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Abstract

Positive close relationships with immediate close network members are associated with healthy adjustment among emerging adults (EA). These influence the initiation and maintenance of romantic relationships. A cross-sectional study ($N = 630$) explored the role of perceived parental and friend support for the current romantic relationship in relationship quality among early EA (EEA; 18-21 years) and middle EA (MEA; 22-25 years) heterosexuals. Structural equation modeling results showed that in EEA greater friend support was associated with greater commitment, satisfaction and investments, and less quality of alternatives. Greater parental support was associated with greater commitment, satisfaction and investments in MEA. This research advances literature by showing different associations between sources of social support and relationship quality at two EA age groups.

Keywords: Emerging adulthood; Parental support; Friend support; Commitment; Investment Model; Structural Equation Model

The co-construction and development of positive close emotional relationships with parents and friends is fundamental for individuals' psychological and physical health across the life span (e.g., Takahashi, 2005; Walen & Lachman, 2000). Research shows that support from parents and friends has been associated with greater social adjustment and well-being (e.g., Gottlieb, 1985; Lee & Goldstein, 2015), and that greater quality of romantic relationships also play an important role in these processes (e.g., Loving & Slatcher, 2013). As in other relationships, the construction of these romantic bonds is influenced by the co-occurrence of intrapersonal, relational and contextual variables (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Perceived support from close social network members for the current romantic relationship has been consistently associated with greater romantic relationship quality (e.g., Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992). As individuals approach adulthood, the relationships with parents and friends change (for a review on the impact of attachment across the lifespan, see Diamond & Fagundes, 2008). During adolescence, friends become the main source of emotional support (Frey & Röthlisberger, 1996) and influence romantic relationship quality and adjustment (Collins, 2003; Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). During emerging adulthood, the relationships with parents become more egalitarian (De Goede, Branje, & Meeus, 2009). Parents reemerge as central sources of emotional support (Arnett & Schwab, 2012) and this is associated with romantic relationship adjustment (Lee, Dik, & Barbara, 2015; Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson, & Boswell, 2006). Although perceived support from parents and friends is important for the development and maintenance of romantic relationships, it is not entirely clear whether both sources of support are equally central during the transition from adolescence into adulthood. Motivated by the need to investigate the role of different sources of social support for well-being (e.g., Uchino, 2009), our research examined whether perceived parental and friend support for the current romantic

relationship were differently associated with relationship quality in emerging adults (EA) and whether those sources of support were equally likely to be important in early and middle years of emerging adulthood.

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood (roughly from 18-29 years) is a developmental period observed in industrialized societies (Arnett, 2015a) that is distinct from adolescence (roughly from 12-17 years) and adulthood (roughly after 30 years). This period is marked by identity exploration, in which individuals strive to be self-sufficient and to gain responsibility, decision-making abilities, and financial independence from parents (Arnett, 2015b). Although there are cultural differences, throughout Southern Europe this period tends to be extended until late 20s (Arnett, 2012; Ferreira, Fernandes, Vieira, Puga, & Barrisco, 2006). Whereas early EA (18-21 years) do not feel they have reached adulthood yet, middle EA (22-25 years) and late EA (26-29 years) feel they are approaching adulthood (Arnett & Schwab, 2012).

During this period, romantic relationships become more salient, common and future-oriented (Arnett, 2015a; Bouchey & Furman, 2003; Markiewicz & Doyle, 2011; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). EA start to explore which type of partner they value in a long-term romantic relationship and search for indicators that their relationship will endure (Arnett, 2015a; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). Commitment is commonly considered an important motivation for relationship maintenance. This construct is central for the Investment Model (IM), one of the most robust models to predict adult relationship maintenance (for reviews, see Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Hence, the IM offers an interesting theoretical framework to also understand romantic relationships in emerging adulthood.

The Investment Model

Commitment refers to the long-term orientation and intention to maintain the relationship (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001) and is influenced by satisfaction, quality of alternatives and investments. Satisfaction depends on the experience of positive affect and the fulfillment of basic relational needs (e.g., intimacy). Alternatives refer to any external situation other than being with the partner (e.g., being alone, with friends or with another romantic interest). Investments refer to all resources applied in the relationship, either intrinsic (e.g., disclosure of intimate topics) or extrinsic (e.g., assets acquired together), which would be lost or diminished if the relationship ended. Individuals experience greater commitment when they feel more satisfied, perceive less quality among alternatives, or when are heavily invested in the relationship.

Considering commitment as an interdependent process (Rusbult, Coolsen, Kirchner, & Clarke, 2006), the IM mainly focuses on the couple's dynamics. However, romantic relationships do not occur in a social vacuum (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Indeed, affective relationships established with parents influence the way individuals construct their own affective relationships. For instance, attachment theory states that the relationships co-constructed with primary caregivers are the building blocks from which individuals construct future close emotional relationships (Bowlby, 1988). Also, individuals build Internal Working Models on how relationships are supposed to be, how to behave and what to expect from others (Bowlby, 1973; Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, & Kiessinger, 2001).

Sources of Social Support for the Current Romantic Relationship

Romantic relationships are embedded in social networks and relationship functioning is influenced by close network members (e.g., parents or friends; Felmlee, 2001). Positive opinions and support from parents and friends are associated with the initiation and

maintenance of romantic relationships (Etcheverry, Le, & Charania, 2008). When network members approve of a romantic relationship, they provide support (e.g., emotional) and influence relationship quality and success (De Goede, Branje, van Duin, van der Valk, & Meeus, 2012; Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004). For instance, longitudinal research with a sample of undergraduate students (M_{age} = 20 years) over a 5-year period showed that increases in perceived support from family and friends predicts commitment, satisfaction, love and break-up (Felmlee, 2001; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992, 2000). However, there is no indication whether parental and friend support predicted different relationship outcomes at different ages of emerging adulthood.

Although parents are important sources of emotional support throughout development, friends, and romantic partners also take a central role as sources of support and intimacy in adolescence (Fingerman, Miller, Birditt, & Zarit, 2009; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). These relationships with friends are particularly salient and help individuals shape their identity (Erikson, 1968; see also Adams & Marshall, 1996; Collins, 2003; Collins et al., 2009; Frey & Röthlisberger, 1996). Adolescents establish close relationships with friends based on mutual respect, value the opinions of close friends and are influenced by them (De Goede et al., 2012; Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004). During this period, romantic relationships play an important role in individuals' functioning and social identification (Collins, 2003; Collins et al., 2009) and often romantic partners are already members of the social network (Furman, 1999). Then, support from friends is an important source of validation, which can influence the initiation and maintenance of romantic relationships (Etcheverry et al., 2008; Etcheverry, Le, & Hoffman, 2013; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Age is not *per se* a criteria for development and different processes may overlap to adjacent periods (Arnett, 2015a). As such, it is possible that processes that occur mainly during adolescence are still present during initial years of emerging adulthood.

As individuals maintain their romantic relationships, the importance of the support from friends may decrease (Arnett, 2012, 2015a) and parental support seems to take a more central role for relationship maintenance. During emerging adulthood parents regain salience as sources of emotional support (Arnett, 2015b; Arnett & Schwab, 2012), the relationship between EA and their parents becomes more egalitarian (De Goede et al., 2009) and there is an increase in cohesion and a decrease in conflicts with parents (Parra, Oliva, & Reina, 2015). Not only parental support promote individual growth and security (e.g., financial, emotional; Fingerman et al., 2009), it also promotes adjustment and well-being in social, but especially in romantic, relationships (Lee et al., 2015; Mounts et al., 2006). Support from parents may be associated with validation, comfort, future assistance (if needed) and the perception of greater barriers preventing relationship dissolution, thus promoting relationship maintenance (Felmlee, 2001; Sprecher & Felmlee, 2000). For instance, the decision to introduce a romantic partner to parents might be associated with the disclosure of a more future-oriented relationship. In this sense, individuals will work on integrating the partner in family life activities (e.g., family dinners, birthdays; Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004). For this reason, parental support may emerge as important for relationship maintenance in later years of emerging adulthood. Supporting this reasoning, there is a positive association between parental support and romantic satisfaction and commitment during courtship and marriage (Felmlee, 2001; Sinclair, Hood, & Wright, 2014). Importantly, for individuals with ages ranging from 21 to 23 years, stronger romantic commitment predicts less emotional problems, and more parental support predicts greater romantic commitment (Meeus, Branje, van der Valk, & Wied, 2007). The absence of support from parents may lead to the end of the romantic relationship (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992), or even a rupture with parents in order to pursue it (Downey, Bonica, & Rincón, 1999).

Current Study and Hypotheses

Using a sample of EA, this study was framed by the IM and aimed to extend research on social support by examining its associations with romantic relationship quality during emerging adulthood. We considered two sources of perceived support for the current relationship in this study: support from own parents and from the partner's parents, and support from friends. We reasoned that perceived friend support is central for relationship quality in earlier years of emerging adulthood, whereas perceived parental support assumes greater importance for relationship quality in middle years of emerging adulthood. To test this, a cross-sectional study analyzed two age groups: early EA (EEA; 18-21 years) and middle EA (MEA; 22-25 years) (Arnett, 2015a; Arnett & Schwab, 2012).

First, we expected both sources of social support for the current relationship – parental and friends – to be correlated with relationship quality indicators. However, we hypothesized that such sources of social support should be differently associated with commitment and relationship quality at different ages of emerging adulthood (i.e., EEA or MEA). During adolescence romantic partners are often members of the network of friends with whom the individual spends time and friend support influences the maintenance of romantic relationships. As some process in developmental periods can overlap do adjacent periods, we expected such influence to remain in earlier years of emerging adulthood. In this sense, greater support from friends should be associated with greater relationship quality, namely greater commitment, satisfaction and investments in EEA. This association was additionally explored by considering the perceived quality of alternatives.

Parents regain centrality as sources of emotional support in emerging adulthood, playing an important role on the adjustment of romantic relationships. Moreover, the long-term maintenance of a committed relationship is usually associated with the inclusion of the partner in family situations. As such, we expected parental support to be associated with

greater commitment and relationship quality in MEA. Specifically, greater support from

parents should be associated with greater commitment, satisfaction and investments. Again,

this association was additionally explored with regards to the perception of quality among

alternatives.

Method

Participants

Participants were 630 romantically involved Portuguese heterosexuals (60.3% female).

Half the participants resided in industrialized urban centers (51%) and the other half in

suburban areas (49%), and most were undergraduate (44.1%) or postgraduate students

(41.9%).

Half the sample ($n = 312$) was categorized as EEA (18-21 years; $M_{age} = 19.36$, $SD =$

1.06; 58.7 % female). The other half ($n = 318$) was categorized as MEA (22-25 years; $M_{age} =$

23.36, $SD = 1.09$; 61.9% female). Most individuals were in a non-cohabiting romantic

relationship (EEA: 95.2%; $M_{lenght} = 21.03$ months, $SD = 16.91$; MEA: 83.3%; $M_{Lenght} = 32.23$

months, $SD = 25.62$; groups differed in relationship length, $t (628) = 6.47$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.52$)

and none indicated having children.

Instruments

Investment Model Scale – Short version (IMS-S). The IMS-S is a self-report

measure validated in a Portuguese sample (13 items, Rodrigues & Lopes, 2013; original scale

by Rusbult et al., 1998). It assesses commitment (4 items; $α = .89$; e.g., "I want our

relationship to last for a very long time"), satisfaction (3 items; $α = .94$; e.g., "I feel satisfied

with our relationship"), quality of alternatives (3 items; $α = .80$; e.g., "The people other than

my partner with whom I might become involved are very appealing"), and investments (3

items; α = .82; e.g., "I have invested a great deal of time in our relationship"). Responses

were given on 7-point scales (1 = *Do not agree at all*, 7 = *Agree completely*).

Based on the standards established in the literature (Bentler, 1990), a confirmatory

factor analysis (CFA) showed the IMS-S to have a good fit in our sample, χ^2 (59) = 193.49,

Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .96, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .95, Standardized Root

Mean Square Residual (SMSR) = .05, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

(RMSEA) = .06 [.05, .07]. Moderate-to-high-standardized regression paths emerged between

the items and their respective component: commitment (.73 > λ > .92), satisfaction (.86 > λ

> .93), alternatives (.69 > λ > .78) and investments (.65 > λ > .80). All components

presented good reliability: commitment (α = .91), satisfaction (α = .92), alternatives (α = .77)

and investments (α = .76).

Social Support Index (SSI). This is a self-report measure adapted from Sprecher and

Felmlee (1992). The original measure (six items; α > .83) assessed the perceived support

from own family, own friends, partner's family, and partner's friends (four items), and the

perceived support from others in general (two items). We focused on perceived support from

parents and friends. Parental support (four items) assessed perceived support for the current

relationship from one's parents (two items, "How much does your mother [father] support

your current romantic relationship?") and from the partner's parents (two items, "How much

does your partner's mother [father] support your current romantic relationship?"). Friend

support (three items) assesses perceived support from one's friends ("How much do your

own friends support your current romantic relationship?"), from the partner's friends ("How

much do your partner's friends support your current romantic relationship?"), and from

common friends ("How much do your mutual friends support your current romantic

relationship?"). Responses were given on 7-point scales (1 = *Completely unsupportive*, 7 = *Completely supportive*).

A CFA showed this measure to have a good fit in our sample, $\chi^2 (11) = 27.71$, CFI = .98, TLI = .97, SMSR = .02 and RMSEA = .05 [.03, .07]. Moderate-to-high standardized regression paths emerged between the items and their respective component: parental support (.63 > λ > .72) and friend support (.77 > λ > .87). Mother and father items were highly correlated for own family, $r = .76$, $p < .001$, and for partner's family, $r = .80$, $p < .001$. Both scales were correlated, $\phi = .74$, $p < .001$, and presented good reliability: parental support ($\alpha = .84$) and friend support ($\alpha = .86$).

Procedure

This study was conducted in agreement with the Ethics Guidelines issued by the Scientific Commission of the hosting institution. Participants were not paid or given other incentives to participate in the study. The web link for the web survey was sent to college students' mailing lists, published on social network websites and published on a webpage developed for the research project. Before starting, all individuals were informed that they would be taking part in a voluntary and confidential self-report survey about personal relationships. They were also informed that the study was directed at heterosexual individuals currently in a romantic relationship The general purpose of the study was explicitly stated, along with the statement that no personally identifying information would be associated to the data, that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without responses being recorded or considered for analysis.

After agreeing to participate and providing informed consent, participants were redirected to the first page of the questionnaire comprising standard demographic questions (e.g., gender, age, sexual orientation). This was followed by the IMS-S and SSI measures. At

the end, participants were thanked, debriefed about the purpose of the studies and provided

with the research team's contact information. The average time to complete the survey was

11 minutes. Internet protocol (IP) addresses were checked and no IP corresponded to more

than one questionnaire.

Results

In this section we start by presenting descriptive statistics and difference tests for the

study variables by age group. We also present zero-order correlations controlling for gender

and relationship length. To examine our main hypotheses, we ran multigroup structural

equation models using Mplus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2015) with Maximum Likelihood

Robust estimation (MLR), correcting for potential bias in multivariate distribution

assumptions (Yuan & Bentler, 2000). These multigroup analyses allow us to compare groups

and test which paths are invariant and which differ. First, we analyzed a configural model

(Model 1) to replicate the theoretical assumptions of the IM (Rusbult et al., 1998). Second,

we tested the invariance across age groups (Models 2 and 3). Third, we added the measure of

perceived social support and tested a full model and constrained the paths to be the equal

EEA and MEA (Model 4). Fourth, to examine differences across EEA and MEA in

associations between parental and friend support to each relationship quality indicator, we

compared this constrained model to models in which each social support path was allowed to

vary freely (Models 5a to 5h). The comparison between the constrained and these

unconstrained models allowed us to identify the paths that differed between EEA and MEA

and the paths that were similar to the two groups. To compare differences in the models we

used the adjusted Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square (Bryant & Satorra, 2012), given that the

typical chi-square difference test is not appropriate when robust parameter estimations are

used (i.e., MLR; Satorra, 2000).

Descriptive Statistics, Differences and Correlations

Means scores, standard deviations, t tests comparing both groups and zero-order

correlations are presented in Table 1. As can be seen, MEA reported greater commitment

than EEA, $t(628) = -2.35$, $p = .019$, $d = 0.19$. No other differences reached significance.

Results also show the expected pattern of correlations among measures for both groups.

Supporting our hypothesis, perceived parental and friend support were positively correlated

with commitment, satisfaction, investments and less perceived quality of alternatives in both

groups. Measures of perceived support were also positively correlated in both groups.

-- table 1 about here --

Role of Parental and Friend Support

Results of the configural model show an adequate fit in our sample (Model 1; Table 2).

Multigroup analyses show this configural model to be invariant across groups, as compared

to the model fixing factor loadings, variances, and co-variances (Models 2 and 3 vs. Model 1,

both $p > .347$).

-- table 2 about here --

As shown in Table 2, adding both social support measures to a model in which the

paths are constrained across groups (Model 4) results in a significant improvement in model

fit. To assess which paths differ significantly between groups, chi-square difference tests

were computed per model path. Significant differences were found when the paths between parental support and commitment (Model 5a vs. Model 4, p = .001) and between friend support and commitment (Model 5b vs. Model 4, p = .012) were unconstrained. Similar results were found for satisfaction (Model 5c vs. Model 4, p = .004; Model 5d vs. Model 4, p = .004, respectively). There was also a significant difference when the path between friend support and alternatives was unconstrained (Model 5f vs. Model 4, p = .001). The result for parental support was non-significant (Model 5e vs. Model 4, p = .159). Finally, there were significant differences when the paths between parental support and investments (Model 5g vs. Model 4, p = .006) and between friend support and investments (Model 5h vs. Model 4, p < .001) were unconstrained.

Results for each path according to age group are depicted in Figure 1. Paths that differ between the two groups have two different loadings, whereas paths that did not differ have the same loading in both groups. For EEA, friend support was positively related with commitment, γ = .13, p = .022, satisfaction, γ = .55, p < .001, and investments, γ = .18, p = .023, while negatively related with alternatives, γ = -.23, p = .005 (Figure 1). For MEA, parental support was positively related with commitment, γ = .18, p = .029 and investments, γ = .22, p = .007. Results remain significant when controlling for gender and relationship length.

-- figure 1 about here --

Discussion

The current study extended research on social support literature and its influence on relationship quality. Framed by the IM, we examined how perceived parental and friend

support for the current romantic relationship is differently related to commitment and relationship quality, using a large sample of Portuguese heterosexual EEA (18-21 years) and MEA (22-25 years). The new and most interesting contributions of this research comprise the following aspects: (a) looking at the effects of social support separately for EEA and MEA; (b) testing a model that includes both direct effects between two different sources of perceived social support and commitment and indirect effects of social support on commitment via satisfaction, investments and alternatives; (c) showing that the association of friend support with commitment and relationship quality indicators are non-significant in MEA, with the same being true for parental support and EEA; (d) extending the social network and IM literatures to a Portuguese sample; and (e) bridging social and developmental psychology frameworks in the pursuit of a more comprehensive understanding of romantic relationships in emerging adulthood.

First, results showed the expected pattern of correlations between perceived social support and relationship quality in both age groups (Felmlee, 2001; Sprecher & Felmlee, 2000). Furthermore, results of the multigroup structural equation modeling also validated the IM assumptions in both age groups. For EEA and MEA commitment was positively associated with satisfaction and investments, while negatively correlated with quality of alternatives (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult et al., 1998). These results further validate the basic tenets of the IM and show its robustness. Second, and most importantly, we extended the IM and showed that perceived social support has an important and distinctive role for both EEA and MEA. Indeed, our results showed an improvement in model fit when adding these measures to the original model.

Analyzing the paths that differ between groups, results showed that for EEA friend support was positively related with commitment and satisfaction. EEA have a need for identification with their group of friends and turn to them for emotional support and

comfort(Adams & Marshall, 1996; Frey & Röthlisberger, 1996) . As intimacy with friends is one of the key components for EEA (Arnett, 2015a), they may rely on close friends to validate romantic partner choices. Such validation seems to be related to greater commitment and satisfaction.

Results for EEA also showed a positive association between friend support and investments. As most of EEA in our sample did not cohabit with their partner, this result may indicate greater intrinsic, rather that extrinsic, investments. Indeed, romantic partners are often members of the close network of friends and individuals tend to develop a network of common friends when in a romantic relationship (Furman, 1999). As friends are sources of intimacy (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Fingerman et al., 2009), spending time with the partner and with common friends may create a sense of belonging that allows individuals to share intimacy. For the IM, indeed, intrinsic investments refer to these type of intangible resources applied in the relationship, such as spending time together and self-disclosing intimate aspects (Rusbult et al., 1998).

Results for this group also showed a negative association between friend support and quality of alternatives. If EEA is a phase for interpersonal exploration (e.g., new friendships), individuals may need to acquire, share, and validate social norms from friends regarding the social acceptance of interest in alternative partners. These shared social norms possibly convey romantic monogamy, exclusivity and commitment, and become highly salient issues among these individuals (Giordano, 2003).

For MEA, parental support was positively related with commitment, satisfaction and investments. Past research shows that as individuals go through emerging adulthood, the meaning of commitment increasingly anchors in a notion of long-term relationship with greater intimacy and future-orientation (Arnett, 2015a; Arnett & Schwab, 2012). During this period parents are central figures for growth and security (Fingerman et al., 2009). When in a

stable and long-lasting relationship, MEA may look for validation and comfort from their

parents and attempt to integrate their partner in their family network (Etcheverry & Agnew,

2004; Wright & Sinclair, 2012). Hence, the partner increasingly becomes part of the family

and starts sharing common space and time (e.g., family reunions). To the extent that the

family supports their current romantic relationship, individuals may perceive greater extrinsic

investments and external barriers to relationship dissolution. Furthermore, MEA may

perceive their parents' support as an emotional (and possibly financial) resource helping to

shape the long-term continuation of the relationship (Fingerman et al., 2009).

Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional nature of our data does not provide insights into causal relations,

nor does it provide direct insight into over-time relations and developmental processes.

Although our reasoning relied on other longitudinal and empirical evidence showing

causality within the IM (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult et al., 1998), it is still possible that the

association between social support and relationship quality is bidirectional. For instance,

when individuals are more committed and satisfied with their romantic relationship friends

might be aware of this fact, evaluate that relationship more positively and in turn provide

greater support (Etcheverry et al., 2013). Hence, future research should test our model with a

longitudinal methodology to establish directionality in the associations proposed by our

model. By longitudinally following a sample of EEA into MEA (possibly extending the

sample also to include late EA, 26-29 years), researchers would be able to understand the

sequential path from friend support initially predicting commitment, satisfaction, and quality

of alternatives in early years of EA into parental support predicting commitment, satisfaction

and investments in middle years of EA. Researchers would also be able to understand in

greater detail the role of social support in influencing intrapersonal aspects relating to

intrinsic investments, such as sacrifice (Monk, Vennum, Ogolsky, & Fincham, 2014) or

moral commitment (Rodrigues & Lopes, 2015), but also relating to extrinsic investments

such as cohabitation (Willoughby, Madsen, Carroll, & Busby, 2015). Another important

addition to this research in future studies is the inclusion of dyadic data (Cook & Kenny,

2005). This type of analysis has been recently extended to the IM (Macher, 2013) and allows

for researchers to understand in greater detail the dynamics of different sources of social

support and its association to commitment in couples.

We cannot rule out an alternative explanation based on relationship length. In our study

relationship length and age were partly dependent, even more so given the differences in this

variable between EEA and MEA. One can alternatively propose that individuals rely on

friend support in earlier stages of their relationship (e.g., as a test for compatibility) and on

the support from their parents as the relationship progressed (e.g., after positive interactions

between the partner and the family), regardless of their developmental stage. To test this

alternative hypothesis, future research could examine our model against a sample of late EA

or a sample of older individuals that vary in relationship length and test the exact same

predictions. If the results are not replicated, our developmental explanation is strengthened.

Another limitation concerns the percentage of students in our sample (86%). Although

most research concerning emerging adulthood is conducted with college students (Arnett,

2015b), extant empirical evidence shows the existence of differences in samples of non-

student peers, especially on demographic and psychosocial variables (Halperin, 2001). Hence,

future research should seek to broaden the sampling method to include a more diversified

sample, in order to examine similarities and differences with a non-student sample.

Lastly, our study was restricted to heterosexual participants. We did not include same-

sex romantic relationships based on the findings that individuals in same-sex relationships

perceive less support from their family and have a weaker association between perceived

support and relationship quality (Holmberg & Blair, 2016) or even no association between parental support and relationship quality (Graham & Barnow, 2013). However, these findings were drawn from samples with a mean age of 34 years and no specific analyses were conducted with participants within our age range. Therefore, future research should seek to examine whether differences in social support are associated with differences in relationship quality in EA, while controlling for variables such as parental acceptance of sexual orientation, parental support for a same-sex relationship, and parental support for individuals who have included their partner in their family activities.

In spite of these limitations, the wide age range of EA included in the present study, allowed for important results that contribute to the literature. Indeed, this study provides important insights into the role of social support in romantic relationships in an important developmental period. Our results suggest that parents and friends have a fundamental role in facilitating and promoting relationship quality, well-being and maintenance. This is relevant not only for academics to advance knowledge in the relatively recent construct of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2012, 2015a, 2015b), but also for professionals to design specific intervention plans to: (1) resolve family conflicts resulting from non-acceptance of EA' romantic relationships; (2) reduce the impacts of break-ups in EA well-being and psychological health; (3) highlight the importance of peer and group identification.

Conclusion

Stable romantic relationships have a central role in the individual's psychological (e.g., Lee & Goldstein, 2015) and physical well-being (e.g., Loving & Slatcher, 2013) and commitment and relationship quality are central for the stability of a romantic relationship (Le & Agnew, 2003). As such, the findings presented on this study are valuable and contribute to further understand the association between two sources of social support and

romantic relationship quality in EA. They also open new venues of research in emerging

adulthood, a highly important developmental period. Not only our results have relevant

implications for academics, by giving new insights on the role of perceived social support for

romantic relationships, they also have relevant implications for professionals, for instance by

suggesting integrating social support in couples' counseling and intervention programs.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Difference Tests and Zero-Order Correlations for Early Emerging Adults (EEA) and Middle Emerging Adults (MEA)

	EEA	MEA		Correlations					
	M (SD)	M (SD)	t test						
Measure				1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Commitment	5.96 (1.37)	6.20 (1.16)	-2.35*	-	.67***	-.40***	.37***	.32***	.43***
2. Satisfaction	5.85 (1.24)	5.81 (1.27)	0.39	.64***	-	-.36***	.29***	.33***	.52***
3. Quality of alternatives	2.93 (1.48)	3.01 (1.46)	-0.68	-.44***	-.37***	-	-.24***	-.15*	-.16**
4. Investments	3.99 (1.56)	3.86 (1.28)	1.14	.54***	.25***	-.27***	-	.11*	.17**
5. Parental support	5.62 (1.31)	5.77 (1.30)	-1.41	.40***	.42***	-.27***	.16**	-	.50***
6. Friend support	6.16 (1.16)	6.18 (1.04)	-0.19	.46***	.55***	-.24***	.12*	.59***	-

Notes. Degrees of freedom for *t*-statistics = 628. Zero-order correlations controlled for gender and relationship length. Correlations for EEA appear below the diagonal, and correlations for MEA appear above the diagonal.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 2

Multigroup Analysis with Chi-Square Difference Tests and Final Model Fit for Early Emerging Adults (EEA) and Middle Emerging Adults (MEA)

Models	χ^2 (*df*)	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA [CI]	Model comparison	CD	TRd	Δ *df*	*p*
Model 1: Configural (no constraints)	184.89 (59)	.96	.95	.05	.06 [.05, .07]	-	-	-	-	-
Model 2: Factor loadings invariant	283.06 (149)	.96	.96	.07	.05 [.04, .06]	2 versus 1	1.54	94.04	90	.364
Model 3: Factor loadings invariant; factor variances and co-variances invariant	285.50 (154)	.96	.96	.07	.05 [.04, .06]	3 versus 1	1.61	99.85	95	.347
Model 4: Model parental and friend support paths constrained	646.75 (341)	.94	.94	.09	.05 [.05, .06]	-	-	-	-	-
Model 5a: Model with commitment-parental support path unconstrained	723.10 (342)	.93	.92	.09	.06 [.05, .07]	5a versus 4	15.66	11.16	1	.001
Model 5b: Model with commitment-friend support path unconstrained	742.17 (342)	.92	.92	.09	.06 [.06, .07]	5b versus 4	43.50	6.26	1	.012
Model 5c: Model with satisfaction-parental support path unconstrained	708.62 (342)	.93	.92	.09	.06 [.05, .06]	5c versus 4	17.74	8.50	1	.004

Model 5d: Model with satisfaction - friend support path unconstrained	654.53 (342)	.94	.93	.09	.05 [.05, .06]	5d versus 4	0.99	13.28	1	< .001
Model 5fe Model with alternatives-parental support path unconstrained	648.96 (342)	.94	94	.09	.05 [.05, .06]	5e versus 4	7.07	1.98	1	.159
Model 5f: Model with alternatives-friend support path unconstrained	692.17 (342)	.93	.93	.09	.06 [.05, .06]	5f versus 4	10.08	10.24	1	.001
Model 5g: Model with investments-parental support path unconstrained	666.78 (342)	.94	.93	.09	.06 [.05, .06]	5g versus 4	6.32	7.41	1	.006
Model 5h: Model with investments-friend support paths unconstrained	673.37 (342)	.94	.93	.09	.06 [.05, .06]	5h versus 4	2.52	20.61	1	< .001

Notes: Models with robust maximum likelihood estimation. χ^2 (*df*) = chi-square (degrees of freedom); CFI = Comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis fit index; SRMR = Standardized root mean square residual; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation; CI = 95% confidence interval; CD = Difference test scaling correction; TRd = Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square difference. CD is calculated using the formula cd = (d0*c0 - d1*c1)/(d0 - d1) where d0 is the degrees of freedom in the nested H0 model, c0 is the scaling correction factor for the nested H0 model, d1 is the degrees of freedom in the comparison model, and c1 is the scaling correction factor for the comparison model. TRd is calculated using the formula (T0*c0 - T1*c1)/cd where T0 and T1 are the MLR chi-square values for the nested H0 and comparison H0 models, respectively (Bryant & Satorra, 2012).
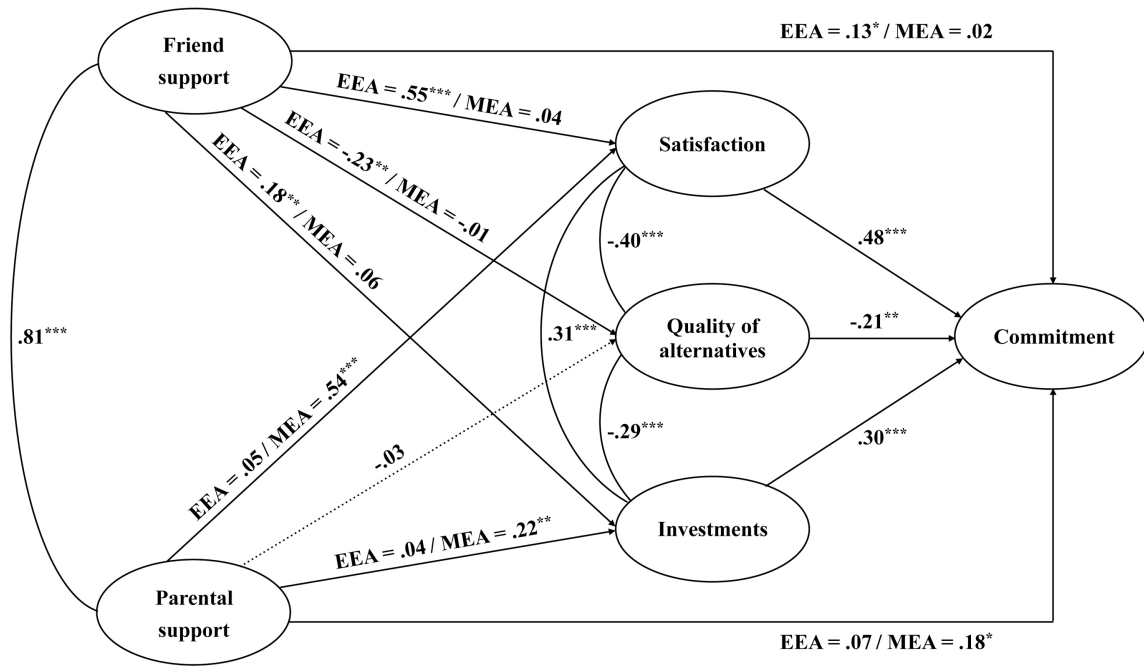
Notes: Only latent variables and significant standardized paths are depicted. Measurement models presented significant results in all the models tested: commitment $\lambda > .75$, satisfaction $\lambda > .79$, quality of alternatives $\lambda > .62$, investments $\lambda > .51$, parental support $\lambda > .58$, and friend support $\lambda > .78$, all $p < .001$.

$^*p \leq .05$ $^{**}p \leq .01$ $^{***}p \leq .001$

Figure 1. *Role of Parental and Friend Support for the Current Romantic Relationship in Early Emerging Adults (EEA) and Middle Emerging Adults (MEA)*