

The Moderating Role of Early Versus Late Adolescence: Exploring the Differential Effects of
Mothers and Fathers on Young Adults' Romantic Relationships

Jacqueline C. Pflieger
Arizona State University

&

Constance T. Gager
Montclair State University

&

Sarah Goldstein
Montclair State University

Abstract

Major demographic shifts, including the postponement of marriage and first births, have led to the development of a new and distinct stage -- emerging adulthood. We focus on one aspect of this stage -- whether stage of adolescence moderates the relation between parent-adolescent relationship quality and young adults' romantic relationship quality. We compare mothers', fathers', and adolescents' reported quality of the parent-child relationship (warmth/closeness, control/conflict), using Waves 2 and 3 of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), and at the 10-year follow-up, young adult children reported on the quality of their current romantic relationship (satisfaction, marriage attitudes, conflict). Results indicate that stage of adolescence moderated the relation between parent-adolescent relationship quality and young adults' romantic outcomes. Specifically, mothers' reports of warmth/closeness during early adolescence predict young adult children's reports of higher romantic relationship quality. These findings highlight the importance of examining distinct parenting processes across stages of adolescence.

The Moderating Role of Early Versus Late Adolescence: Exploring the Differential Effects of Mothers and Fathers on Young Adults' Romantic Relationships

Major demographic shifts occurring over the past half century have transformed the late teens and early twenties from a brief period --the transition to adulthood --to a distinct period of the life course, characterized by change and exploration of possible life directions known as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). These demographic changes include an increase in the median age at marriage, and concomitant increase in the age at first birth. For example from between 1975 and 1998 the percent of white and black women aged 20-24 who were married declined by 32 percent (Teachman, Tedrow & Crowder, 2000). This postponement of marriage is attributable to increases in the numbers of young Americans attending college and the rise in popularity of cohabitation. For most young people in developed countries, the years spanning the late teens through the twenties represent a time of profound change and importance. In this paper, we examine how relationships with parents during adolescence correlate with young adults' satisfaction in their romantic unions during this important period of transition to adult roles.

The desire to secure a fulfilling romantic relationship is one of the foremost goals in an individual's life. Erikson's (1968) theory of identity viewed intimate relationships as a sign of maturity and as key to the conception of self. Whereas a healthy romantic relationship can be one of the most rewarding relationships that one experiences in their lifetime, for some individuals, achieving success in romantic relationships remains a challenge. Furthermore, demographic changes including increased rates of divorce, single-parenthood, and remarriage, as

well as the increased value placed on individualism in American culture have further complicated romantic relationships and the mate selection process. Despite these demographic shifts, 90.4 percent of Americans report that family and children are very important in their lives (GSS, 2007). Indeed, it is a crucial time for researchers to better understand the etiology of relational competence in an ever-complicated world.

Recent research is beginning to examine romantic relationships through a developmental perspective. Specifically, research has shown that dimensions within the parent-child relationship, including warmth, support, and low coercion/hostility, distinctively contribute to the development of interpersonal competencies and romantic relationship quality in young adulthood (Bryant & Conger, 2002; Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000). Further, preliminary research alludes to the fact that relationships with mothers and fathers may contribute differently to the development of romantic relationships. For instance, adolescents often report feeling closer to their mothers, which is strongly tied to the development of intimacy. In addition, fathers appear to play an especially formative role in children's development of interpersonal competence (Kawaguchi, Welsh, Powers, & Rostosky, 1998; Miller & Lane, 1991; Russell & Saebel, 1997; Valery, O'Connor, & Jennings, 1997). Further research is necessary to determine the distinct roles of mothers and fathers on the development of interpersonal competencies.

In addition, it may be important to distinguish relationships with mothers and fathers during early adolescence as opposed to late adolescence when examining the link between parent-child relationship quality and young adults' romantic outcomes. In particular, research has shown that the time span of adolescence typically encompasses the ages from 10 to 17 (although some refer to the college years of 18 – 21 as a part of adolescent development). It is important to recognize the vast transformations that take place for both children and parents over

this developmental time period. Indeed, adolescence is a formative stage in a child's life whereby relationships with parents transform dramatically. For instance, Clark-Lempers, Lempers, and Ho (1991) found that during early adolescence, children rated relationships with parents, friends, siblings, and teachers as higher in importance than children in middle and late adolescence. This suggests a decrease in the importance of parents throughout adolescence. In addition, over the duration of adolescence, time spent with parents tends to decrease (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996). Relatedly, adolescents report that emotional closeness with parents also tends to decrease over time (Steinberg, 1988). Interestingly, conflict tends to increase between parents and children from early through mid-adolescence, with a decline experienced by late adolescence (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). However, extant research often utilizes inconsistent groupings to categorize the period of adolescence, making generalizations across studies difficult. Due to the fact that adolescence is such a variable and broadly defined period, it may be important to look at relationships between parents and adolescents by distinct stages of adolescence. Thus, our research extends previous research by examining the potential effects of mother's and father's, during two distinct periods of adolescence, on adult children's romantic relationship quality.

Last, our analysis extends previous research by using a nationally representative sample. Previous research by Conger et al, although it used a prospective, longitudinal sample, cannot be generalized to all emerging adult relationships as it is based on a small regional sample from northern Iowa. Thus, we test the DEARR model using a prospective, longitudinal and nationally representative sample of young adults from the National Survey of Families and Households.

Theoretical Framework

Several different perspectives have been used to understand how the quality of the parent-child relationship influences the development of romantic relationship competence in young adulthood. Intergenerational transmission theory and the Development of Early Adult Romantic Relationships (DEARR) model (Bryant & Conger, 2002) aptly provide a framework that encompasses several relevant theoretical perspectives. The overarching theory of intergenerational transmission, as used to guide the DEARR model, effectively incorporates premises found in observational learning, socialization, and attachment perspectives in order to explain the mechanisms involved in the transmission of attitudes, values, and behaviors through the generations from parent to child. Attachment and socialization theories emphasize the importance of the parent-child relationship throughout development, with primary emphasis on how parenting behaviors are related to children's social development (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Consistent with observational learning theory, the DEARR model proposes that both the quality of parents' marital relationships, as well as parenting behaviors, serve as models that children observe, internalize, and incorporate into similar situations outside of the family environment. Thus, young adults may utilize past attributions, cognitions, emotions, and learned behaviors directly experienced with parents in the context of romantic relationships.

Although attachment research has provided evidence that parents continue to exert a strong influence on children's interpersonal attributes into adulthood, there is still much to learn in regards to the explicit processes that contribute to the development of competence in romantic relationships. Additional research is needed to determine how the quality of relationships with both mothers and fathers influence young adults' romantic relationships.

Past research has determined that authoritative parenting styles, defined by high warmth and nurturance, adequate monitoring and firm discipline, and low levels of hostility and conflict lead to better outcomes for children (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000). Specifically, Conger et al. (2000) interviewed adolescents and their parents when children were in the seventh grade, and again when children reached young adulthood and were in a romantic relationship. Young adults' romantic partners also were interviewed in order to assess how the family of origin influenced offspring's affect toward partners and the relationship qualities of happiness, satisfaction, and commitment. The indicators used to assess quality of relationships with parents and romantic partners were similar across time, consisting of measures of high warmth-supportiveness and low hostility-coercion. This landmark study found that a "nurturant-involved" parenting style, as opposed to children's observations of parents' marital interactions or sibling interactions, directly impacted young adults' interaction styles toward dating partners in the context of romantic relationships. Parent-adolescent relationships characterized by high warmth, support, and low hostility contributed to the development of similarly warm and supportive interpersonal styles when children reached young adulthood and were involved in romantic relationships.

Furthermore, research demonstrates that children whose parents foster a sense of autonomy are more interpersonally competent in young adulthood. Many studies have linked positive, supportive, autonomous-promoting parenting behaviors to trust and intimacy in young adults' romantic relationships (Scharf & Mayseless, 2001; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Further, the intergenerational transmission of communication styles and conflict interactions in the family of origin has been associated with young adults' interactions in the context of relationships outside of the family. Conflict experienced directly within the parent-child relationship appears to have

a greater impact on the long-term adjustment of young adult children than merely observing conflict between parents (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998). The affective tone of the parent-young adult relationship also influences young adults' romantic relationships (Kim, Conger, Lorenz, & Elder, 2001), as emotional reactivity between parents and children is associated with young adults' lack of interpersonal competencies (Bartle-Haring & Sabatelli, 1997).

Similarly, Gray and Steinberg (1999) have suggested that relationships with parents during adolescence are central in understanding intimate relationship competence. Specifically, their research supported the notion that separation/individuation and general emotional autonomy from parents during adolescence is linked to subsequent processes utilized in romantic relationships. In addition, past research has found that autonomy from parents during adolescence is linked to intimacy, with autonomy increasing over time while closeness to parents decreases over time (Taradash, Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Costa, 2001). However, research also has shown that close and supportive relationships with parents are central to understanding the development of intimacy in romantic relationships, and maintaining a balance between autonomy and relatedness in parent-child relationships promotes optimal adolescent development (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994). In fact, research has shown that couples who can balance autonomy with intimacy report higher levels of self-validation, and overall, higher relationship quality in marriage (Harter, Waters, Pettitt, Whitesell, Kofkin, & Jordan, 1997).

Mothers, Fathers, and Young Adults' Romantic Outcomes

Many studies have explored the distinctive role of mothers and fathers during adolescence; however, a limited amount of literature exists that has specifically examined the continuing role that parents play in the lives of their children, and how these parental

relationships affect romantic relationship indicators during young adulthood. Specifically, research demonstrates that mothers tend to have closer, more affectionate and supportive relationships with children, and greater levels of open communication with both sons and daughters, although fathers appear to exude substantial influence in regards to young adults' interpersonal competencies such as trust, self-esteem, independence-promoting behaviors, and identity development (Collins & Russell, 1991; Steinberg, 1988).

Prior research has also confirmed that mothers tend to spend more time with their children than fathers (Miller & Lane, 1991; Russell & Russell, 1987; Sayer, 2005). Mothers also identify with more of a caregiver role as compared to fathers, and mothers are more likely to have conversations with their children, especially daughters, on personal matters (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Conversely, mothers typically experience higher levels of conflict with their children (Collins & Russell, 1991; Laursen, 1995), although mother-child interactions are more frequently characterized by an overall tone of warmth and responsiveness. In general, children rate relationships with mothers as higher in quality than relationships with fathers, with research demonstrating that mother-child relationships tend to improve in quality over time as compared to father-child relationships (Thornton, Orbuch, & Axinn, 1995).

Over the last few decades, there has been a burgeoning interest in the research on the importance of fathers (Coltrane, 1995). Although mothers continue to be considered the primary caregiver, relationships with fathers have predicted unique variance for child outcomes in past research (Lamb, 2000). For instance, Marcus and Betzer (1996) found that sons' lack of attachment to fathers was a significant predictor of antisocial behavior, whereas the quality of relationships with both mothers and fathers predicted daughters' level of parental attachment. In addition, Williams and Kelly (2005) recently found that fathers' lack of involvement and

adolescent attachment were associated with teachers' reports of externalizing behavior problems. Interestingly, relationships with fathers demonstrated a stronger pattern for daughters' externalizing behaviors, a finding that necessitates further exploration. Overall, research in this area suggests that fathers play a formative role in child outcomes, thus the present investigation will further explore the unique roles of mothers and fathers on young adults' romantic outcomes.

The Moderating Role of Stage of Adolescence

It is well-known in the literature that authoritative parenting, which is characterized by high warmth, involvement, support, and reasonable limit setting, is associated with optimal child outcomes (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Steinberg, Darling, & Fletcher, 1995). Conversely, negative parent-child relationships, characterized by high levels of conflict, a lack of affection, and lower levels of support, are associated with greater internalizing and externalizing behaviors in children, earlier sexual activity, and involvement with norm-violating peer groups (Ge, Best, Conger, & Simons, 1996; Gunn & Furstenberg, 1989). However, there are important distinctions to make regarding stage of adolescence and the role of parenting during early versus late adolescence. Past research has established that healthy parent-child relations during adolescence are characterized by strong attachments, particularly during early adolescence. During later adolescence, the importance of separation-individuation from parents becomes a primary task while relationships with peers and opposite-sex dating partners are formed. Although the quality of relationships with parents remains relatively stable over time, unique processes inherent to the parent-child relationship during early versus late adolescence may be more important to subsequent competence in romantic relationships. Future research is necessary to explore how parenting processes during distinct stages of adolescence contribute to children's long-term outcomes. Specifically, the current study will explore processes that are

unique to early adolescence versus those associated with adjustment during late adolescence, and how these unique processes are related to potentially different outcomes in young adults' romantic relationships.

The Current Investigation

The current study utilizes longitudinal and nationally representative data to investigate the quality of relationships with mothers and fathers during early and late adolescence, and to understand how processes within the parent-child relationship predicted children's romantic outcomes in young adulthood (for a conceptual depiction, see Figure 1). Specifically, using Wave 2 and Wave 3 of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), this study will examine whether and how parents shape their children's romantic relationships in later life. Predictor variables were measured at Wave 2, which was collected from 1992 to 1994. These measures assess quality of relationships with adolescent children as reported by mothers and fathers. Parents also reported on children's peer relationships, time spent with children, discipline tactics, children's level of disclosure, expressed affection toward children, independence-granting behaviors, amount of conflict, and adolescents' dating relationships. Focal children between the ages of 10 to 17 reported on the same indicators to assess their perspectives of relationship quality with mothers and fathers. To examine the impact of quality of relationships with mothers and fathers during distinct periods of adolescence, children were divided into two stages of adolescence, early (age 10-13) versus late (age 14-17), to predict the unique association of stage of adolescence on parent-adolescent relationship quality and romantic relationship outcomes in young adulthood.

Outcome variables were measured at Wave 3, which took place approximately 10 years later (2001 – 2002), when focal children were between the ages of 20 to 27. In Wave 3, young

adults' romantic relationships will be examined in order to determine if parent-child relationship quality during adolescence has a differential impact on the romantic relationship quality indicators of satisfaction, disagreements, and attitudes concerning trouble in marriage. This study expects to find that the quality of relationships with mothers and fathers during the distinct developmental periods of early versus late adolescence will uniquely contribute to young adult children's relational outcomes 10 years later.

No research to date has examined the longitudinal impact of mothers and fathers during two distinct developmental periods in adolescence on young adult children's romantic outcomes. In addition, this study is unique in that reports were obtained from both parents and children during two points in time. Past research often uses reports from one person's perspective, with parents often reporting more positive relationships with children as compared to children's reports of relationship quality with parents (Aquilino, 1999). Thus, this research will inform current gaps in the literature by examining how family of origin factors influence the course of romantic relationships by using a large, nationally representative, longitudinal data set.

Research Questions

RQ 1: Will mothers' and fathers' reports of relationship quality with adolescent children significantly differ from children's reports of relationship quality with mothers and fathers?

RQ 2: Will quality of relationships with mothers and fathers during adolescence, as reported by both parents and children (Time 1), predict young adult children's reports of romantic relationship quality 10 years later (Time 2)?

RQ 3: Will quality of relationships with mothers and fathers during adolescence differ in their effects on young adults' romantic relationships?

RQ 4: Will relationships with mothers and fathers be significantly different during early versus late adolescence?

RQ 5: Will stage of adolescence (early versus late) moderate the relation between parent-adolescent relationship quality and young adults' romantic relationship quality?

Method

Procedures

The National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) is a nationally representative survey, longitudinal in design, utilizing three waves of collected data from 1988 through 2002. In the original data collection, a cross-section of participants was randomly chosen, with an over-sampling of racial/ethnic minorities and diverse family structures (e.g., single parents, stepfamilies). An introductory letter was sent to randomly selected addresses ($N = 33,869$) informing potential participants of the study purpose and protocol. An interviewer visited the home of those who agreed to participate, with the purpose of screening participants in the main sample ($N = 16,941$) and the over-represented sample ($N = 16,928$).

During the screening interview, participants were asked who presently lived in the household as well as the age and marital status of each family member. One respondent was then randomly chosen as the primary respondent from each household. Initial interviews took place in the home during this first contact visit with the primary respondent, and the spouse or partner living in the home was asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire. The screening response rates for both the main sample and the over-sample were 91 percent successful. Follow-up phone interviews in subsequent data collection lasted an average of one hour and forty minutes. Additional questionnaires on demographics and life history events were

self-administered to participants. In addition, a short self-administered questionnaire was given to the spouse or cohabiting partner of the primary respondent during subsequent contacts.

Longitudinal data were collected five years later at Wave 2 (1992 – 1994) from primary respondents, cohabiting partners and spouses, as well as adolescent and young adult children. Focal children in each family were selected based on which child's name came first in the alphabet. For the purposes of the current study, reports from mothers, fathers, and adolescent children in Wave 2 will be used to examine parent-adolescent relationship quality on indicators of warmth/closeness and control/conflict. The most recent data collection at Wave 3 (2001 – 2002) will be utilized to examine young adults' reported romantic relationship quality (for further information on NSFH study design, see Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988).

Sample

The original study was comprised of $N = 13,017$ main respondents. The current study will utilize Wave 2 and Wave 3 of the NSFH. In Wave 2, mothers' and fathers' reports of quality of relationships with children were assessed. The average age of parents was 47 years old. In addition, focal children between the ages of 10 to 17 years old reported on the quality of relationships with mothers and fathers. At Wave 2, $n = 1,762$ children were interviewed. For Wave 3, young adults ($n = 881$) from Wave 2 reported on relationships with their current romantic partner. Young adult children ranged in age from 20 to 27 years old.

Measures

Demographic Characteristics. Data were collected retrospectively from primary and secondary respondents (i.e., mothers and fathers), as well as focal children during adolescence and young adulthood. In addition age, sex, racial/ethnic identification, marital status, socioeconomic status (SES), and family structure while growing up.

Parent-adolescent warmth/closeness. Parents and adolescent children reported on identical questions assessing the positive aspects of their relationships through the construct of warmth/closeness in relationships with each other. The warmth/closeness scale was comprised of four dimensions: (1) global relationship quality (i.e., “Taking things all together, on a scale from 0 = really bad to 10 = absolutely perfect, how would you describe your relationship with your parent/child?”); (2) humor/closeness (5-point Likert-type scale, with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, i.e., “It’s easy for me to laugh and have a good time with my parent/child”); (3) tension (5-point Likert scale, 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, i.e., “I feel on edge or tense when I’m with my parent/child”); and (4) shared activities (5-point scale, 1 = not at all and 5 = more than once a week, i.e., “Over the last 3 months, about how often have you spent time with your parent/child in leisure activities, working on something together, or just having private talks?”). The four dimensions of warmth/closeness were averaged to form a total score of positive relationship quality for mothers, fathers, and adolescents. The tension question was reverse-coded so that higher scores represented less tension in the parent-adolescent relationship. Higher scores across all dimensions indicated higher levels of warmth/closeness in the parent-adolescent relationship. Reliability estimates for mothers’, fathers’, and adolescents’ reports of positive relationship quality ranged from $\alpha = .85$ to $\alpha = .95$.

Parent-adolescent control/conflict. The control/conflict scale was comprised of 4 items assessing both parents’ and adolescents’ perceptions of the following negative dimensions of relationship quality: (1) parental control/influence (5-point Likert-type scale, 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, i.e., “I/my mother/my father would like more influence over my/my child’s decisions”); (2) parental disapproval (average of 6 items, 5-point scale, 1 = extremely happy and 5 = extremely unhappy, e.g., “How do/does your parent feel about how

well you've done in school, your boyfriend/girlfriend, future plans?"); (3) extent of open disagreements (total response rate, 1 = No and 2 = Yes, i.e., "In the last 3 months, have you and your parent/child had open disagreements about: dress, friends, dating partners, job, sexual behavior, drinking, smoking or drug use, money, helping around the house, curfew, or discipline?"); and (4) **fight/arguments** (5-point scale, 1 = not at all and 5 = more than once a week, i.e., "During the last 3 months, how often did you argue or fight or have a lot of difficulty with your parent/child?"). The four dimensions of control/conflict were averaged to form a total score of negative relationship quality for mothers, fathers, and adolescents. Higher scores across all dimensions indicated higher levels of control/conflict in the parent-adolescent relationship. Reliability estimates for mothers', fathers', and adolescents' reports of negative relationship quality ranged from $\alpha = .89$ to $\alpha = .94$.

Young adults' romantic relationship quality. A global relationship quality measure was used to assess young adult children's romantic relationship quality. This indicator was comprised of three questions, as defined by satisfaction, attitudes about marriage, and conflict in young adults' romantic relationships. The conflict indicator was reverse-coded so that higher levels were related to less conflict in the relationship. The three dimensions of romantic relationship quality were averaged to form a total score of relationship quality for young adults. Higher scores across all dimensions indicated higher levels of romantic relationship quality. The reliability estimate for this scale was $\alpha = .92$.

Results

Initial correlation analyses examined the associations between mothers', fathers', and adolescents' reports of relationship quality (i.e., warmth/closeness, control/conflict).

Adolescents' reports of warmth/closeness were moderately correlated with mothers' reports ($r =$

.55) and weakly correlated with fathers' reports of warmth/closeness ($r = .25$). Further, adolescents' reports of control/conflict were moderately correlated with both mothers' ($r = .65$) and fathers' ($r = .55$) reports of control/conflict. Mothers' and fathers' reports of relationship quality with adolescents were moderately correlated ($r = .50$).

Paired t-test analyses compared group means for adolescents and mothers, adolescents and fathers, and mothers and fathers on reports of relationship quality, and found significant differences between adolescents and mothers ($t = 8.74, p < .001$) and adolescents and fathers ($t = 9.65, p < .001$) on warmth/closeness. Adolescents' reports of warmth/closeness were significantly lower ($M = 3.54, SD = .64$) than mothers' reports ($M = 3.85, SD = .75$). In addition, adolescents rated warmth/closeness significantly lower ($M = 3.17, SD = .61$) than fathers' reports ($M = 3.72, SD = .65$). However, no significant differences were found between mothers' and fathers' reports of warmth/closeness. Further, mothers reported the lowest levels of control/conflict ($M = 3.76, SD = .72$) as compared to adolescents' reports ($M = 4.08, SD = .65$) and fathers' reports of control/conflict ($M = 3.91, SD = .69$). Lastly, fathers' reports of control/conflict ($M = 3.91, SD = .69$) were significantly lower than adolescents' reports of control/conflict ($M = 4.08, SD = .65$).

Next, we examined how the quality of relationships with mothers and fathers during adolescence, as reported by parents and children, predicted adult children's reports of romantic relationship quality a decade later. Exploratory regression analyses examined the importance of demographic variables (i.e., age, sex, racial/ethnic identification, marital status, socioeconomic status (SES), and family structure) and found that the effects on young adults' romantic relationship quality were very modest, especially once parents' reports were included in the model; thus a decision was made to simply enter these variables as controls in subsequent

analyses. Next, adolescents', mothers', and fathers' reports of parenting process variables (i.e., warmth/closeness, control/conflict) were entered. Results indicated a significant effect for adolescents' reports of control/conflict with mothers on later romantic relationship quality ($\beta = -.196, p < .01$). Adolescents' perceptions of higher control/conflict with mothers during adolescence were the only significant predictor of young adults' reported romantic relationship quality. In addition, differential effects of mothers and fathers on young adults' romantic outcomes were explored. As indicated above, relationships with mothers were the only significant predictor of romantic relationship quality in young adulthood.

The last research questions examined how stage of adolescence (early versus late) moderated parent-adolescent relationship quality and young adults' romantic outcomes. First, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were used to assess whether adolescents, mothers, and fathers reported differences in relationship quality by stage of adolescence. Results indicated that relationships with mothers differed significantly by stage of adolescence ($p < .001$). Specifically, Scheffe post hoc tests revealed that during later adolescence, mothers reported higher levels of warmth/closeness with children ($M = 3.73, SD = .57$) as compared to reports in early adolescence ($M = 3.46, SD = .67$). Further, older adolescents rated relationship with fathers as significantly higher on warmth/closeness ($M = 3.33, SD = .45$) as compared to younger adolescents ($M = 3.05, SD = .70$). In addition, children in the late adolescence group reported higher levels of control/conflict with both mothers ($M = 4.20, SD = .68$) and fathers ($M = 3.93, SD = .45$) as compared to those in the early adolescence group ($M = 3.89, SD = .58; M = 3.73, SD = .48$).

Further, initial correlation analyses provided evidence of the significance of stage of adolescence with parent-adolescent relationship quality and young adults' romantic outcomes;

therefore, subsequent hierarchical regression analyses were completed separately by stage of adolescence (early versus late adolescence, split at the median age of sample). A series of hierarchical regression analyses were completed by early versus late adolescence groups on young adults' romantic relationship quality. In the first step, control variables (i.e., age, sex, racial/ethnic identification, marital status, socioeconomic status (SES), and family structure) were entered. Next, mothers', fathers', and adolescents' reports of relationship quality (i.e., warmth/closeness, control/conflict) were entered. Results indicated that stage of adolescence, specifically early adolescence, moderated the relation between mothers' reports of warmth/closeness and young adults' romantic relationship quality ($\beta = .140, p < .05$). None of the parent-adolescent relationship quality variables reached significance for romantic relationship outcomes in the late adolescence group.

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to investigate the quality of relationships with mothers and fathers during early and late adolescence and how processes within the parent-child relationship predicted children's romantic outcomes in young adulthood. To examine the impact of quality of relationships with mothers and fathers during distinct periods of adolescence, children were divided into two stages of adolescence, early (age 10-13) versus late (age 14-17), to predict the unique association of stage of adolescence on parent-adolescent relationship quality and romantic relationship outcomes in young adulthood.

Specifically, for Research Question 1, results found that parents and adolescents reported differing views on relationship quality indicators. Adolescents' reports of warmth/closeness were moderately related to mothers' reports and weakly related to fathers' reports. Overall, adolescents rated relationships with both parents as lower in warmth/closeness as compared to

parents' higher perceptions of a positive relationship with adolescent children. Further, relationships between adolescents', mothers', and fathers' reports of control/conflict were moderately related. These findings support past research concluding that parents' perceptions of positive aspects of relationships with adolescent children are on average higher than adolescents' reports (Acock & Bengtson, 1980; Noller, Seth-Smith, Bouma, & Schweitzer, 1992). In terms of negative aspects of parent-adolescent relationships, past research also has found a larger difference between adolescents' and parents' reports of control/conflict, with adolescents typically reporting higher levels than parents (Aquilino, 1999). Past research has explained these findings in terms of a generational stake -- the idea that parents have a greater stake in maintaining positive relationships with children, whereas adolescents tend to focus on the negative aspects of relationships with parents in order to exert their independence. In addition, research has documented that children spend more time with mothers than with fathers during adolescence; hence perceptions of relationship quality between adolescents and mothers may be more accurate than perceptions between adolescents and fathers (Sayer, 2005; Larson et al., 1996).

For Research Questions 2 and 3, results indicated that adolescents' reports of control/conflict with mothers predicted later romantic relationship quality in young adulthood. Specifically, the higher the amount of conflict that adolescents perceived with their mothers, the lower their reported romantic relationship quality in young adulthood. Past research has supported the notion that mother-adolescent relationships are more conflict-ridden, especially through the adolescent's perception (Collins & Russell, 1991; Laursen, 1995). These lasting impressions of the parent-child relationship during adolescence appear to have a long-term effect on relationships outside of the family, particularly in an intimate context. Similarly, these results

showed that relationships with mothers, as opposed to fathers, during adolescence had a more lasting impact on young adults' romantic relationship quality. Again, this could be due to the central role that mothers occupy in their children's lives during adolescence. Past research has confirmed these findings, showing that adolescents report higher levels of closeness with mothers than with fathers (Laursen, Wilder, Noack, & Williams, 2000). Further, fathers are typically less involved with children, spending 20-to-25 percent the amount of time that mothers spend with their children (Lamb, 2000).

Finally, for Research Questions 4 and 5, results indicated that mothers' ratings of warmth/closeness and adolescents' ratings of fathers' warmth/closeness were higher during late adolescence as opposed to early adolescence. In addition, adolescents rated conflict/control with both mothers and fathers as higher during later adolescence. Past research has documented that conflict tends to increase during adolescence, whereas warmth/closeness within parent-adolescent relationships decreases (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). However, the current findings suggest that mothers and adolescents perceive relationships as higher in warmth/closeness during later adolescence, while at the same time adolescents perceive relationships with both parents as higher in control/conflict during this time period. Further research is clearly needed to understand the long-term implications of having both highly positive and highly negative perceptions of parent-adolescent relationships, and the impact this may have on young adults' romantic relationships.

Further, the current study found that mothers' reports of warmth/closeness with children during early adolescence were predictive of young adult children's romantic relationship quality 10 years later. This supports prior research finding that early adolescence is a time of greater dependence on parents, and mothers' support during this time period has been associated with

bonded love in young adulthood (Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). As adolescents become older and desire greater autonomy from parents, outside influences, such as those from peers and romantic partners, may influence outcomes more so than relationships with parents (Furman & Wehner, 1994). However, more recent research studies have refuted this claim, finding that relationships with parents, versus peers, during later adolescence are more predictive of romantic relationship quality in young adulthood (Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, & Klessinger, 2001). Clearly, further investigation is needed to disentangle the impact of stage of adolescence on the development of romantic relationship competencies in young adulthood.

Based on the current findings, it appears that the quality of relationships with parents during specific stages of adolescence moderated the relationship between parent-adolescent relationship quality and young adults' later romantic relationship quality. More specifically, in the early adolescence group, mothers' reports of warmth/closeness predicted higher romantic relationship quality in young adulthood. In contrast, for the total sample, adolescents' reports of mothers' control/conflict was a significant predictor of relationship quality in young adulthood. The more control/conflict adolescents reported, the lower their romantic relationship quality in young adulthood. Hence, it appears important to obtain multiple perspectives ascertaining the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship, and to distinguish between stages of adolescence in order to determine how processes unique to the parent-adolescent relationship during these periods relate to later romantic outcomes.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Very little research to date has examined the longitudinal impact of relationships with mothers and fathers during two distinct developmental periods in adolescence on young adult children's romantic outcomes. The findings of this research confirm the importance of

examining the unique effects of mothers and fathers on child outcomes as well as discovering that parents' and adolescents' differing perceptions of relationship quality impact later outcomes. Hence, this study is unique in that reports were obtained from both parents and children during two points in time, allowing for the minimization of shared method variance as well as providing evidence for causal pathways that influence children's long-term outcomes. Past research often used reports from one person's perspective (Aquilino, 1999). This research addressed current gaps in the literature by examining how family of origin processes influence the development of romantic relationships, which is important in preventing the cycle of unhealthy relationship patterns in families.

Finally, it is important to note the limitations of the current investigation, which include the use of single-item measures. Future research should more specifically address parenting behaviors and romantic relationship quality using multi-item measures. Future work needs to provide a greater understanding of how dyadic sex composition of the parent-child relationship impacts parenting and the development of romantic competence. In particular, past research has alluded to the crucial role of fathers on the development of interpersonal competencies. Clearly, further research is necessary that specifically addresses these issues across different age groupings during adolescence. In addition, we propose to examine additional relationship statuses of young adults including cohabitation and marriage as well as alternative outcomes that represent success as an adult, such as educational and career achievements.

References

- Acock, A., & Bengtson, V. (1980). Socialization and attribution processes: Actual versus perceived similarity among parents and youth. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *42*, 501-515.
- Allen, J. P., Hauser, S. T., Bell, K. L., & O'Connor, T. G. (1994). Longitudinal assessment of autonomy and relatedness in adolescent-family interactions as predictors of adolescent ego development and self-esteem. *Child Development*, *65*, 179-194.
- Aquilino, W. S. (1999). Two views of one relationship: Comparing parents' and young adult children's reports of the quality of intergenerational relations. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *61*, 858-870.
- Bartle-Haring, S., & Sabatelli, R. M. (1997). Emotional reactivity toward parents and interpersonal competence: Differences across gender and type of relationship. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *26*, 399-413.
- Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, *11*, 56-95.
- Bryant, C. M., & Conger, R. D. (2002). An intergenerational model of romantic relationship development. In A. L. Vangelisti, H. T. Reis, & M. A. Fitzpatrick (Eds.), *Stability and change in relationships* (pp. 57-82). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cassidy, J., & Shaver, P. R. (Eds.). (1999). *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Clark-Lempers, D. S., Lempers, J. D., & Ho, C. (1991). Early, middle, and late adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with significant others. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *6*, 296-315.

- Collins, W. A., & Russell, G. (1991). Mother-child and father-child relationships in middle childhood and adolescence: A developmental analysis. *Developmental Review, 11*, 99-136.
- Coltrane, S. (1995). The future of fatherhood: Social, demographic, and economic influences on men's family involvements. In W. Marsiglio (Ed.), *Fatherhood: Contemporary theory, research and social policy* (pp. 255-274). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Conger, R. D., Cui, M., Bryant, C. M., & Elder, G. H., Jr. (2000). Competence in early adult romantic relationships: A developmental perspective on family influences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*, 224-237.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Furman, W., & Wehner, E. A. (1994). Romantic views: Toward a theory of adolescent romantic relationships. In R. Montemayor, B. Adams, & T. Gulotta (Eds.), *Advances in adolescent development: Vol 3. Personal relationships during adolescence* (pp. 168-195). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- General Social Survey, 2006. Data extracted September 18, 2007:
http://publicdata.norc.org:41000/gssbeta/GSSVariables_subject.html
- Ge, X., Best, K. M., Conger, R. D., Simons, R. L. (1996). Parenting behaviors and the occurrence and co-occurrence of adolescent depressive symptoms and conduct problems. *Developmental Psychology, 32*, 717-731.
- Gray, M. R., & Steinberg, L. (1999). Adolescent romance and the parent-child relationship: A contextual perspective. In W. Furman, B. B. Brown, & C. Feiring (Eds.), *The development of romantic relationships in adolescence* (pp. 235-265). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Gunn, J. B., & Furstenberg, F. F. (1989). Adolescent sexual behavior. *American Psychologist*, *44*, 249-257.
- Harter, S., Waters, P. L., Pettitt, L. M., Whitesell, N., Kofkin, J., & Jordan, J. (1997). Autonomy and connectedness as dimensions of relationship styles in men and women. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *14*, 147-164.
- Kawaguchi, M. C., Welsh, D. P., Powers, S. I., & Rostosky, S. S. (1998). Mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters: Temperament, gender, and adolescent-parent relationships. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, *44*, 77-96.
- Kim, K. J., Conger, R. D., Lorenz, F. O., & Elder, G. H., Jr. (2001). Parent-adolescent reciprocity in negative affect and its relation to early adult social development. *Developmental Psychology*, *37*, 775-790.
- Lamb, M. E. (2000). The history of research on father involvement: An overview. *Marriage and Family Review*, *29*, 23-42.
- Larson, R. W., Richards, M. H., Moneta, G., Holmbeck, G., & Duckett, E. (1996). Changes in adolescents' daily interactions with their families from ages 10 to 18: Disengagement and transformation. *Developmental Psychology*, *32*, 744-754.
- Laursen, B. (1995). Conflict and social interaction in adolescent relationships. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *5*, 55-70.
- Laursen, B., Wilder, D., Noack, P., & Williams, V. (2000). Adolescent perceptions of reciprocity, authority, and closeness in relationships with mothers, fathers, and friends. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *24*, 464-471.

- Maccoby, E., & Martin, J. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family. In E. M. Hetherington (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. Socialization, personality, and social development* (pp. 1-102). New York: Wiley.
- Marcus, R. F., & Betzer, P. D. (1996). Attachment and antisocial behavior in early adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 16*, 229-248.
- Miller, J. B., & Lane, M. (1991). Relations between young adults and their parents. *Journal of Adolescence, 14*, 179-194.
- Noller, P., Seth-Smith, M., Bouma, R., & Schweitzer, R. (1992). Parent and adolescent perceptions of family functioning: A comparison of clinic and nonclinic families. *Journal of Adolescence, 15*, 101-114.
- Paikoff, R. L., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (1991). Do parent-child relationships change during puberty? *Psychological Bulletin, 110*, 47-66.
- Reese-Weber, M., & Bartle-Haring, S. (1998). Conflict resolution styles in family subsystems and adolescent romantic relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 27*, 735-752.
- Russell, G., & Russell, A. (1987). Mother-child and father-child relationships in middle childhood. *Child Development, 58*, 1573-1585.
- Russell, A., & Saebel, J. (1997). Mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son, father-daughter: Are they distinct relationships? *Developmental Review, 17*, 111-147.
- Sayer, L. (2005). Trends in Women's and Men's Work and Free Time. *Social Forces, 84*, 285-303.
- Scharf, M., & Mayseless, O. (2001). The capacity for romantic intimacy: Exploring the contribution of best friend and marital and parental relationships. *Journal of Adolescence, 24*, 379-399.

- Seiffge-Krenke, I. (2003). Testing theories of romantic development from adolescence to young adulthood: Evidence of a developmental sequence. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 27*, 519-531.
- Seiffge-Krenke, I., Shulman, S., & Klessinger, N. (2001). Adolescent precursors of romantic relationships in young adulthood. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 18*, 327-346.
- Steinberg, L. (1988). Reciprocal relation between parent-child distance and pubertal maturation. *Developmental Psychology, 24*, 122-128.
- Steinberg, L., Darling, N. E., & Fletcher, A. C. (1995). Authoritative parenting and adolescent adjustment: An ecological journey. In P. Moen & G. H. Elder, Jr. (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (pp. 423-466). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Sweet, J. A., Bumpass, L. L., & Call, V. (1988). *The design and content of the National Survey of Families and Households* (Working Paper NSFH-1). Madison: University of Wisconsin, Center for Demography and Ecology.
- Taradash, A., Connolly, J., Pepler, D., Craig, W., & Costa, M. (2001). The interpersonal context of romantic autonomy in adolescence. *Journal of Adolescence, 24*, 365-377.
- Teachman, J., Tedrow, L. & Crowder, K. (2000), The changing demography of America's families. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62*, 1234-1246.
- Thornton, A., Orbuch, T. L., & Axinn, W. G. (1995). Parent-child relationships during the transition to adulthood. *Journal of Family Issues, 16*, 538-564.
- Valery, J. H., O'Connor, P., & Jennings, S. (1997). The nature and amount of support college-age adolescents request and receive from parents. *Adolescence, 32*, 323-338.

Williams, S. K., & Kelly, F. D. (2005). Relationships among involvement, attachment, and behavioral problems in adolescence: Examining fathers' influence. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 25*, 168-196.

Youniss, J., & Smollar, J. (1985). *Adolescent relations with mothers, fathers, and friends*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the moderating role of stage of adolescence on parent-adolescent relationships and young adults' romantic relationship quality.

