



Interpersonal Curiosity and its Association with Social and Emotional Skills and Well-being during Adolescence

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BACKGROUND

- Interpersonal curiosity, or the desire to know about the inner and outer experiences of other people (Litman & Pezzo, 2007; Renner, 2006), is arguably the foundation of social and emotional development and well-being (Dunn, 1988; Engel, 2015; Lieberman, 2013; Way et al., 2018).
- While intellectual curiosity has been widely studied in the field of child development, interpersonal curiosity, and its association with social and emotional skills and well-being has rarely been investigated.
- Even the research and practice of social and emotional learning (SEL) rarely includes or investigates this important human capacity (e.g., CASEL, 2022).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this paper is to explore the dimensions of interpersonal curiosity, examine how each dimension is associated with social and emotional skills and well-being, and investigate the moderating role of gender among middle school students.

METHOD

Participants

- 389 seventh-grade students in seven public middle schools in New York City ($M_{age}=12.52$; 48% female).
- The sample was racially/ethnically diverse: Asian (36%), White (29%), Latino/a (16%), African American (13%), and Other (6%).

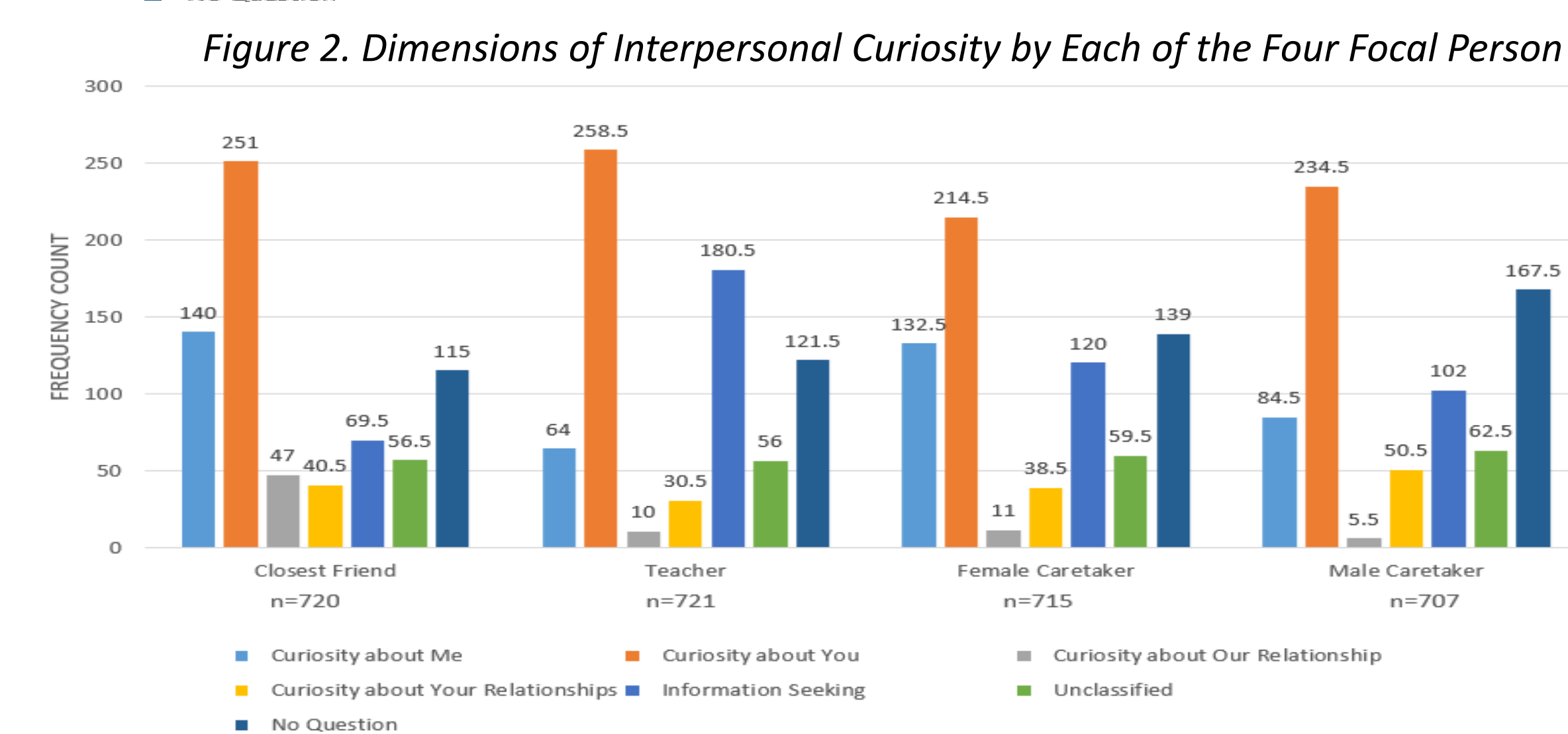
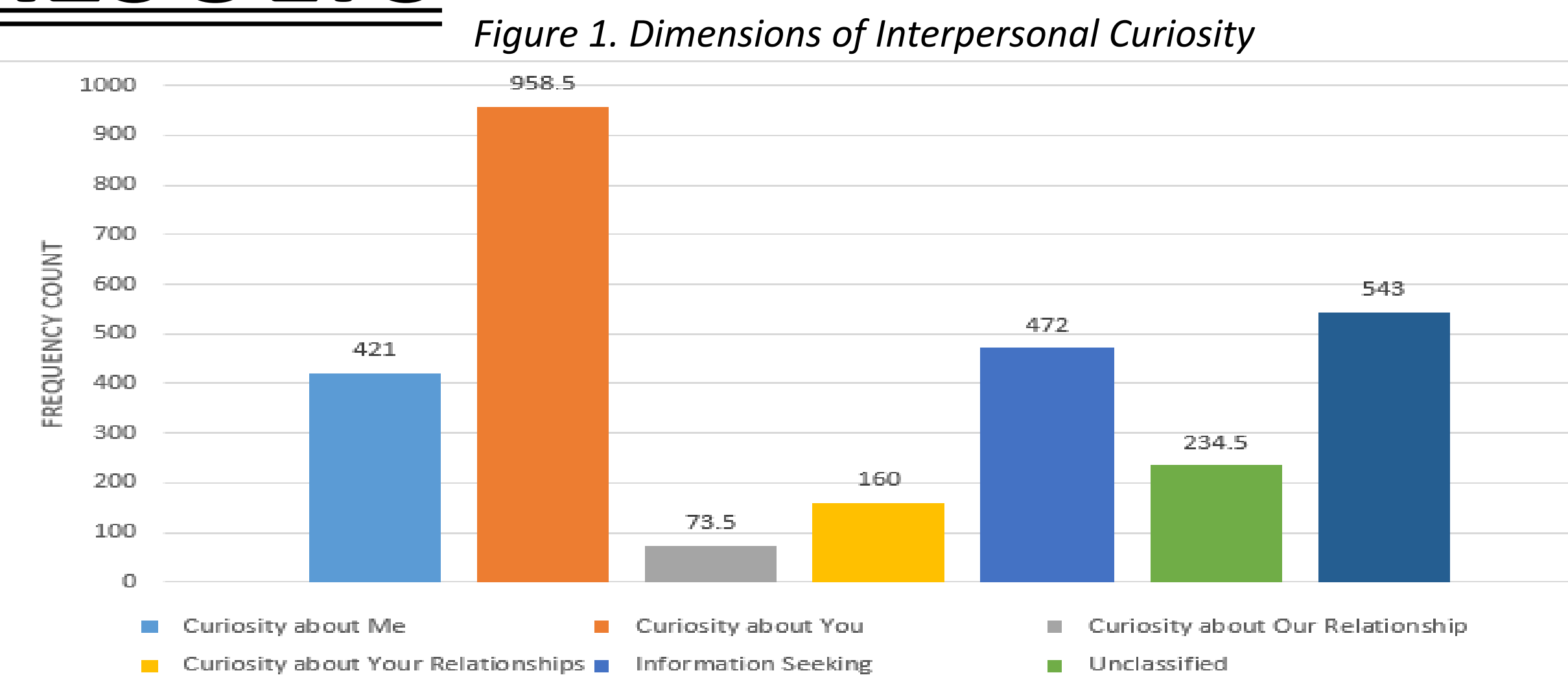
Procedure

This study used student outcome data from an observational study of the Listening Project (LP) with a pre-post design. The response rate was 75%: 389 of 527 students and their parents assented and consented to participate in the evaluation of the Listening Project. The student survey was administered through Qualtrics Online Survey Software at two time points before and after the implementation of the project. We applied a mixed-method approach to data (i.e., quantifying qualitative data for integration with quantitative data).

Measures

- Interpersonal Curiosity Instrument - an interpersonal question-generation measure (IPCI)
- Empathy (Davis, 1980)
- Active Listening (Ford et al., 2000)
- Friendship Quality (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985)
- Depressive Symptoms-Short (Kovacs, 1992)

RESULTS



Note. $N=2929$ at Time 1; $N=2796$ at Time 2; All variables were averaged between the two measurement points.

Table 1. Estimates for Dimensions of Interpersonal Curiosity Predicting Student Outcomes in Regression Models

	Empathy		Active Listening		Friendship Quality		Depressive Symptoms	
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Constant	2.63** (0.67)	2.53** (0.68)	2.84** (0.75)	2.69** (0.76)	3.31** (0.77)	3.15** (0.79)	1.73** (0.42)	1.93** (0.42)
Curiosity about Me	0.06* (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	0.07* (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)	0.05† (0.03)	0.06 (0.04)	0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Curiosity about You	0.05* (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.05* (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	-0.03† (0.02)	-0.07** (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Curiosity about Our Relationship	0.07 (0.08)	0.10 (0.15)	0.09 (0.10)	0.25 (0.17)	0.14 (0.09)	0.10 (0.17)	0.07 (0.05)	-0.11 (0.09)
Curiosity about Your Relationships	0.06 (0.05)	0.10 (0.08)	0.12* (0.06)	0.13 (0.08)	0.13* (0.05)	0.19* (0.08)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.05)
Information Seeking	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Curiosity about Me X Female		0.03 (0.05)		0.05 (0.05)		0.00 (0.05)		0.04 (0.03)
Curiosity about You X Female		0.07† (0.04)		0.10* (0.04)		0.09* (0.04)		-0.02 (0.02)
Curiosity about Our Relationship X Female		-0.06 (0.18)		-0.23 (0.20)		0.05 (0.20)		0.26* (0.11)
Curiosity about Your Relationships X Female		-0.06 (0.11)		-0.01 (0.12)		-0.10 (0.11)		-0.01 (0.06)
R ²	0.15	0.15	0.14	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.06	0.08
ΔR ²	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.12	0.13	0.12	0.04	0.04

Note. $N=389$. Results are based on the full available sample and 10 imputed datasets. Three student characteristics (i.e., age, gender, and race/ethnicity) were included as student covariates. † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

DISCUSSION

- Multidimensionality of interpersonal curiosity & gender difference:** Interpersonal curiosity consists of a desire to know about the relational self, others, reciprocal relationship between the self and others, as well as others' relationships with a third party in their social networks. Dimensions of "Curiosity about Me" and "Curiosity about Our Relationship" were more prevalent among girls than boys, and that "No Question" was more prevalent among boys than girls.
- Associations between interpersonal curiosity and social and emotional skills and well-being:** Student outcomes varied across the dimensions of interpersonal curiosity.
- Moderating role of gender:** There were differential associations between dimensions of interpersonal curiosity and student outcomes by gender.

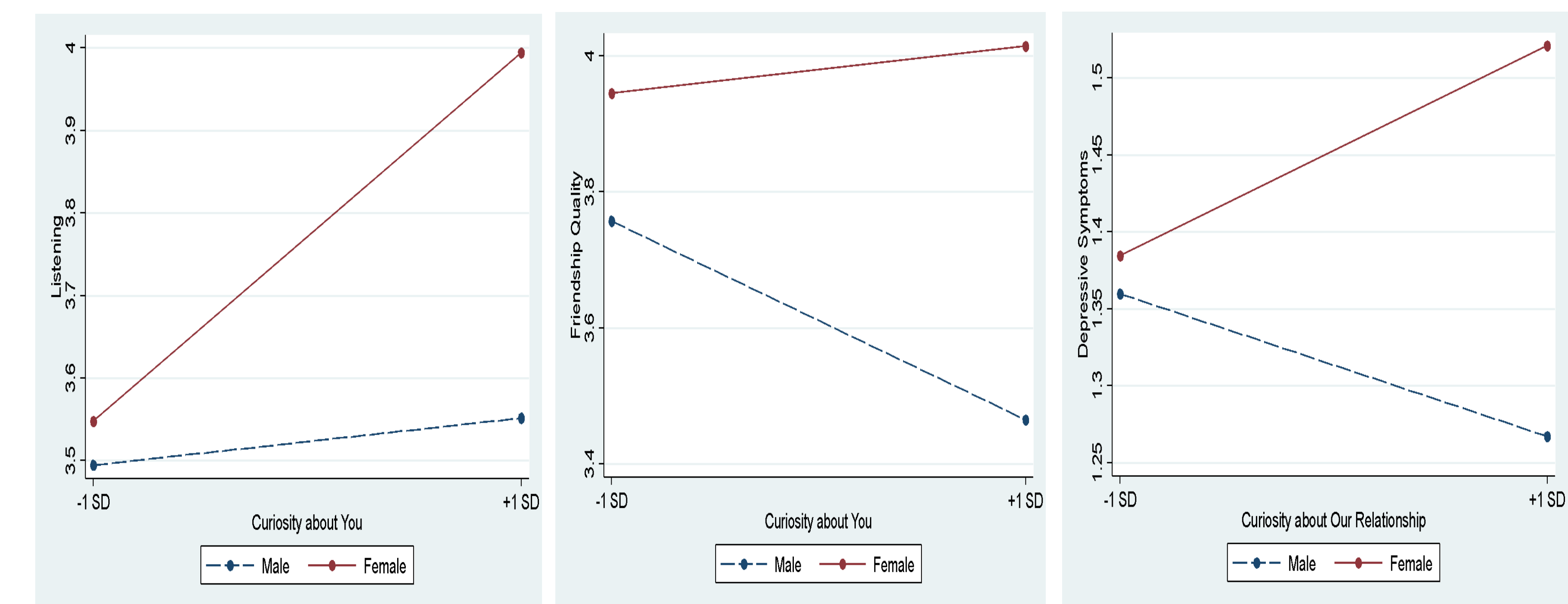
Findings offered new insights into the multidimensional nature of interpersonal curiosity and its association with social and emotional skills and well-being in early adolescence. It suggests that the exclusive focus on intellectual curiosity in the study of curiosity and the absence of the topic of interpersonal curiosity in the study and practice of SEL has overlooked an important component of human experience and well-being. Future studies should not only examine the experience of interpersonal curiosity and how dimensions of it may change over time, but also how such curiosity and its dimensions vary by context and culture, with those that value human connection more than self-obsessed cultures such as the U.S. may be more likely to foster such curiosity.

IPCI Prompt: "Everyone has a number of people who are important in his or her life. These questions ask about your curiosity with each of the following people: closest friend, teacher, mother or female caretaker, and father or male caretaker."

The two questions that I most want to ask [my closest friend / teacher in the class / female caretaker / male caretaker] are:

Dimension	Definition	Example
Curious about Me	This dimension encompasses exploratory questions that are about the subject. These questions either 1) focus on the subject him/herself; or 2) to understand/explore the subject him/herself.	What do you honestly think about me? Am I better than you?
Curious about You	This dimension encompasses exploratory questions that are about the focal person. The focus of curiosity is on the focal person. The aim of these questions is to understand who the focal person is.	Did you do well in school? What is your biggest fear?
Curious about Our Relationship	This dimension encompasses exploratory questions that are about the subject's relationship with the focal person. These questions tap into a bond or connection the subject has with the focal person.	What made us be this close? What is your favorite memory of us together?
Curious about Your Relationships	This dimension encompasses exploratory questions that are about the focal person's relationships with others. These questions tap into a bond or connection the focal person has with a third party.	When did your mom and dad split up? Do you actually hate your brother?
Information Seeking	This dimension encompasses general questions that either 1) don't show relational curiosity; 2) don't allow one to understand the focal person in a meaningful way; 3) ask about specific kinds of information or facts about something; or 4) request something.	Can I do extra credit? What is my cycle project grade?

Moderating Effect of Gender on the Association between Dimensions of Interpersonal Curiosity and Social and Emotional Skills and Well-being



Note. Simple slopes were used to interpret the significant interactions at high (i.e., 1 SD above the mean) and low (i.e., 1 SD below the mean) values.