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THE EFFECT OF PARENT CHILD COMMUNICATION IN COLLEGE ON SELF ESTEEM,
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, AND HAPPINESS

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the relationship between self-esteem, happiness, and academic achievement in college students and their relationship with their parents. Data were gathered using a convenience sample at a large Northeastern university (N=263) during the fall of 2014. The findings of the study show that there is no significant relationship between the college students' relationship with their parents and grade point average, self-esteem and happiness. Parent's marital status was a significant predictor of the quality of relationship with the father but not the mother. Women and those students with high levels of religiosity reported better relationships with their parents than their counterparts.

Keywords: Relationship with parents, happiness, self-esteem, academic achievement

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Chapter 1

Literature Review

Causes and effects of parent-child interactions have received considerable attention in the empirical literature. Much of this research has focused on young and adolescent children. My research adds to the research literature by examining how college students interact with their parents before and during college and whether these interactions influence student well-being and academic achievement. Factors examined in my research include level of communication; gender of the parent and gender of the student, and the impact of this communication on student well-being and academic performance. Data for this study come from a convenience sample of students at a large northeastern university in fall 2014. Variables examined include student's amount of communication with their parents, the quality of their relationship with their parents, background variables, social and mental health adjustment and academic performance.

Learning more about parent-child communication is important because, for many individuals, college is the first time they are on their own without parental control for days or weeks at a time. This sudden lack of supervision and guidance may lead some people to engage in behavior they did not before.

About 31.1 million people were enrolled in college in 2011 and between 2000 and 2011, the number of traditionally aged college students (ages 18 to 24) increased by 35 percent (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). A significant number of young people are enrolled in college and consequently it is important to examine how separation from parents affects students' level of communication with their parents and overall adjustment to college life.

According to Pew Research Social and Demographic Trends (2010), 76% of adults say that family is the most important aspect of their lives. College serves as the time in life where young people have less face-to-face interaction with their parents although the family relationship is remains pivotal in their lives. My research focuses on this period of adjustment and the role that family plays in this process.

Rational Choice Theory

The theoretical approach I am using to explain this research is the rational-choice theory. The rational choice theory states that individuals, when given a choice, will choose the option that is most rational for reaching their goals and desires. Another tenant of the theory focuses on knowing what motivates an individual and predicting their behavior (Hechter and Kanazawa, 1997: 191-214) in the context of both individual and structural factors. This theory fits with my research because if students are motivated by their affection for their families, they will have more conversations with their parents, which will affect their well being. The rewards of parental interaction can motivate students to perform well in college. Ultimately the level of communication between a parent and child is a choice that is made between both parties. Structurally, parental communication assists in the transmission of the values and norms of the larger society including success and hard work. Rational choice theory also focuses on differences in decision-making processes by gender and religion, familial values among other factors (Hechter and Kanazawa, 1997: 191-214). I expect students to make different rational choices based on both of these variables.

Family Structure and its Impact on Parent-Child Contact in College

Family structure plays a role in the development and attitudes of every child. There has been a wide range of research on how family structure impacts children during the growing up process. Dawson (1991) conducted research on family structure's impact on children's health and well-being. Data for the research came from the 1989 National Health Interview Survey. Findings showed that children from single parent families were more likely to have been treated for emotional and behavioral problems and have a lower academic performance than those from a two-parent family. Due to lower academic performance, children were more likely to be expelled and repeat a grade. Among these families, diminished parenting due to the parent's other responsibilities, lead to a decrease in communication between parent and child. This decrease in communication had a negative influence on the affection between the two and a positive influence on the amount of restrictiveness placed on the child (Dawson, 1991).

According to Dawson's findings (1991) an intact, biological parent family structure appears to be ideal for raising a child. Interestingly, Fisher, Leve, O'Leary, and Leve's (2003) found that intact biological parent families do not differ drastically from stepmother families in regards to parental monitoring. Their research also states though that the level of parental monitoring appears to be higher in stepfather families than intact families (45-52). This is somewhat consistent with the findings from Dawson's (1991) research because these are two parent families although they are not intact biological families. Consistent with Dawson's findings, Brown's (2004) research on family structures states that cohabiting parents and stepfamilies are more associated with negative child well-being than intact, biological parent families. Cohabiting parents closely resemble single parent families in regards to children's issues (Brown, 2004, 351-367). This research supports my first hypothesis (H1) which states

that children from intact, biological parents will talk to their parents more often and have a better well-being and academic achievement than those from other family types.

Parent-Child Closeness before College and Parent-Child Contact in College

In addition to structural factors such as parent's relationship status, a child's perception of their level of closeness with their parent is an indicator of their relationship with their parent. Barnes and Olson's (1985) found that both parents and children with high parent-child communication, perceived themselves as high in family cohesion, family adaptability, and family satisfaction (438-448). Familial communication levels can influence the overall family's ability to adapt to a child in college and remain a cohesive group. Barnes and Olson (1985) also found that children who reported being able to rely on both their teachers and parents and felt secure in their relationships with them, reported higher academic motivation and success. In contrast, for adolescents whose perception of their family cohesion and adaptability was low, Barnes and Olson (1985) found they reported higher levels of communication thanin more balanced families. They found the same to be true for adolescents who perceived their family as extremely high in cohesion and adaptability. Barnes and Olson (1985) theorized that this may be attributed to high balanced families being categorized as extreme families in the Circumplex Model. According to the Circumplex Model, families that are high in cohesion and adaptability could be categorized as chaotically enmeshed. Finally, Barnes and Olson (1985) also found that adolescents perceived less openness and more problems in intergenerational communication than their parents did. This could lead the child to perceive the relationship differently from the parent. Other research showed that adolescents reported not being able to talk to their parents

about some topics. A fourth of adolescents reported not being able to talk to their mother about certain topics while half of adolescents reported not being able to talk to their father about certain subjects (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, and Perry, 2006: 59-66). Overall, this research supports the second hypothesis (H2) I am examining in this research: Parents and children with a high level of closeness will communicate with each other more often and have a better well-being and academic achievement than those with lower levels of closeness. The inability to communicate about some subject matter with parents is not necessarily indicative of lower levels of closeness.

The Sex of the Parent and Its Impact on Parent-Child Contact in College

The gender of the parent and child could impact the degree to which the child feels comfortable communicating with that parent. According to research by Kerig, Cowan, and Cowan (1993), fathers reward boys and girls differently in conversation. They reinforce compliant behavior for girls and assertive behavior for boys. This difference could affect whether or not a child feels comfortable communicating with their father. According to the same research, in couples with marital discord, parent negativity was highest in fathers towards daughters. This negativity towards daughters in couples with marital discord will have an impact on the daughter's perception of her bond with her father (Kerig, Cowan, and Cowan, 1993: 931-939).

Researchers have also focused on other aspects of father-daughter communication and find that daughters benefit more from social support from outside individuals when problems in parent-child communication are high, especially when the problems occur in father-child

communication (Landman-Peeters, Hartman, Van der Pompe, den Boer, Minderaa, and Ormel, 2005: 2549-2559. These researchers also found that children at a high risk for depression and anxiety also rely more on social support when they have problems communicating with their father). Kernis, Brown, and Brody (2000) reported that fathers were perceived as more critical and controlling to children with unstable and low self-esteem. For children with high self-esteem, father's communication methods were perceived as value-affirming.

Children's perceived level of closeness with their mother is reported differently in research than their level of closeness with their father. Adolescents perceiving their mother as caring very little about them were at risk for more problems than those who thought their mother cared about them. These risks ranged from unhealthy weight control, substance abuse, body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and depression (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, and Perry, 2006: 59-66). Children with unstable self-esteem saw their mother's discipline as inconsistent, which is surprisingly true for girls with high self-esteem as well (Kernis, Brown, and Brody, 2000: 225-252). Adults who were parents, reported feeling more satisfied with their communication with their mother (Jackson, Bijstra, Oostra, and Bosma, 1998: 305-322). Overall, these findings supports the idea that young people have better communication patterns with their same sex parent as compared to their opposite sex parent. This research provides support for the third hypothesis (H3) I am examining: Children will feel more comfortable and talk more often to a parent of the same sex as them as compared to their opposite sex parent.

Parent-Child Communication and Its Impact on Child Well-being and Academic Achievement

Communication with parents can impact a variety of aspects of a child's life. Family communication has a positive association with adolescent well-being and self-esteem. Especially in adolescence, effective communication is regarded as a central aspect of good family functioning due to teenagers forming their sense of identity during this time period (Jackson, Bijstra, Oostra, and Bosma, 1998 : 305-322). Fan and Chen (2001) found that academic achievement is most strongly affected by parental aspirations and expectations. Their findings showed that parental home supervision had the weakest relationship with adolescent academic success. Finally, Fan and Chen (2001) found a small to moderate, but substantively meaningful relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement.

Other researchers have found that families with low communication were less affectionate and less flexible in solving family problems than their counterparts (Jackson, Bijstra, Oostra, and Bosma, 1998: 305-322). Also, adolescents who valued their friend's opinions over those of their parents were more likely to have low self-esteem than their counterparts (Jackson, Bijstra, Oostra, and Bosma, 1998: 305-322). This provides additional support for the importance of strong parental relationships with their children. These studies, support my fourth hypothesis (H4): A higher level of communication between parents and children will have a positive impact on child well-being and academic achievement In other research they found that problems in parent-child communication did not result in more depression symptoms in at risk children, if social support from outside individuals was present (Landman-Peeters, Hartman, Van der Pompe, den Boer, Minderaa, and Ormel, 2005: 2549-2559).

Hypotheses

H1: College students whose parents are married will be more likely to have better relationship with their parents than their counterparts.

H2: Students with a better relationships with their parents will be more likely to have higher grade point averages, self-esteem and happiness than their counterparts.

H3: Children will feel more comfortable and talk more often to a parent of the same sex as them.

Chapter 2

Methods

The data for the study were collected through a survey given to students at a large Northeastern University during the fall of 2014. Students enrolled in two classes were invited to participate in this study and received extra credit for completing the survey. A non-probability convenience sample was utilized. The survey was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University and was distributed to the respondents online. Participants were informed that the results would be used for a thesis. Students received information about the survey from a recruitment script. The respondent's completion and return of the survey indicated their consent. Students received extra credit for participation. Two hundred seventy-seven students responded to the survey.

Independent Variables

Seven independent variables were included in the analysis. Sex of the respondent (33.6% male and 66.4% female) as well as whether they had a living mother and/or father were included. Some of the questions also focused on the respondent's family structure. Questions were asked about the parent's marital status (69% married, 23.8% not married) , if the family has stepparents or stepchildren (1=yes, 2=no), and how many siblings the respondent has (average= 2.18). Mother's and father's education was also included as a control variable (1=less than high school, 8=Ph.D. or higher). Year in college was measured on a five point scale ranging from a

first year student to a fifth year or great student. Finally, religiosity was measured by a question

asking how important religion is in the respondent's life with a higher number indicating a

higher importance of religion.

Dependent Variables

The respondent's relationship with their parents was treated as a dependent variable in

the first two regression analyzes and as an independent variable in the remainder of the

regression analyzes. Respondents responded to a series of questions about their relationship with

their parents. These questions focused on the relationship with their parents during high school

and currently when they were not living with their parents while in college. They were asked

questions on how often they talked to their parents and what they talked to their parents about.

They were also asked questions on what mode of communication they used most frequently to

talk to their parents as well. Table 1 presents the responses to these items. These questions about

the respondent's relationship with their parents were then grouped together into the variables of

closeness to mother and closeness to father. All of the questions, except for the mode of

communication question, are done on a frequency scale to measure how often they are

communicating with their parents. (Very frequently= 5, Never=1) One of the other variables

looked at was the respondent's relationship with their parents before college. Questions asked

dealt with the relationship with mother and with father before college, how often they fought

with their parents, and the feeling of togetherness (Strongly Agree= 5, Strongly Disagree =1) in

the family before the respondent went to college About five % said they strongly disagreed,

8.7% said they disagreed, 13.4% were undecided, 28.5% said they agreed, and 37.5% said they

strongly agreed to having a feeling of togetherness in their family. These questions were also included in the variables mother closeness and father closeness. They provide information on what the relationship looked like before the student attended college. All of these questions were asked on a 5 point scale. The relationship with the mother and father scale was based on these items. It is a simple additive scale of the items with a higher number meaning a better relationship with the parents. The Chronbach's alpha for the relationship with the father is .655 and the relationship with the mother is .514.

Dependent variables include academic achievement, self-esteem, and happiness. Academic achievement was measured with questions about the respondent's grade point average (Under 2.0 =0.4%, 2.01-2.5= 2.9%, 2.51-3= 17.3%, 3.01-3.5= 28.5%, 3.51-4= 44.8%). The self-esteem scale was composed of two questions. Students were asked if they felt they were a person of worth (Strongly Agree=5 to Strongly Disagree=1). They were also asked if they had a positive attitude towards themselves which had the same responses. These items were added together to form the scale with a higher number indicating higher self-esteem. The Chronbach's alpha for the scale was .819 indicating that it is a reliable scale. Finally happiness was measured by the question that asked them in general how happy they were. About 20% percent of respondents said they were very happy, 72.6% were somewhat happy, and 0.7% were not very happy.

Chapter 3

Findings

Table 1 presents the descriptives for all of the variables in the analysis. The correlation matrix for these variables is presented in Table 2. The respondent's number of brothers and sisters was significantly correlated with self-esteem ($p < .05$). Parent's marital status, year in college, and mother's level of education was significantly correlated with GPA and self-esteem, gender, and religion are significantly correlated with happiness ($p < .05$).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Independent and Control Variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Happy	258	1.00	5.00	3.9651	0.75549
Relationship with Dad	247	4.00	21.30	14.2733	3.31246
Relationship with Mom	250	6.50	23.20	16.3712	2.76733
Gender	263	0.00	1.00	0.6768	0.46859
Self-Esteem	246	1.00	3.67	1.8672	0.43900
Academic Achievement	250	1.80	3.40	2.9128	0.34326
Parent's Marital Status	263	0.00	1.00	0.2738	0.44674
Mother's Highest Level of Education	260	1	8	4.50	1.548
Father's Highest Level of Education	249	1	8	4.71	1.754
Year in College	263	1	5	1.98	1.063
Number of Brothers and Sisters	261	0.00	9.00	2.2797	2.25028

Table 2. Correlation matrix of Independent and Control Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
GPA (1)	1												
Happiness (2)	0.120	1											
Self-Esteem (3)	-0.075	-0.365**	1										
Relationship with Mom (4)	0.011	0.094	0.045	1									
Relationship with Dad (5)	0.108	0.091	0.007	0.433**	1								
Gender (6)	0.068	0.154*	-0.20	0.289**	0.92	1							
Parent's Marital Status (7)	-0.172*	-0.015	0.029	-0.094	-0.336**	0.084	1						
Religion (8)	-0.016	0.173*	-0.112	0.208**	0.074	0.154*	-0.063	1					
Year in College (9)	-0.374**	-0.087	-0.007	-0.116	-0.183**	0.048	0.242**	-0.032	1				
Mother's level of Education (10)	0.151*	0.117	0.006	0.1	0.00	0.019	-0.069	0.033	-0.005	1			
Father's level of Education (11)	0.109	0.060	0.005	0.036	0.040	-0.085	-0.131	-0.007	-0.099	0.367**	1		
Number of Brothers and Sisters (12)	-0.122	-0.009	0.143*	-0.013	-0.088	0.112	0.18**	0.098	0.161*	-0.115	-0.009	1	
Feeling of Togetherness (13)	0.117	0.061	-0.137*	0.172*	0.287**	-0.065	-0.409**	0.123	0.000	0.015	0.021	-0.036	1

The linear regression analysis for the relationship between the respondent's relationship with their mother and control variables is shown in Table 3. Only two variables had a significant effect. Females report a better relationship with their mother as compared to males (p< .001). The more religious a person is the more likely they are to report a better relationship with their mother compared to those with lower level s of religiosity (p<.001). Table 4 presents the linear regression analysis for the relationship between the respondent's relationship with their father and the control variables. Only one variable had a significant effect. If the father was still married to the respondent's mother, the more likely the respondent was to report a positive relationship with their father (p<.001). This relationship was in the same direction for men and women.

Table 3. Regression of the control variables on relationship with the father

	Model
Gender	0.560
Religion	0.201
Year in College	-0.220
Father's highest level of education	-0.047
Number of Brothers and Sisters	-0.086
Parent's Marital Status	-2.175***

*** Significant at the 0.001 level

Table 4. Regression of the control variables on relationship with the mother

	Model
Gender	1.413***
Religion	0.434***
Year in College	-0.222
Mother's highest level of Education	0.172
Number of Brothers and Sisters	-0.057
Parent's Marital Status	-0.173

*** Significant at the 0.001 level

Table 5 presents the linear regression analysis for the relationship between the

independent and control variables on the dependent variable grade point average. Interestingly,

the relationship with the mother and father has no effect upon GPA. This is presented in Model

1. Model 2 shows the relationship between the independent and control variables and GPA.

Only two variables have a significant effect.

As years in college increases, GPA decreases ($p < .001$) and as mother's education increases,

students GPA increases ($p < .05$). Model 3 presents the independent and control variables with

the addition of the interaction terms for relationship with mother and father by sex of respondent.

No significant effect from the interaction terms was found. It did not matter whether the

respondent was a son or a daughter on how they evaluated their relationship with their parents

and this did not affect the student's grade point average.

Table 5. Regression of the independent and control variables on grade point average

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Relationship with Mom	-0.011	-0.031	-0.052
Relationship with Dad	0.032	0.013	0.047
Gender		0.231	0.431
Parent's Marital Status		-0.116	-0.123
Religion		-0.004	-0.009
Year in College		-0.302***	-0.307***
Mother's highest level of education		0.078*	0.082*
Father's highest level of education		0.026	0.027
Number of brothers and sisters		-0.018	-0.016
Relationship with Mom X gender of respondent			0.027
Relationship with Dad X gender of respondent			-0.043
Constant	3.953	4.623	4.460
R2	0.011	0.198	0.201

* Signficant at the .05 level, *** Significant at the .001 level

The linear regression analysis for the relationship between the independent and control variables on the dependent variable self-esteem is shown in Table 6. Model 1 shows the relationship with the mother and father has no effect upon self-esteem. Model 2 shows the relationship between the independent and control variables and self-esteem. Only two variables have a significant effect. As the respondent's number of siblings' increases, self-esteem increases $(p < .01)$ and as religiosity increases, students self-esteem decreases $(p < .05)$. Model 3 presents the independent and control variables with the addition of the interaction terms for relationship with mother and father by sex of respondent. No significant effect from the interaction terms was found. It did not matter whether the respondent was a son or a daughter on how they evaluated their relationship with their parents and this did not affect the student's self-esteem.

Table 6. Regression of the independent and control variables on self-esteem

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Relationship with Mom	0.005	0.10	0.13
Relationship with Dad	-0.003	-0.002	0.008
Gender		-0.024	0.268
Parent's Marital Status		-0.10	-0.016
Religion		-0.063*	-0.067*
Year in College		-0.015	-0.015
Mother's highest level of education		0.011	0.012
Father's highest level of education		-0.002	-0.002
Number of brothers and sisters		0.036**	0.036**
Relationship with Mom X gender of respondent			-0.006
Relationship with Dad X gender of respondent			-0.014
Constant	1.838	1.824	1.625
R2	.001	0.056	0.058

* Significant at the .05 level ** Significant at the .01 level

Table 7 presents the linear regression analysis for the relationship between the

independent and control variables on respondent's happiness. The relationship with the mother

and father has no effect upon happiness. This is presented in Model 1. Model 2 shows the

relationship between the independent and control variables and happiness. Only one variable had

a significant effect. As religiosity increases, happiness increases ($p < .05$). Model 3 presents the

independent and control variables with the addition of the interaction terms for relationship with

mother and father by sex of respondent. No significant effect from the interaction terms was

found. It did not matter whether the respondent was a son or a daughter on how they evaluated

their relationship with their parents and this did not affect the student's happiness.

Table 7. Regression of the independent and control variables on happiness

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Relationship with Mom	0.022	-0.001	-0.03
Relationship with Dad	0.015	0.021	0.059
Gender		0.171	0.279
Parent's Marital Status		0.135	0.132
Religion		0.115*	0.11*
Year in College		-0.037	-0.043
Mother's highest level of education		0.032	0.037
Father's highest level of education		0.024	0.026
Number of brothers and sisters		-0.013	-0.011
Relationship with Mom X gender of respondent			0.037
Relationship with Dad X gender of respondent.			-0.048
Constant	3.392	3.086	2.978
R2	0.014	0.067	0.072

*significant at .05 level

Table 8 presents the linear regression analysis for the relationship between the

independent and control variables on respondent's perception of the feeling of togetherness in

their family. The relationship with the father had a significant effect (p<.001) on the feeling of

togetherness in the family with those respondents reporting better relationships with their fathers

reporting higher levels of a feeling of family togetherness. This is shown in Model 1 when the

control variables were not included in the analysis. In the second model, both years in college

and parent's marital status are significant. As year in college increases, the feeling of

togetherness in the family before college increases (p<.001). If the respondent's parent's are

married than the respondent is also more likely to remember a better feeling of togetherness in

the family than if the parents are not married (p < >001).

Table 8. Regression of independent and control variables on family togetherness

	Model 1	Model 2
Relationship with Mom	0.035	0.055
Relationship with Dad	0.090***	0.046
Gender		-0.276
Marital Status		-1.069***
Religion		0.085
Year in College		0.148*
Mother's highest level of education		-0.030
Father's highest level of education		-0.018
Number of brothers and sisters		0.010

* significant at .05 level ***significant at the .001 level

Chapter 4

Discussion

In this research, I examined the influence of relationship with parents on self-esteem, GPA, and happiness of college students at a Northeastern university. I examined six predictors of the relationship with the father and the mother. For the father, only the parents marital status was significantly related to the quality of relationship while for the mother, both gender of the respondent and the respondent's degree of religiosity were significant. Overall, parent's marital status had no significant effect on the respondent's self-esteem, GPA, or happiness. Happiness was only significantly impacted by the respondent's religiosity while self-esteem was impacted by both religiosity and the number of siblings. Finally, GPA was affected by year in college and the mother's level of education. I also examined the relationship with the mother or father and the effect of feeling of togetherness in the family on. Those students reporting better relationships with their fathers were more likely to report having a feeling of family togetherness as compared to those that did not. Parent's marital status and year in college also significantly effected feelings of togetherness in the family.

The first hypothesis I examined was that young adults with parents having intact marriages would be more likely to have better relationships with their parents than those students from non-intact families. This relationship was significant only for the relationship with the father with student's having married parents being more likely to have positive relationships with their parents than their counterparts. The only gender effect identified was that daughter's had better relationships with their mother's than did sons. Marital statusmay have had an impact on

relationship with the father because in separated families, fathers do not interact as much with their children compared to before the relationship break-up (Dawson, 1991).

Hypothesis two also focuses on the effect of the relationship with the parent, the parent's marital status on well-being and academic achievement. My research findings did not support this hypothesis. Neither parent's marital status nor relationships with the parents were significantly related to grade point average, self-esteem or happiness. . These findings are not consistent with the literature. Dawson (1991) found that children from single parent homes have behavioral and emotional problems that can be linked to the child's well-being than children from two parent homes. She also found that these children have lower academic achievement. She concluded that an intact family structure is best for children's well-being, relationship with parents, and academic achievement (Dawson, 1991: 573-584). . Fan and Chen (2001) also found a small to moderate but meaningful connection between relationship with parents and academic achievement. For self-esteem, adolescents who valued their friend's opinions more than their parents were more likely to have low self-esteem (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, &Perry, 2006, p. 59-66). This was not seen in this research since there was no connection between relationship and the dependent variables.

This is not consistent with the results of my survey and this could be for multiple reasons. One major factor is that Dawson's (1991) findings were based on adolescents while this research was focused on college students. The difference in age could affect the individual's response to the situation. It also could affect the amount of time that has passed between the break up and when the survey was conducted. Someone who very recently witnessed the break up of his or her parents may be more affected by it. Also, since my respondents are college students and not living in their family households, the immediacy of their parent's relationship has been lessoned

by distance. Finally, Dawson's research was conducted over two years ago and real changes in predictors of these behaviors could have occurred during this time period.

I also examine the predictors of feelings of family togetherness. The relationship with the father did have a positive significant relationship with the respondent's feels of family togetherness. However, when marital status was added to the model, the relationship with the father was no longer significant and the marital status of the parents was significant. Barnes and Olson's (1985) research on family closeness found that high parent and child communication resulted in a higher reporting of family cohesion and closeness (p. 438-448). This was seen to be true in this research but not when controlled for independent variables for the relationship with the father. Respondents may have a greater likelihood of feeling close to their father if the parents are married and that is why this relationship disappeared with the addition of parent's marital status in the analysis. This could also be explained by the difference in ages in the individuals in the study as well. Most of the research has focused on adolescents while my respondents were college students and thus at a different point in their development.

The third hypothesis states that respondents will have a better relationship with a parent of the same sex. This hypothesis was seen as somewhat true. Gender had an impact on the relationship with the mother but it did not have an effect on the relationship with the father. This shows that female respondents are more likely to have a better relationship with their mother than male respondents. The relationship with the father does not appear to be affected by the gender of the respondent. The fact that relationship with the mother is affected by gender of the respondent does fit with the literature. Other research shows that gender plays a role in the relationship for both mothers and fathers. Kerig, Cowan, and Cowan (1993) found that fathers reward different characteristics in boys and girls which effects what each gender feels

comfortable talking to their parents about (Kerig, Cowan, and Cowan, 1993, p. 931-939). This

discrepancy may be explained by ages of the respondents in the study.

Rational choice theory can assist in making sense of these findings. This theory says that

individuals will choose the option that helps them achieve their goals and desires (Hechter, and

Kanazawa, 1997: 191-214). I had speculated that rational choice theory would apply to

communication and closeness to parents in college because parents can be beneficial to reaching

those goals. This may still be a factor in the respondent's life but it could be operating in a

different way. College students may be making the rational choice not to maintain a relationship

with their parents on a daily basis because it takes time away from their desires. It may also be

that reward of parental approval is not as strong in college students because they are young

adults and no longer subject to their parent's wishes. Another explanation is that the effort of

maintaining a daily relationship with their parents takes time away from the students that they

would rather be spending doing something else. So, college students may be making the rationale

choice to spend more time on maintaining relationships with friends and spending time on their

education because the rewards have the greatest benefits. Also, for people in college, the cost of

choosing not to maintain as intense of a relationship with parents is low as parents are still

attached to their children and will provide them with the same rewards (love, economic support)

even though they do not have as intense of a relationship with their children.

The strengths of my study are that the sample is very representative of the population I

am trying to research. The sample is from students in a large university so it can be considered

representative of the population of college students' at large universities. A second strength is

how the data were gathered. Surveys are a good method to use when collecting information on

college students because of the easy use of technology and ability to gather a large sample. The

strength of using surveys is also that you can get more information from the respondents. Surveys normally allow for the researcher to ask more questions and collect more information than they would through an interview. Survey data also allows for easier analysis due to the smaller range of responses.

The limitations of this study are that I was only able to get information from one university. It would have been more representative of the population if the sample were larger and more varied. The same thing applies to the limitation of only getting information from students in certain classes. A wider variety of classes may have provided more varied responses. Another limitation is that you are only getting the respondent's perception of their relationship with their parents and cannot get the parent's perception of the relationship. If I was able to get the parent's perception I would be able to have a better understanding of the relationship. The final limitation is that academic achievement measured from one university may not be representative of the population. The academic achievement may be attributed to the university instead of the respondents' relationship with their parents.

Conclusion

In future research on this topic it would be helpful to have a better measure of parental interaction. Since students are asked to retrospectively comment on their relationship with their parents, it would be more accurate to have information from the period of time before college. A longitudinal study would work well for a study on this topic. Another aspect that could be improved upon is getting a larger sample size. After some respondents did not answer all of the questions, it is hard to get statistically significant results.

Overall, the findings in my study were not statistically significant and did not support the hypotheses. The findings were also not very consistent with the literature perhaps due to the age of my respondents. My findings show that the relationship between parents and college students is less important than the literature shows for adolescents. Future research should further examine the effects of age of respondent on success and well-being.

Appendix A

IRB Approval

Notification of Approval

To:	Paige Booth
Link:	STUDY00000964
P.I.:	Paige Booth
Title:	Communication between Parents and College Students and its effects

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EDUCATION

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY, State College, PA	**2011 – Present**
NORTHERN GUILFORD HIGH SCHOOL, Greensboro, NC	**2008 – 2011**
MOORESTOWN HIGH SCHOOL, Moorestown, NJ	**2007 - 2008**

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

RESEARCH ASSISTANT, Penn State University   **2013 – 2014**

Coded newspaper articles on the Tea Party movement for specified criteria. Found newspaper articles pertaining to Tea Party protests so that our team could code them. This work was done for the Sociology Department.

CREDIT BASED WORK EXPERIENCE

CENTRE COUNTY YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU,   **2014**
State College, PA

Intern at the Centre County Youth Services Bureau in State College. Worked with their Prevention and Outreach division. Traveled to different areas around Centre County providing services to children who were in need.

RESEARCH ASSISTANT, Penn State University   **2013-2014**

Research assistant for the Human Development and Family Studies Department. Watched videos of parents and their children and coded the parenting style for specified criteria.

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Teaching assistant for Introduction to Sociology class. Graded student exams and led smaller group discussions within the 120 student class.

HONORS

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