Parent-child communication:
An antecedent of friendships and well-being in emerging adulthood

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the friendships and well-being of emerging adults as influenced by familial environments, particularly parent-child communication. Recent literature affirms that friendships play a critical role in the lives of emerging adults; these interpersonal connections rely on individuals’ willingness and ability to engage in friendship work (i.e., formation strategies and maintenance behaviors). Employing a longitudinal design that included both participant and peer reports, this study found individual’s propensity to engage in friendship work was predicted by communication within the parent-child relationship. Following that recent scholarship asserts that parent confirmation affects both the socialization and psychosocial development of children, the current work employed a confirmation perspective to assess how families lay the groundwork for emerging adults’ communicative behaviors in friendship and found that parent confirmation predicted individuals’ use of friendship formation and maintenance behaviors. Together, these associations pave a social-cognitive pathway from family communication to friendship and overall well-being.
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As emerging adults—people in their late teens through mid-20s—leave home and establish new social networks (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983), they may find themselves in a unique “sink or swim” position, either prepared to form and maintain new relationships or not. We understand that the ability to establish social relationships is important—satisfying social relationships make us happier (Diener & Seligman, 2002). However, not enough work has been done to explain the meaning of satisfying social relationships, how people go about forming and maintaining them, and why it is that some people are more likely than others to make and keep social ties.

Friendships between emerging adults often are considered more intense and time consuming than those among adults within other age cohorts, such as those that relies more heavily on family ties for social interaction (Argyle & Henderson, 1984; Rawlins, 1992). Thus, in studying how social relationships associate with well-being, it is not important to consider the emerging adulthood population. Explicating the links between friendships and well-being among the emerging adult population is one objective of this project.

More importantly, though, we maintain that there is a need for knowing what may predict persons’ use of friendship formation strategies and maintenance behaviors and point to the communication between parent and child within the family environment. We argue that persons’ use of friendship behaviors not only influences well-being over time and that such behaviors are learned within, and influenced by, families. Factors related to the family environment, especially parent-child interaction, affect the psychosocial development of young adults (Koesten, 2004).
particular, research shows that through confirming parent-child interaction, young people actually glean positive communication skills (Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007) that will better prepare them for life outside the home. We therefore propose that parent confirmation is capable of predicting individuals’ use of friendship formation strategies and maintenance behaviors. Together, the associations from family and friendship to well-being will be described as a social-cognitive pathway and will provide a framework for future scholarship that explores how family ties are a catalyst for adult’ friendships and well-being.

**Friendship as a Social Context**

Researchers have approached the concept of friendship and its study from a variety of perspectives. Friends are people who provide companionship (Hays, 1984), discuss thoughts and feelings (Argyle & Henderson, 1984), and share mutual activities and interests (Hays, 1989; Parks & Floyd, 1996). The deliberate nature of friendship is unlike other close relationships, such as the kind of relational ties that individuals experience at home or even work. Families are typically comprised of involuntary, long-lasting relationships (Vangelisti, 1993) and follow hierarchical structures. Alternatively, friendships are traditionally considered to be chosen relationships (Rawlins, 1992), characterized by equality (Allan, 1989), mutual involvement, and unconstrained interaction, wherein individuals are valued for their uniqueness (Wright, 1984).

Although, as Rawlins (1992) suggests, people get to choose their friends, both scholarly work and lived practices affirm that the process of forming and maintaining friendships is easier said than done. Even in a modern, technologically-savvy society in which individuals amass “friends” by the hundreds on their Facebook accounts, research shows that most adults have only two close friends—a decrease from three close friends when a similar study was completed in
1985 (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006), suggesting that, in general, people may be experiencing a decline in friendship and may lack someone with whom they can discuss important matters. The results of this study indicate a legitimate threat to persons’ well-being, as research shows that individuals who can name several close friends with whom they freely share their intimate concerns are healthier and happier than people without such friendships (Cohen, Sherrod, & Clark, 1986; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Likewise, Reis (2001) argues that feeling understood and cared for by a close other is considered a core component of persons’ well-being. Continuing this line of investigation and uncovering links between how the formation and maintenance of friendship impacts persons’ well-being constitutes one of our primary research objectives. Previous research has shown that the formation and maintenance of voluntary ties like friendship rely heavily on the use of certain communicative behaviors (e.g., initiative taking and self-disclosure). In this regard, attention to the process of friendship formation and maintenance behaviors gains greater urgency.

**Friendship and Well-Being**

The argument advanced in the current study is that both the formation and maintenance of friendships play a critical role in emerging adults’ pathway toward overall well-being. A recent study by McEwan and Guerrero (2010) explored how the communication skills of college freshmen predicted their use of various friendship formation strategies, including group involvement, online social networking, disclosure to others, responsiveness, and invitations. Here, *group involvement* is characterized by actions such as joining a social club or becoming involved with a service group, which provide opportunities to be in proximity to others and form new friendships. In the digital age, however, proximity is not always required, as people are able
to form friendship through *online social networking* (Fehr, 2008). For decades, *disclosure to others* (i.e., sharing information about oneself with others) has been viewed as a critical factor for developing relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Hays, 1985). Specifically, self-disclosures that yield reciprocal disclosures from the other person promote sharing between two potential friends (Fehr, 2008). As well, *responsiveness* toward others (i.e., communication which demonstrates care, concern, and liking) is believed to prompt friendship (Fehr, 2008). A responsive communicator is other-centered and shows consideration for and affection toward others (Hays, 1984). Finally, issuing *invitations* (e.g., asking people to attend events) is another important strategy for developing friendship (Shaver, Furman, & Buhrmester, 1985), sharing activities, and spending time together (Fehr, 2008).

In addition to exploring how well-being is influenced by the strategies people use to make friends, this study also focuses on how the maintenance of friendship is associated with persons’ well-being. Previous findings acknowledge that friendships do require maintenance (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Guerrero & Chavez, 2005), or else they are likely to deteriorate (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Stafford & Canary, 1991). As Dindia and Canary (1993) describe, relational partners engage in relational maintenance for four reasons: “to keep a relationship in existence, to keep a relationship at a specific state or condition, to keep a relationship in satisfactory condition, and to keep a relationship in repair” (p. 163).

Scholars have identified specific communicative behaviors that are important for friendship maintenance. Hays (1984) discussed four theoretical areas of behavioral content that are important in friendships—consideration, affection, companionship, and communication. Likewise, Rose and Serafica (1986) asked same-sex friends, “How do people stay friends?”
From their study, casual friendships were perceived as requiring more proximity and less affection than close or best friends. In a study by Oswald, Clark, and Kelly (2004), friendship maintenance was determined to consist of four key factors—*positivity* (behaviors that make the friendship rewarding and enjoyable, e.g., trying to make each other laugh); *supportiveness* (providing assurances such as emotional support); *openness* (self-disclosure; sharing private thoughts); and *interaction* (activities that friends do together, e.g., going to social gatherings).

Friendships play a critical role in the lives of emerging adults and are formed and maintained through a variety of communicative behaviors. Following that social relationships are key to well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002) and that emerging adults often leave home and part from most, if not all, of their known social relationships, it stands to reason that the well-being of emerging adults ought to be associated with their forming and maintaining new social relationships. It is proposed here that emerging adults’ use of friendship formation strategies and maintenance behaviors will predict well-being. Thus, the following are posited:

**H1:** Emerging adults’ intent to use friendship formation strategies at Time 1 will predict well-being at Time 1.

**H2:** Emerging adults’ use of friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 1 will predict well-being at Time 1.

**H3:** Emerging adults’ use of friendship formation strategies at Time 2 will be positively correlated with well-being at Time 2.

**H4:** Emerging adults’ use of friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 2 will be positively correlated with well-being at Time 2.
**Family Communication**

If emerging adults’ well-being is positively associated with use of friendship formation strategies and maintenance behaviors, careful attention ought to be given to factors that may predict whether individuals actively form and maintain friendships. A recent study suggests that family communication influences the experience and health of friendships (Ledbetter, 2009). This is a logical finding, being that families set the stage for young persons’ social development (Moos, 2002) and continue to influence young people even after they have left home (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). The social knowledge learned inside the family informs young people as they leave the home, transition into adulthood, and develop new interpersonal relationships (Koesten, 2004). The impact of the family unit can be understood through the lens of interpersonal communication, as families are based on, formed, and maintained through communication (Vangelisti, 2004). It is through families that people learn how to communicate and think about communication (Fitzpatrick & Caughlin, 2002). By communicating, families create, brand, and share unique world views (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994) that shape not only how members interact with one another, but also how they perceive their social environment outside of the family (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Thus, family communication can and should be considered as a predictor of emerging adults’ friendship behaviors.

There is a growing body of literature that demonstrates how family communication is associated with factors related to adolescents’ psychological adjustment (Dailey, 2009) like self-esteem (Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007) and behavior in extrafamilial relationships, such as communication apprehension (Elwood & Schrader, 1998) and communication competence (Koesten, 2004). Even though the outcome variables from these studies may be logically related to friendship behaviors, there are gaps in the literature that fail to explain how family
communication relates to emerging adults’ propensity to form and maintain friendships. Scholars have highlighted the parent-child relationship as being especially important for young persons’ growth and socialization (Gitelson & McDermott, 2006; Peterson & Hann, 1999). In particular, it is noted that young persons’ self-development is linked to confirmation received from parents (Ellis, 2002; Sieburg, 1985), and much has been written recently citing the association between parent confirmation and young adults’ development (Dailey, 2006, 2008, 2009; Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007).

Confirmation is an interactional process (Ellis, 2002) between parent and offspring that is capable of validating children’s sense of self and identity (e.g., Buber, 1965; Cissna & Sieburg, 1981; Laing, 1961; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). Confirming messages from parents promote a unique and positive sense of self (Dailey, 2006, 2009) and communicate to children that they are allowed to have their own perspective and are accepted unconditionally (Friedman, 1983; Laing, 1961). Conversely, disconfirming messages imply inferiority and reject young persons’ validity as a speaker (Ellis, 2002; Laing, 1961), which is likely to prompt a negative view about one’s identity, worth, and relation to others. The parent-child relationship is especially important for children, and parents who continue to confirm their children after they leave home are likely providing a source of support and encouragement that buffers their children from stressors that can lead to poor mental health (Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007).

More than a form of direct support and encouragement, however, the argument put forth here is that confirmation from parents will lead emerging adults to form and maintain new networks of friends that, when friendship quality is achieved, are capable of enhancing children’s well-being. The parent-child relationship and communicative practices within may be the
archetype by which young people model their future relationships. Confirmation from parents has been shown to be positively associated with young persons’ psychosocial adjustment (Dailey, 2009) and sense of validity as a communicator (Ellis, 2002; Laing, 1961), leading to greater esteem and willingness to initiate relationships.

Confirmation in the parent-child relationship, a critically important factor for the development of young people, is likely to be an important factor for emerging adults as they leave home, enter a new environment with the possibility for new relationships.

Thus, it stands to reason that emerging adults who receive parent confirmation are more likely to engage in friendship work (i.e., formation strategies and maintenance behaviors). There are a number of reasons for why this may be true. For instance, parent confirmation is believed to validate the child as a speaker, but it also creates an immediate opportunity for the child to have positive, interpersonal interactions with the parent. In this way, confirmation affirms children as valuable human beings and promotes confidence in young persons’ interpersonal competency. Furthermore, parent confirmation models for the child interpersonal behavior that can be learned from and employed again during subsequent interactions. This means that, through confirming parent-child interactions, young people actually glean communication skills (Schrodt, Ledbetter, Ohrt, 2007) that will prepare them for life outside the home.

Parent confirmation is important to the overall development of children and is especially important for young persons’ interpersonal maturation. In particular, we can expect that emerging adults who receive parent confirmation will be more likely to use friendship formation strategies and maintenance behaviors. Thus, the following are posited:
**H5:** Emerging adults’ report of parent confirmation at Time 1 will be positively correlated with emerging adults’ intent to use (a) friendship formation strategies and use of (b) friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 1.

**H6:** Emerging adults’ report of parent confirmation at Time 1 will be positively correlated with emerging adults’ use of (a) friendship formation strategies and (b) friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 2.

**H7:** Emerging adults’ intent to use friendship formation strategies at Time 1 will partially mediate the relationship between parent confirmation and use of friendship formation strategies at Time 2.

**H8:** Emerging adults’ use of friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 1 will partially mediate the relationship between parent confirmation and use of friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 2.

**Method**

The primary investigator collected questionnaire data at two time points from both participants and peers during their first semester at college. Time 1 data collection took place within the first three weeks of the fall 2011 semester, and Time 2 data collection took place during the last three weeks of the same semester. This time frame between data collection points was chosen because freshmen friendships (Hays, 1985) and overall adjustment to college (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983) traditionally stabilize after six weeks of being on campus.
PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

Participants include undergraduate students enrolled at a large southwestern university. Primarily, students were recruited through undergraduate courses and were offered extra credit for their participation. The final sample included 272 individuals (97 males and 175 females) currently enrolled as freshmen in college. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 21 years old ($M = 18.12$, $SD = .38$) and self-identified as White/Caucasian ($n = 150$, 55.1%), Asian/Asian-American/Pacific Islander ($n = 73$, 26.8%), Hispanic or Latino ($n = 45$, 16.5%), Black/African-American ($n = 18$, 6.6%), and American Indian ($n = 5$, 1.8%). The vast majority of participants ($n = 264$, 97.1%) had lived at home with their family of origin the summer immediately prior, slightly less ($n = 262$, 96.3%) had lived at home the full academic year prior. When asked which parent figure they communicated with most about the transition to college, most participants ($n = 215$, 79.0%) identified a maternal figure.

Participants completed both a Time 1 and Time 2 questionnaire via an online survey system. Prior to their participation, individuals read a cover letter that included a description of the project and information regarding informed consent. The description of the project informed participants that the study was designed to examine the link between interpersonal relationships and well-being and that, as part of the investigation, participants would be asked to report information pertaining to their friendships and familial relationships. Individuals were reminded that their participation was completely voluntary and could be ended at any point without penalty. After having time to review the description of the project, participants were informed that “because this is an online survey… your consent is given when you enter the survey.” Only individuals who gave their consent were allowed to participate in the study. The Time 1 questionnaire included items pertaining to: parent confirmation, friendship formation strategies,
friendship maintenance behaviors, relational quality with friends (not reported in this study), well-being, and demographic information. At Time 2, participants completed a similar questionnaire including: friendship formation strategies, friendship maintenance behaviors, relational quality with friends, and well-being.

**MEASURES**

*Friendship formation strategies* were studied at both collection points by a measure originally developed by McEwan and Guerrero (2010). The items in the friendship formation strategies measure pertain to both the structures (e.g., campus organizations) that people use to form social connections as well as the communicative strategies (e.g., talking about hobbies) that people employ to initiate friendships. At Time 1, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions probing the likelihood that they would make new friends through various formal and informal structures (e.g., “joining an on-campus club” or “meeting a new friend through an existing one”). Responses were assessed using a Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all likely* (1) to *highly likely* (7). At Time 2, participants were shown the same items but were asked to report whether “yes” they actually did or “no” they did not meet new friends through the various strategies outlined. The remaining items from McEwan and Guerrero’s measure asked participants to report on their use of communicative strategies for making friends in college. At Time 1, participants responded to future tense statements (e.g., “will talk about my hobbies”) using a seven-point, Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all likely* (1) to *highly likely* (7). At Time 2, participants responded to the same items but each statement was phrased in the past tense (e.g., “talked about my hobbies”) and the seven-point, Likert-type scale anchors ranged from *never* (1) to *often* (7). McEwan and Guerrero subjected all items regarding communicative
strategies to a principal components analysis with varimax rotation, and three factors emerged—responsiveness, disclosure to others, and invitations. Likewise, these same factors were determined to be stable in the present study: responsiveness ($a = .92$, six items, $M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.48$), disclosure to others ($a = .79$, four items, $M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.31$), and invitations ($a = .88$, five items, $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.84$). The responsiveness factor included items such as “told people they are important to me,” and “told people they are my friends.” Disclosure to others consisted of items such as “talked about how I spent my summer” and “discussed future plans.” Finally, the invitations factor incorporated items such as “invited people to hang out with me” and “invited people to attend social events with me.” The alpha reliability at Time 1 and Time 2 was .96 and .87, respectively.

The Friendship Maintenance scale by Oswald, Clark, and Kelly (2004) was used in this study to assess participants’ friendship maintenance behaviors at both Time 1 and Time 2. Following the prompt, “how often do you and your close friends…,” participants responded to a series of eighteen items on a seven-point, Likert-type scale with values ranging from never (0) to very frequently (6). The eighteen items collapse into four factors—positivity (e.g., “Try to be upbeat and cheerful when together?”), supportiveness (“Support each other when one of you is going through a difficult time?”), openness (“Share your private thoughts with each other?”), and interaction (“Do favors for each other?”). The alpha reliability at both Time 1 and Time 2 was .93.

Well-Being was measured at both Time 1 and Time 2 using the nine-item Overall Adjustment Scale by Aspinwall and Taylor (1992). The scale contains questions regarding happiness, which ask for participants to compare their own happiness with that of the average
freshman at their university (i.e., "Compared to the average freshman, how happy do you think you are?") using a five-point Likert-type scale that ranges from much less happy (1) to much happier (5). Students were also asked to rate their academic, social, and overall adjustment (i.e., "Overall, how well do you think you've adjusted to college?"), and report the extent to which they feel they belong at the university. A higher score on the adjustment scale indicates greater subjective happiness in comparison to a peer group, and it is indicative of successful adjustment to college (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992). The alpha reliability at Time 1 and Time 2 was .90 and .91, respectively.

*Parent Confirmation* was studied at Time 1, by assessing participants’ report of the acceptance (Schaeffer, 1965) and challenge (Dailey, 2008) they received from the parent that communicated with them most about their transition to college. Participants were asked to report on only one parental figure—the parent or parental figure “you have talked most with about your transition to college.” This approach was chosen because it prioritizes the parent-figure that the participant likely communicates with the most, prevents participants from providing general overview of their relationship with multiple parents, and standardizes the questionnaire for those participants with only one parent figure. Including both subscales—acceptance and challenge, there are twenty- items total. Participant responses for all items ranged across a seven-point, Likert-type scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The acceptance subscale included ten items adapted from Schaefer (1965), including: My [parental figure] “smiles at me often,” “speaks to me in a warm and friendly voice,” and “does not praise me” (reverse-scored). The challenge subscale was assessed using Dailey’s (2008) parental challenge measure, and items included: My [parental figure] “pushes me to resolve problems rather than just complain
about them,” “makes me deal with the consequences of my decisions or behaviors,” “asks me to explain the reasoning behind my decisions,” and “discusses different perspectives with me regarding complex issues.” The alpha reliability for each of the subscales (i.e., Parent Support and Parent Challenge) was .90.

Results

All hypothesized path models were tested using maximum likelihood estimation in Mplus Version 6 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010). Model fit of the hypothesized path models was assessed using four common fit indices: (a) model chi-square, (b) comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), (c) standardized root mean square residual (SRMR; Bentler, 1995), and (d) root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger & Lind, 1980).

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, Pearson product–moment correlations, and Cronbach’s Alpha (α) for all variables included in the primary data set are reported in Table 1. To test the influence of participants’ biological sex in regard to the present study, independent samples t-tests were conducted, revealing significant difference for friendship maintenance behaviors at Times 1 and 2, relational closeness at Times 1 and 2, and communication satisfaction at Times 1 and 2 between women and men (see Table 2). Specifically, women had significantly higher ratings on friendship maintenance behaviors at Times 1 and 2, relational closeness at Times 1 and 2, and communication satisfaction at Times 1 and 2 than men. Women participants generally reported lower well-being at Times 1 and 2 than did men, but this difference was only found to be statistically significant at Time 1. Consequently, biological sex was dummy-coded (1 = female, 0 = male) and entered as a control variable for all hypothesized models.
Table 1

Correlations among the Variables in the Primary Data Set

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<td>.00</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01. FF1 = Friendship Formation Strategies at Time 1, FF2 = Friendship Formation Strategies at Time 2, FM1 = Friendship Maintenance Behaviors at Time 1, FM2 = Friendship Maintenance Behaviors at Time 2, WB1 = Well-Being at Time 1, WB2 = Well-Being at Time 2, CL1 = Closeness with Friend at Time 1, CL2 = Closeness with Friend at Time 2, CS1 = Communication Satisfaction with Friend at Time 1, CS2 = Communication Satisfaction with Friend at Time 2, ACC = Parent Acceptance, CHA = Parent Challenge, EX1 = Extroversion at Time 1. For sex, 0 = females and 1 = males. Some of the variables reported here were analyzed intentionally but not discussed in the current project.
Table 2

T-test of Differences Between Women and Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FF1</td>
<td>-1.318</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FF2</td>
<td>-5.95</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM1</td>
<td>-3.172</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM2</td>
<td>-4.820</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB1</td>
<td>2.419</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>&lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB2</td>
<td>.961</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL1</td>
<td>-2.132</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>&lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL2</td>
<td>-4.760</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS1</td>
<td>-3.172</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS2</td>
<td>-4.195</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>-.442</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHA</td>
<td>-.087</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX1</td>
<td>.266</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>&gt; .05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Acronyms listed here are same as in Table 1. a Degrees of freedom were adjusted using the Welch-Satterthwaite method due to violating the homogeneity of variance assumption. Negative t-values indicate higher means on the outcome of interest for women participants.

Main Analyses

A series of analyses were conducted to examine the friendship behavior of emerging adults, and to model a social-cognitive pathway from family and friendship to well-being. Model fit was assessed as previously described. A summary of model-fit statistics for all hypothesized path models is provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Model-fit Statistics for Structural Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>(\chi^2)</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>90%CI RMSEA</th>
<th>AIC</th>
<th>BIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well-Being</td>
<td>3.531</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.997</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.000, .144</td>
<td>4409.190</td>
<td>4527.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Quality</td>
<td>40.158</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.971</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.054, .114</td>
<td>5849.658</td>
<td>6033.366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend Check Time 1</td>
<td>14.103</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.978</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.000, .156</td>
<td>1157.770</td>
<td>1236.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend Check Time 2</td>
<td>26.101</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.886</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.092, .237</td>
<td>1425.322</td>
<td>1505.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Confirmation</td>
<td>563.558</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.912</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.058, .073</td>
<td>19367.708</td>
<td>19688.296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Friendship Behavior and Well-Being

It was predicted that emerging adults’ friendship behavior would be associated with well-being at both Time 1 and Time 2. Further, it was projected that the relationship between well-being at Time 1 and well-being at Time 2 would be mediated by friendship behaviors at Time 1. The hypothesized model (see Figure 1) included seven variables: (a) intent to use friendship formation strategies reported at Time 1, (b) friendship formation strategies reported at Time 2, (c) friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 1, (d) friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 2, (e) well-being at Time 1, (f) well-being at Time 2, and (g) sex of the participant.

The hypothesized well-being model demonstrated adequate model fit, $\chi^2 (2, N = 271) = 3.531, p < .17, CFI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.018, RMSEA = 0.05 (90\% CI: 0.000–0.144), AIC = 4409.19, and BIC = 4527.44$; see Table 3]. Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted that emerging adults’ friendship behavior at Time 1 would be positively predicted by well-being at Time 1. As hypothesized, emerging adults’ intent to use friendship formation strategies and their use of friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 1 was positively and significantly predicted by well-being ($\beta = .38, p < .001$ and $\beta = .14, p < .05$, respectively). Therefore, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. Similarly, hypotheses 3 and 4 posited that emerging adults’ friendship behavior at Time 2 would be positively associated with well-being at Time 2. The path model (see Figure 1) shows that emerging adults’ well-being at Time 2 was positively and significantly associated with friendship formation strategies ($\beta = .15, p = .006$) and maintenance behaviors ($\beta = .20, p = .012$) at Time 2. Thus, Hypotheses 3 and 4 were supported as well.

In sum, the results supported the hypothesized associations between friendship behavior and well-being, in particular the direct relationships between well-being and friendship formation strategies and maintenance behaviors at both Time 1 and Time 2.
Figure 1. The Well-Being Pathway Model.

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. To improve visibility of hypothesized paths, the Biological Sex variable was removed from this figure.
Parent-Child Communication as a Predictor of Friendship Behavior

The second set hypotheses predicted associations between parent confirmation and emerging adults’ friendship behaviors. The hypothesized parent confirmation model included six variables: (a) parent confirmation, a latent variable that includes measures (aa) parent acceptance and (ab) parent challenge, (b) intent to use friendship formation strategies at Time 1, (c) friendship formation strategies at Time 2, (d) friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 1, and (e) friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 2. It was predicted that emerging adults’ report of parent confirmation at Time 1 would positively predict emerging adults’ intent to use friendship formation strategies and use of friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 1 and Time 2 (Hypotheses 7 and 8, respectively). Further, it was proposed that emerging adults’ intent to use friendship formation strategies at Time 1 would partially mediate the relationship between parent confirmation, which was only collected at Time 1, and use of friendship formation strategies reported at Time 2 (Hypothesis 9). Likewise, it was proposed that emerging adults’ use of friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 1 would partially mediate the relationship between parent confirmation (only collected at Time 1) and use of friendship maintenance behaviors reported at Time 2 (Hypothesis 10).

Both dimensions of parent confirmation (i.e., parent acceptance and parent challenge) were found to be significantly and positively correlated with friendship formation strategies and maintenance behaviors at both Time 1 and Time 2, with correlations ranging from .14 to .36 (see Table 1). Results of the hypothesized parent confirmation model are shown in Figures 6 and 7.

The hypothesized parent confirmation model demonstrated adequate fit to the data, $\chi^2 (261, N = 271) = 563.558, p < .00, CFI = .912, SRMR = 0.053, RMSEA = 0.065 (90\% CI: 0.058, 0.073), AIC = 19367.708, and BIC = 19688.266; see Table 3]. Figure 6 demonstrates that parent confirmation significantly predicted friendship formation and friendship maintenance at Time 1 ($\beta = .37$ and $\beta = .34$, respectively, $ps > .00$), supporting Hypotheses 7. At Time 2, parent
confirmation significantly predicted friendship maintenance behaviors but not friendship formation strategies at Time 2 ($\beta = .13$ and $\beta = .09$, respectively, $ps > .05$), partially supporting Hypotheses 8.

Given the significant indirect effects of parent confirmation on friendship formation strategies reported at Time 2 via friendship formation strategies reported at Time 1 ($c’ = .072, p > .01$), Hypothesis 9 was supported (see Table 10). Likewise, the significant indirect effect ($c’ = .192, p < .01$) of parent confirmation on friendship maintenance at Time 2 via friendship maintenance at Time 1 indicated that friendship maintenance behaviors reported at Time 1 partially mediated the relationship between parent challenge and friendship maintenance reported at Time 2 (see Table 10), supporting Hypothesis 10.

Table 10

Mediating Parent Confirmation and Friendship Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Direct Effect</th>
<th>Indirect Effect</th>
<th>Total Effect</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PC, FF1, FF2</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.072**</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>.088, .181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC, FM1, FM2</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.192**</td>
<td>.322</td>
<td>.094, .234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. PC = Parent Confirmation, FF1 = Friendship Formation Strategies at Time 1, FF2 = Friendship Formation Strategies at Time 2, FM1 = Friendship Maintenance Behaviors at Time 1, FM2 = Friendship Maintenance Behaviors at Time 2.
Figure 6. The Parent Confirmation Pathway Model

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. To improve visibility of hypothesized paths, the Biological Sex variable was removed from this figure. Acceptance and Challenge measurement models are shown on the next page.
Figure 7. The Measurement Model of Parent Confirmation
Discussion and Future Directions

The present study was conducted to examine a social-cognitive pathway from family communication and friendship behavior to well-being. The results of the current investigation provide several new insights into how parent confirmation influences emerging adults’ friendship behaviors, and how these behaviors contribute to their overall well-being. First, the data indicated that at Time 1 and Time 2, emerging adults who were engaged in friendship work (i.e., formation strategies and maintenance behaviors) concurrently experienced greater well-being than those individuals not performing friendship work, lending credence to the supposition that engaging in friendship work is positively associated with emerging adults’ well-being. This finding only further necessitates our need for understanding the variables that influence ones likelihood of engaging in friendship work. Thus, our second finding, in line with confirmation theory, is that emerging adults’ propensity to engage in friendship work was predicted by communication in the parent-child relationship, or more specifically, by the confirmation that emerging adults reported receiving from their parents. Cumulatively, the findings of the current study indicate that the friendship work of emerging adults may be both a catalyst for well-being and a consequence of parent-child communication.

Friendship Work Predicted Well-Being

Given that having close friends is linked to personal happiness (Taylor, Chatters, Hardison, & Riley, 2001) and that relationships are constituted in communication (Baxter, 2004), it was proposed here that engaging in communicative behaviors that form and maintain friendships would predict participants’ well-being (Hypotheses 1-4). Results revealed that, at
both Time 1 and Time 2, emerging adults who engaged in friendship work (i.e., formation strategies and maintenance behaviors) experienced greater well-being than those not engaged in friendship work. The correlation matrix (Table 1) and well-being path model (Figure 1) indicate that friendship work variables at both Time 1 and Time 2 were positively and significantly correlated with well-being at Time 1 and Time 2; even more closely correlated, however, is the association between well-being at Time 1 and well-being at Time 2. While emerging adults’ friendship work is clearly linked to their well-being, the significant predictor of well-being at Time 2 was well-being at Time 1. Given that participants engaged in friendship work at Time 1 were more likely to engage in friendship work at Time 2, it is possible that the well-being they experienced at Time 1 was sustained over time in accordance with their friendship work.

**Parent Confirmation Predicted Friendship Work**

In addition to examining the outcomes associated with emerging adults’ friendship behaviors, the current study considered factors that may predict whether individuals actively form and maintain friendships. Scholars have previously highlighted the parent-child relationship as being especially important for young person’s growth and socialization (Gitelson & McDermott, 2006; Peterson & Hann, 1999), and recent findings suggest that young persons’ self-development and communicative behaviors are linked to the confirmation that they receive from parents (Dailey, 2006, 2008, 2009; Ellis, 2002; Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007; Sieburg, 1985). Given that children’s’ socialization is consistently linked to the parent-child relationship, the present investigation explored the role of confirmation from parents in regard to emerging adults’ use of friendship formation strategies and maintenance behaviors. Specifically, it was predicted that emerging adults’ report of parent confirmation at Time 1 would be positively
associated with emerging adults’ intent to use friendship formation strategies and use of friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 1 (Hypothesis 5) and would predict their use of friendship formation strategies and maintenance behaviors at Time 2 (Hypotheses 6).

The results indicated a significant association between parent confirmation and friendship work variables. As the path model (Figure 6) indicated, confirmation from parents predicted participants’ friendship work at Time 1, both the use of maintenance behaviors as well as the intent to use friendship formation strategies, supporting Hypothesis 5. At Time 2, however, parent confirmation significantly predicted friendship maintenance behaviors but not friendship formation strategies. That parent confirmation did not predict participants’ use of friendship formation strategies at Time 2 was surprising, given that parent confirmation predicted participants’ intent to use friendship formation strategies at Time 1. In other words, emerging adults’ use of friendship formation strategies at Time 2 was predicted by the intent to use those strategies at Time 1 but was not directly associated with parent confirmation. Because the association from parent confirmation to friendship formation strategies at Time 2 was nonsignificant and fully mediated (not partially mediated, as had been hypothesized) by emerging adults’ intent to use friendship formation strategies at Time 1, Hypothesis 7 was only partially supported. The link between parent confirmation and friendship maintenance behaviors, however, operated as had been hypothesized; emerging adults’ use of friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 1 partially mediated the relationship between parent confirmation and use of friendship maintenance behaviors at Time 2, and Hypothesis 8 was fully supported.

A closer look at literature regarding parent-child communication and friendship behaviors may explain the differences in how parent confirmation associated with the friendship work
variables (i.e., formation strategies and maintenance behaviors). Research has already highlighted the importance of parental confirmation to children’s mental health and well-being (Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007). In light of this, it is possible that some participants felt perfectly content in the existing relationship established with their confirming parent and preferred to engage with their parent rather than stepping out and forming new friendships. However, even if that were the case, it is unlikely that parent confirmation would predict the use of friendship maintenance behaviors but stifle the use of friendship formation strategies. A more likely explanation may be that parent confirmation associated with friendship work variables (i.e., formation strategies and maintenance behaviors) in unique ways. In particular, the way that parent confirmation was operationalized here is more similar to friendship maintenance behaviors than friendship formation strategies. In looking at the measures for friendship maintenance (Oswald, Clark, & Kelly, 2004) and parent confirmation (Challenge Scale, Dailey, 2008; Acceptance Scale, Schaeffer, 1965), it is obvious that many of the items focus on similar relational behaviors (e.g., the Friendship Maintenance Scale asks participants, “How often do you and your close friends let each other know you accept them for who they are?” and, similarly, the Acceptance Scale of parent confirmation asks about whether parents “accepted my feelings or views even when s/he disagreed with me.”). The measure of Friendship Formation Strategies (McEwan & Guerrero, 2010) is not altogether different, except that, unlike the friendship maintenance measure which is a report of behaviors both at Time 1 and Time 2, the formation strategies measure asks that respondents report their intent to engage in formation strategies at Time 1 and their actual use of those strategies at Time 2. Thus, even though the intent to use formation strategies at Time 1 (e.g., how likely are you to “discuss future career
plans with others”) might seem very normal and commonplace, especially to those emerging adults who have been confirmed by their parents, employing those same strategies at Time 2 (e.g., how often did you “discuss my future career plan with others”) may for some be more intimidating or taxing than initially planned.

Altogether, the results from the parent confirmation path model add to a growing body of research that suggests parent confirmation is closely associated with young adults’ development (Dailey, 2006, 2008, 2009; Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007). Scholars have shown how parent-child communication is related to young persons’ psychosocial adjustment (Dailey, 2009) and self-esteem (Schrodt, Ledbetter, & Ohrt, 2007), and a recent study by Ledbetter (2009) suggests that parents foster environments in which young adult children can experience healthy social development. More than being associated with psychosocial outcomes, however, the findings from the current investigation demonstrated that confirmation from parents was positively linked to emerging adults’ friendship work and well-being after leaving the home. Participants that had been confirmed by their parents were more likely to form and maintain friendships in college than their peers, a finding that suggests how confirmation in the parent-child relationship is a critically important factor for the development of emerging adults as they leave home and enter a new environment with the possibility for new relationships. This extension of the existing research is useful not only in further conceptualizing the critical nature of parent confirmation as a lens through which scholars examine the parent-child relationship, but also as a means for understanding how this relationship may pave the way for children’s well-being far beyond the home.
References


Ledbetter, A. M., Griffin, E., & Sparks, G. G. (2007). Forecasting “friends forever”: A
longitudinal investigation of sustained closeness between college best friends.


