partner are more pronounced than in other age periods, avoidance of closeness is less pronounced, relationships are characterized by a high degree of involvement, positive emotional colouring. It is in youth that close relationships with a partner are considered as a resource for coping with high uncertainty of the future, with emerging difficulties, increase the stability of the subject in the face of modern challenges and level out the risks associated with dissatisfaction with life. In the period from 26 to 40 years, sexual closeness prevails in relations with a partner; flexible coping contributes to the realization of the adaptive potential of partners. At the same time, relationships to a greater extent than in other age groups are characterized by emotional ambivalence. By the age of 41–65, relationships become more predictable, and sexual closeness levels off. Trust and mutual support come to the fore. A high level of life satisfaction is achieved.
- There are gender differences in the manifestation of the parameters of close relationships, which gradually level out with age. Thus, the most striking differences are observed between the ages of 21 and 25, with a predominance of values in the female sample. Women are characterized by an ambivalent perception of a partner and close relationships proper; exhibit "cautious/fearful" and "withdrawal-avoidant" types of attachment up to and including the period of middle maturity. Men are more prone to social desirability in assessing closeness with a partner, since recognition, acceptance of existing problems and loss of closeness in a relationship is a powerful stressor for them, an alarm signal, an indicator of a violation of a stable, familiar, comfortable system of relationships, undermining the social status in a relationship in eyes of close people.

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Author Contributions

Elena Viktorovna Tikhomirova prepared the plan and the text of the paper, reviewed the existing sources on the problem raised in the paper, statistically processed the empirical data and described the results of the research.

Anna Gennadievna Samokhvalova wrote the abstract, key words and general provisions, structured and edited the text of the paper, grounded the research methods provided the theoretical analysis of the problem and summarized the conclusions.

Maria Vyacheslavovna Saporovskaya analysed the sources in the Russian language, collected the empirical data, interpreted the results, prepared the references and summarized the conclusions.

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Conflict of Interest Information

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.