

Childhood Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Predicts College Students' Friendship

Quality and Social Support

By

Lindsey McDonald

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for

Honors in the Departments of Psychology

UNION COLLEGE

June, 2023

ABSTRACT

MCDONALD, LINDSEY Childhood Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Predict College Students' Friendship Quality and Social Support. Department of Psychology, June 2023.

ADVISOR: [Linda Stanhope]

Most children are exposed to some form of interparental conflict; when the interparental conflict is elevated and unresolved, and the children's exposure to conflict is high and sustained over time, there are a variety of negative consequences (deficits in romantic relationships, lower social support, and psychological distress). My study expands connections established in the literature by focusing on how perceptions of interparental conflict relates to friendship quality and perceived levels of social support. 114 college undergraduate students completed an online questionnaire about their childhood perceptions of conflict between their parents, and their relationship with their best friends currently. They also responded to questions about their perceived levels of social support from both family and larger network of friends. Based on previous studies, I hypothesized that college students who reported higher exposure to interparental conflict would report more negative features within their friendships, and this hypothesis was supported. As predicted, poor conflict resolution and high conflict frequency between parents were both predictive of more negative features in college students' friendships. Further, students who had been exposed to more interparental conflict as children reported receiving less social support from family members. Students who reported lower levels of social support also experienced more negative features in their friendships. Overall, this study suggests that children's exposure to unresolved interparental conflict extends to college years and beyond romantic relationships into friendship dynamics. Future work should investigate the possible mediating effects of therapy for children exposed to high levels of interparental conflict.

Childhood Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Predict College Students' Friendship Quality and Social Support

As much as humans may avoid conflict, it is an important part of our relationships. Conflict can be healthy and normal; disagreements are to be expected and will occur in different types of healthy relationships. The arguments and conflicts that occur between parents are referred to in the literature as “interparental conflict”. Interparental conflict occurs in almost every family, whether divorced or intact. Destructive levels of interparental conflict can be characterized by being high in frequency and intensity, and by being poorly resolved (Grych & Fincham, 1990). In families where discord is high, excessive amounts of unproductive and persistent conflicts are unhealthy. Through over-time exposure to habitual conflict dynamics, children may learn and replicate attitudes, feelings, and actions (e.g., Bandura, 1971). These mindsets and behaviors may flow into how we go about our lives and how we relate to, connect with, and treat others throughout our lives (Hess, 2021). While there is a large amount of research surrounding interparental conflict and its numerous ramifications for children when they are young and as they grow into adulthood, much of the work surrounding interpersonal relationships is heavily focused on romantic relationships (e.g., Simon and Furmon, 2010, Kinsfogal and Grynch, 2004). Romantic relationships are important; and they can come and go, especially as teens and young adults, whereas a strong friendship often withstands multiple romantic relationships. Further, the age of marriage seems to be getting older, leaving a lot of room for friends to matter more. Since romantic relationships can be so significantly influenced by parental dynamics, it seems as though there is a gap in previous research. Many questions flow from that awareness. How might parental dynamics influence peer dynamics? How, if at all, does the quality of our friendships differ when we have been exposed to high amounts of conflict

and poor resolutions at home? Our friends provide the support to work through daily life problems that we encounter and provide another source of love and support. The current study was focused on beginning to fill it by examining the relationship between college students' perceptions of interparental conflict and their self-reported friendship quality and social support.

The influence of parents on their children has long been studied; indeed, the citations in the preceding paragraph alone, as a simple example, span almost fifty years (i.e., 1971-2021). There are many different major theoretical frameworks that are useful to explain the association with interparental conflict and its negative outcomes. The foundational framework for this study is the emotional security hypothesis from Davies and Cummings (1994), but there are others that are important to discuss as well. Each of these frameworks all attempt to explain how interparental conflict changes children's responses to conflict over time through cognitive processes and emotionality (i.e., Grych and Fincham, 1990, Davies and Cummings, 1994). For the purposes of this study, there are multiple theories that are applicable: the cognitive-contextual model, attachment theory, and social learning theory; each of which will be addressed in turn.

Bandura's (1971) social learning theory has been cited in many of the studies surrounding parent-child relationships. Bandura (1971) discusses the concept of modeling and makes claims that human behaviors are primarily influenced by observations and learning from those around them. In terms of interparental conflict, Bandura's theory would predict that, particularly if they have watched their parents model poor conflict resolution and emotional regulation, the children would demonstrate similarly suboptimal skills (though not necessarily in the exact same ways). As the axiom goes, the life you lead is the example you give, and that example becomes an unconscious encoded guide for children.

The cognitive-contextual model (Grych and Fincham, 1990) offers additional foundational insights. Grych and Fincham (1990) reviewed 20 studies and formed an explanatory model for the association between marital conflict and poor adjustment. This framework highlights that it is the child's perceptions of the conflict that acts as a predictor of the negative outcomes. Grych and Fincham (1990) found multiple dimensions of conflict that can exacerbate the effect of the conflict – namely frequency, intensity, and resolution. The child first appraises the stressor and identifies that the conflict is occurring; the child attempts to understand why and to attribute blame, and finally, the child attempts to cope. In sum, this model places emphasis on the cognitive processes that allow the child to understand and handle the conflict, but there are multiple dimensions that can interfere with constructive coping and that may become unproductive for the child.

The Bowlby-Ainsworth theory of attachment has provided the basis for a significant amount of research surrounding how our relationships with our parents (or primary caregiver) influence us, beginning in childhood and continuing throughout our lives. Ainsworth (1979) provided a review of infant-mother attachment. Attachment theory is based on Bowlby's evolutionary theory, which posits that mother-infant attachment works to ensure the infant is attached to its mother. The trustworthiness of that connection provides the basis for an infant's working model of expectations for the child's relationship with the mother. This working model is then applied to real-life situations. However, individual experiences need to be considered in the variations of parenting. Mothers are the secure base from which infants can explore the world and their attachment is what directs them to seek proximity to their mother *and* also allows the child to feel secure to explore. Ainsworth's (1979) "strange situation" assessment of attachment in one-year-olds revealed that securely attached infants are able to explore while their mother is

close, distressed when she leaves and happy upon her return. Insecurely attached infants instead display avoidant and anxious behaviors. Suffice to say for our purposes, in multiple studies (e.g., Markiewicz et al., 2001), attachment theory is used to explain psychopathology, behaviors and interpersonal skills later in life and is useful in demonstrating the staying power of early foundations.

The main framework that is a driving force for the current study is the emotional security hypothesis which builds off of both attachment theory and the cognitive-contextual framework (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Davies and Cummings (1994) provided a strong foundation to examine the consequences for children of aggressive interparental conflict and attempted to explain possible causes within the relationship between exposure to interparental conflict and the child's emotional security. They specify that, while their model builds from attachment theory, attachment theory places focus on the parent-child relationship whereas the emotional security hypothesis is focused on the child's experiences with the marital relationship. They argue that a child's emotional security can be enhanced through demonstrations of healthy levels of conflict; when there are high levels of unhealthy conflict, it gives rise to the child feeling insecure in their parents' relationship.

As Davies and Cummings (1994) explain, emotional security forms through a child's experience of their parents' conflict and influences a child's future reactions and psychological adjustment. Specifically, higher levels of conflict and physical aggression have significant implications for children. Davies and Cummings (1994) reviewed prior research and concluded that emotional security relates to children's functioning and long-term adjustment through three major processes. First, children's emotional regulation is altered through repeated exposure to high levels of aggressive conflict; with arousal levels consistently elevated, this can lead to

dysregulation, emotional reactivity and hypervigilance. Second, children may become motivated to involve themselves intensely in the interparental conflict to regulate or resolve their parents' behavior and conflicts, or to strongly avoid conflict all together. The coping behaviors are not always demonstrated in productive or healthy ways. Third, the conflict alters children's cognitive appraisals and internal representations of their family. Children may become hypersensitive to the threat of conflict, which can alter their working models of their family and can have significant implications in terms of attachment theory. These three responses to conflict can increase the likelihood of psychological adjustment problems related to disruptions to parent-child relationships and emotional insecurity.

Researchers on parental conflict have been careful to point out that parents do *not* need to be divorced for the consequences of conflict to be damaging. Not all families who divorce have high levels of conflict, and not all intact families lack high levels of conflict. In fact, even when parents divorce, the conflict that occurs *prior to* the divorce may be what is actually damaging. Emery (1982) conducted a review of the relationship between marital conflict, divorce and behavioral problems in children. He offers multiple hypotheses about the ways in which conflict may contribute to maladaptive social behaviors in children. Emery (1982) defines conflict generally as acts such as arguing or hitting, and takes the content and intensity into account. The frequency of conflict, he asserts, is important for how severe its effect is on the child. Therefore, to control for the stressors of the actual divorce and the separation that precedes or follows, it would be wise for studies to include and focus on both intact and divorced parents, and this study will do that. The mechanisms Emery (1982) names as responsible for affecting children include the disruption of attachment, changes to parental discipline styles, and the stress and emotionality of conflict. Relying on Bandura's theory of modeling, Emery (1982) discussed how

healthy imitation of parents may be interrupted during conflict, and children may find themselves recreating aggressive disagreements. In terms of gendered expectations, boys may be more obvious in externalizing their feelings and behavioral problems whereas girls may find themselves internalizing the problems (Emery, 1982). In sum, conflict interrupts important developmental processes and leads to behavior problems as more stress is placed on children.

In a similar vein, Long et al. (1987) examined marital conflict and recent divorce in relation to young adolescents' competence, both socially and academically. Long et al. (1987) examined 40 adolescents, aged 11 to 15 years old, with half of them from divorced parents and half from intact families. They found a significant association between high levels of parental conflict and increased behavioral problems in both boys and girls, which was indicative of lower levels of cognitive and social competence. Long et al. (1987) also concluded that it was the interparental conflict that was associated with lesser cognitive and social competence for adolescents rather than the act of divorce.

Exposure to interparental conflict in childhood is important to study because it occurs during a time of significant stages of development, and interference with developmental stages can cause problems that last into adulthood. In a recent review, Harold and Sellers (2018) focused on high interparental conflict in predicting youth psychopathology with the goal of understanding the implications for treatments. The authors highlighted that destructive interparental conflict puts children at risk for a variety of problems. Harold and Sellers (2018) found that children who have been exposed to destructive levels of interparental conflict were more likely to exhibit internalizing and externalizing problems. Externalizing problems are characterized by behavioral problems such as aggression, conduct disorders, or antisocial tendencies. Internalizing problems are characterized by internal symptoms such as anxiety or

depression which they attributed to the emotional strain that supervenes conflict in the family. (Harold & Sellers, 2018). They also noted that multiple studies mentioned the increased likelihood of altered sleep patterns and disruptions in relation to interparental conflict, which can damage neurological processes, as well as physical health difficulties. Harold and Sellers (2018) also discussed research that has found significant findings for interparental conflict as a risk factor for increased academic problems, general classroom difficulties, and social and interpersonal relationship problems. Other common associated problems that they found also included increased conflict with siblings and peers. Externalizing and internalizing problems may alter how we interact with, or limit how much children interact with, our peers and close friends; specifically, the symptoms associated with internalizing problems, such as anxiety and depression, predict greater isolation and antisocial tendencies. Indeed, externalizing problems may impact friendships through a general distancing of others. That lack of social support and connection may have the compounding implication of increasing feelings of loneliness and rumination, which magnifies insecurities and not only fails to deliver any insight or make a person feel better, but might make things even worse.

Emotional insecurity stemming from interparental conflict is key to understanding and the possible consequences. In a study referring back to the emotional security hypothesis, Davies et al. (2016), investigated the mediational pathways among three forms of interparental conflict – hostile, disengaged, and uncooperative – and children’s emotional security and externalizing problems. They conducted two longitudinal studies on preschool children and adolescents. For preschoolers, externalizing problems were measured through behavior conduct problems and ADHD symptoms. The adolescents were measured for the same variables with added measures of delinquent behaviors. They concluded that an early exposure to hostile

interparental conflict (i.e., arguments that involved anger and aggression) predicted greater emotional insecurity in children, and that, in turn, was strongly associated with more externalizing problems (Davies et al., 2016).

The development of children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors may stem from how they experience and cope with sustained interparental conflict. Rhoades (2008) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the relationship between children's various responses to interparental conflict and their later adjustment. Rhoades' (2008) final meta-analysis included 142 studies and examined children of ages five to nineteen. Across all the studies, the patterns that she found included that children across the different studies were likely to have poor coping skills and often use avoidance strategies. Children's maladaptive coping behaviors were more likely to be related to internalizing behaviors compared to externalizing problems, but her meta-analysis supported significant relationships between interparental conflict and both internalizing and externalizing problems. Another key finding from Rhoades (2008) was gender differences in response to exposure to conflict; girls were more likely to demonstrate internalizing behaviors whereas boys reported higher levels of externalizing behaviors. She implied that this may be the case because although boys and girls both reported seeing conflict between their parents as a threat, girls are more likely to blame themselves and see it as a threat to the family whereas boys are more likely to see it as a threat to themselves and act outwardly. She also found that older children seemed to demonstrate stronger associations between exposure to conflict and internalizing and externalizing problems

Children are sensitive to the emotions of their parents, so it is no surprise that anger handled poorly by parents in front of their children would be alarming and, if consistent and unresolved, possibly damaging. Sometimes parents tend to have moments of conflict in front of

children and then take the remainder of the conflict, including the resolution if there is one, “behind closed doors”. Cummings et al. (1993) examined 20 children between five and six years of age, and 20 children between nine and ten years of age to see if children’s appraisals, coping responses, and emotional responses to their parents’ conflict influenced the children’s beliefs about the resolutions of conflict. They conducted two studies, the first had the young children watch videos of actors demonstrate scenes of conflict that went unresolved and then conducted interviews. In the second, they examined how the adult’s explanations of the conflict reduced the children’s distress. Cummings et al. (1993) concluded that children are able to infer resolutions had occurred based on their parents’ emotional interactions without the parent(s) explicitly telling the child the conflict had been resolved. Cummings et al. (1993) emphasized that the negative emotions a child feels are strongly associated with the level of resolution felt, or not felt, by the child; they noted that children can benefit from parental explanations of the conflict. In sum, children seem to benefit from resolution behind closed doors as well as explanations from the parents. This makes sense because children use their parents as role models and learn how to navigate relationships from their parents. When people are able to process misunderstandings and hurts, and learn from mistakes or misunderstandings, they can often strengthen their bond. As parents model recovery and repair, children learn to do the same; without that modeling, children are left to be vigilant and read non-verbal signals to determine the safety and risks of their family dynamics.

Research shows that problems and dysfunctions with friendships and social life can begin early in life; this makes sense if they have been seeded and fueled by high interparental conflicts. Beyond what children internalize or externalize as individuals, and beyond their specific family dynamics, multiple studies have found problems in terms of children’s social lives that are

related to their exposure to interparental conflict. Hess (2021) examined the relationship between interparental conflict and children's social well-being. Hess (2021) drew data from the German Family Panel and examined a total of 1,157 children with ages ranging from seven to sixteen years old. She found that children who reported higher levels of conflict between their parents were more likely to report parents with lower levels of warmth and higher levels of negative communication. The children in her study seemed to model the behaviors they watched at home which was translated into the school environment, as the same children reported higher levels of problems with peers and lower levels of prosocial behaviors. This is another example of how parental behavior in the home influences children as they replicate those behaviors outside of the home. Hess's (2021) research is interesting in its span, which was from elementary school to driving age. This was important in the sense that she did not find significant differences between age groups, and her findings were consistent for children and adolescents.

The development of children's social problems has been explored longitudinally through the lens of the emotional security hypothesis. Davies et al. (2018) conducted a study that followed 235 parents and children over 10 years, from kindergarten to high-school, with the goal of investigating the link between children's insecurity due to interparental conflict and their social problems. The study revealed that children with higher exposure levels to interparental conflict were more likely to devalue affiliation in their best friendships in adolescence, meaning they were less likely to consider their relationship with their bestfriend to be important and more likely to distance themselves. In terms of longitudinal effects, they found that children's insecurity related to interparental conflict in childhood significantly predicted later insecurity in high school. Davies et al. (2018) explained the presence of insecurity as a result of an interruption of the developmental process because exposure may cause children to become

hypervigilant and defensive in their response to stress across all relationships. As children learn to distance themselves from their friends, their social problems grow, creating an ongoing cycle. Friends offer a chance to learn new ways of interacting with interpersonal relationships, so if children of high-conflict interpersonal relationships undermine affiliation at such a young age, it may be significantly harder for them to recover their social competence and social support in high school.

Researchers want to look at adolescents because of the developmental significance of this life stage. Indeed, research on adolescents can provide us with clearer insights into how interparental conflict may influence adults because they are cognitively closer in development to adults, but typically still living with their parents. If an adolescent's perceptions remain consistent with their childhood perceptions and patterns, there are significant implications for the long-term repercussions of interparental conflict. Adolescents are at a more advanced place to understand and experience how their own behavior changes based upon their parents during this stage of development. If the emotional security hypothesis holds true, then the insecurity children feel will last into adolescence. Wiersma et al. (1988) examined 178 young adolescents' perceptions of interparental conflict compared to their parents' own perceptions along with the adolescents' cognitive competence. Cognitive competence was measured based on teachers' perceptions, the students' GPA and general graded performance. Social functioning was measured based on their behavioral deviance and the teachers' perceptions of social competence. The researchers found that adolescents' perceptions of high interparental conflict were significantly associated with teacher reports of internalizing and externalizing problems as well as overall lower levels of cognitive competence. Although the researchers mainly found that parents' and adolescents' perceptions aligned, they did also find that adolescents were more

likely to contribute more information about their deficits in cognitive functioning compared to their parents, which allows for deeper analysis. This underscores that the children who witness the conflict are reliable narrators of the impacts on themselves as well as how important it is to understand the broader implications of interparental conflict.

To that exact point, research has looked at how children handled and coped with conflict by checking different dimensions; specifically at the teens' perceptions of threats to themselves, and whether the teens experienced any attributions of self blame or psychological distress. Shahinuzzaman et al. (2016) looked at a sample of 383 adolescents to examine how interparental conflict relates to adolescents' psychological distress. Their research revealed that threat to self was a significant predictor of psychological distress; when children perceive a threat to themselves from their parents' conflicts, they may use poor coping mechanisms that lead to anxiety and depression. Self-blame was also a significant predictor of psychological distress for children as they felt responsible for the conflict occurring and often became involved in the interparental conflict. These two variables, self-blame and the level of psychological distress, were responsible for the adolescents' behavioral and emotional responses to the interparental conflict.

Knowing how children are affected by their parents' patterns, researchers have also realized how important it is also to examine how adolescents model their parents' conflict styles in their own romantic relationships. In the teen years, friendships and romantic relationships matter a great deal. Naturally researchers have extended the inquiry to include romantic relationships, as a primary focus of close interpersonal relationships. Simon and Furman (2010) had 183 high schoolers living with married parents complete self-report questionnaires surrounding their parents' relationship and their own romantic relationships. The researchers

found that there is a direct positive association between interparental conflict and adolescents' romantic relationship conflict: the higher levels of perceived interparental conflict that were reported, the higher levels of conflict were reported in their own relationships. This is representative of children's expectations and sense of security (or insecurity) in romantic relationships. The perception that conflict is normal, or even seen a lot, in association with love may lead adolescents unconsciously to expect conflict, or even to seek or encourage it, as care and conflict have been metaphorically wired together in their life experiences so far.

Along similar lines, the observations of how parents handle conflict may reinforce or justify certain behaviors in adolescents' romantic relationships; again, this is because parents are a major source of modeling what it means to be a boyfriend or girlfriend. Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) surveyed 391 high school students aged 14-20 years old and explored how exposure to interparental aggression related to various aspects of teenage relationships such as conflict, aggression, anger regulation and overall beliefs about aggression. The researchers found that boys who reported witnessing higher levels of aggression between parents were more likely to believe that aggression is justifiable in romantic relationships compared to boys who reported lower levels or did not witness aggression. Hence, they were more likely to report more hostility and abusive behavior in their own relationships. Although they did not find significant findings about interparental conflict in predicting beliefs about aggression for the girls in the study, the researchers argued that girls may be prone to avoiding all relationships that remind them of aggression as girls would have likely viewed the aggression as fearful. Yet again, this study highlights how parents' relationships serve as models for their childrens' behavior and can lead to generational transmission of conflict behaviors. Another noteworthy finding from Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) was that the boys who experienced more conflict within the home tended to

report having friends who engaged in higher levels of verbal and physical aggression with romantic partners as compared to respondents who had not experienced high conflict in their homes. There are implications from this study about how exposure to interparental conflict may influence the people with whom children choose to associate, which would only encourage the perpetuation of destructive conflict.

In more recent years, there has been more research into the implications of consequences for adolescents' broader peer relationships, social connections and social networks in relation to interparental conflict. In 2019, Weymouth et al. reported that adolescents who were exposed to higher levels of interparental conflict had higher levels of social anxiety and were more vigilant in their threat appraisals of interparental conflict. This translated into problems of loneliness and antisocial behaviors as their threat appraisals seemed to be relevant to, or even carry over into, friendships and other interpersonal relationships. Adolescents with problems of loneliness and antisocial behaviors also tended to report that they received lower levels of social support. The researchers explained this result by citing the potential that adolescents may become hypervigilant and learn to expect that all relationships will have properties of conflict, such as competitiveness and unpredictable variability in emotional expression. The Weymouth et al. (2019) study's findings have huge implications for how we view the influence of interparental conflict on children and their future adolescent and adult relationships. The current study sought to explore and extend this finding further by examining the relationship between interparental conflict and friendship.

Without specific interventions, the potential consequences of interparental conflict seem likely to extend into adulthood because they occur during the formative years. The potential for life-long ramifications makes it all the more important to study. O'Hara et al. (2021) provided

support for the longitudinal influence of interparental conflict. These researchers recruited 559 children from families of divorce, aged 9 to 18, and examined them through a short-term longitudinal study in which they received a pretest of interparental conflict levels, parent-child relationship quality, and child mental health problems, retesting again 3 and 10 months later for post-divorce interparental conflict. They examined the influence of interparental conflict that was post-divorce and how the fear of abandonment mediated the relationship between interparental conflict and mental health problems. Through the three waves they were able to find that postdivorce interparental conflict predicted children's fear of abandonment regardless of the parent-child relationship. They also included teacher reports and found that children with higher reported fear of abandonment were rated by teachers as having more internalizing and externalizing problems. In alignment with the emotional security hypothesis, reported fear of abandonment from the children exposed to high levels of interparental conflict, could be rooted in the insecure foundation of their parents' relationships.

In an attempt to measure the long term consequences of parental divorce, Leys et al. (2018) sampled a group of 121 adults with an average age of 26. 55 participants were children of divorce and 66 were children of parents who are still together. Their findings were intriguing because they did not find a significant relationship between divorce and depression and anxiety, but across both groups there was a significant positive relationship between their perceived levels of interparental conflict and their reported levels of depression and anxiety. Most longitudinal studies have examined children of divorce, and, if we assume that most of divorced parents demonstrated conflict before and/or after the divorce, then we can use longitudinal studies such as Leys et al. (2018) to explore how long-lasting outcomes of parental problems

might be and to determine what might be done to support resilience and the acquisition of healthier conflict skills.

As one might expect, longitudinal divorce studies are useful in giving us insights into the long-term ramifications of interparental conflict. Wallerstein and Lewis (2004) looked at 131 children of divorce from California over the course of 25 years. From childhood to adulthood they found that participants expressed distrust in all personal relationships as they assumed that close personal relationships were unreliable. Wallerstein and Lewis (2004) found that in adulthood, participants were able to recall the distress of their childhoods, especially those who experienced violence in their homes. Many participants even reported fear of having children due to their experiences with their own parents and the feeling that their parents did not set a good example for them.

There has also been research that has connected the recollections of childhood exposure to interparental conflict and its possible outcomes for young adults, as a measure of the longitudinal consequences of interparental conflict. Turner and Kopiec (2006) surveyed 649 college students from three colleges in New England, and asked about their exposure in childhood to interparental conflict, romantic and parental relationships, self-esteem and depressive symptoms. To increase the confidence that differences were indeed from the interparental conflict, they controlled for divorce and physical violence. In their findings, there was a positive relationship between exposure to interparental conflict in childhood or adolescence and the probability that the participants were experiencing a major depressive disorder. Turner and Kopiec (2006) also found a significant increase in the likelihood that young adults exposed to high interparental conflict would suffer from alcohol abuse or dependency. Additionally, Turner and Kopiec also provided support for the mediating factors on childrens'

mental health, such as the increased strain that is formed in the participants' relationship with their parents. They also found higher levels of reported strain in romantic relationships as well as lower levels of self-esteem for the young adults exposed to high interparental conflict. In all, Turner and Kopiec (2006) provided support for the risk that chronic exposure to interparental conflict poses on adolescents who are still developing cognitively and how that exposure may manifest in other challenges later in life.

As demonstrated repeatedly in the previous discussion, there is a well-documented relationship between interparental conflict and consequences or risk factors for children. The research on college students demonstrates how interparental conflict may also place college students' overall success at risk. While college students are legally adults, they are still in transformative years where they are learning to navigate interpersonal relationships in a closer setting while also balancing the stressors of college academic life. For instance, Hunt et al., (2017) found that past exposure to interparental conflict did show a relationship to college students' grade point averages. In this study, 217 college students completed a survey that asked about their perceptions of their parents' conflicts and that requested their self-reported GPA as a measure of academic success. The researchers found that the students who reported higher GPAs tended to perceive less interparental conflict. When discussing the implications of their study, Hunt et al. (2017) suggested further research to examine the outcomes of interparental conflict on other aspects of life, such as how college students handle conflict with peers or even residential assistants.

At the time of conducting this research, the world was more than two years into a global pandemic, with a reach of hundreds of thousands of cases and thousands of deaths, stemming from the Covid-19virus. The pandemic caused global shutdowns of travel, workplaces and

education, at a scale unforeseen by most people. It forced people out of communal spaces into isolation, into wearing surgical masks for any interactions, and into remote work and learning via technological applications like Zoom and Google Meets. During the pandemic, families were under a severe amount of stress, many children or even adult children were stuck at home as conflict and tension rose between parents. Conflict seemed to elevate across all families as financial stress and parenting practices began to clash; for those with already higher levels of conflict, COVID-19 stressors were likely to impose or compound negative psychological impacts on children in the home.

The context may even be more relevant to study now, after such an extended period of time in isolation away from peers and closer to the parental conflict itself. Li et al. (2022) recently explored the relationship between parental conflict and adolescent depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. Li et al. (2022) surveyed around 800 adolescents and found a significant positive relationship between the adolescents' perceived levels of interparental conflict and risk factors for depression. Adolescents who were exposed to higher levels of interparental conflict, specifically unresolved conflict which contributes to higher levels of hostility in the home, reported more depressive symptoms than adolescents living with lower levels of conflict. Further, when parents were arguing about adolescent-related content, there was a direct relation to more symptoms of depression as they likely had higher levels of self-blame and involvement. Li et al. (2022) continued to explain that interparental conflict reduced family support and increased the burden of the pandemic on families by creating a hostile environment in which to quarantine.

It is important to keep in mind the significance of COVID-19 when studying college students, as there has been a general increase in reported negative emotions and burnout, which

in turn affects social behaviors. The overall emotional pressures of interparental conflict are an added source of stress in college students' lives, and that can compound their overall experience. Zhang et al. (2022) supported previous work showing how college students' insecurities with their parents' relationships are associated with students' negative emotions and academic burnout. In a study of 1,355 college students, Zhang et al. (2022) found that a rise in negative emotions and a decrease in overall mental health was associated with higher levels of academic burnout. A unique element of their findings was that “phubbing”, a term used to describe the use of a phone to evade social interactions, was higher for those who experienced higher levels of interparental conflict. College students often use their phones to find social support; in high conflict families, this becomes even more of an outlet, as it may be an avoidant or anxious coping mechanism. “Phubbing” was found to be a significant mediator between interparental conflict and academic burnout as it is a form of disengagement. For instance, when interparental conflict is high, negative emotions run higher, and college students disengage or “phub” more. When a student “phubs” more, that student is more likely to burn out academically, perhaps due to overuse of technology or the increased likelihood of distraction.

For many college students, dating is incredibly important. Cusimano and Riggs (2013) focused their research on romantic collegiate relationships and general psychological distress as a function of interparental conflict. In their study, 330 undergraduate students from a large university who were in exclusive relationships for more than six months completed questionnaires. Memories of interparental conflict from childhood were positively correlated with symptoms of psychological distress in young adulthood. Specifically, Cusimano and Riggs (2013) found that students who reported high perceptions of threats from the interparental conflict were more likely to report attachment anxiety and avoidance. In terms of romantic

relationships, participants with higher levels of perceived conflict reported more negative romantic experiences, including pessimism and fear of rejection. Linking early interparental conflict to romantic attachment patterns and then to current psychological symptoms, the authors made connections that are helpful to the current study. Indeed, similar attachment issues and similar feelings could be applicable to friendships and social relationships as well.

While romantic relationships are significant, family and friends also matter immensely to our growth, experiences and fulfillment. Peer relations and friendships matter as they are associated with many beneficial aspects of life and success. College is an inherently social situation, and friendships formed in college can matter for years afterwards as well. Kaufman et al. (2022) examined the importance of friendship for 972 participants with an age range of 18 to 75 years old to explore and emphasize the enduring, lifelong significance of friendships. Kaufman et al. (2022) measured the participants on their satisfaction with their romantic, familial, and friendship relationships in relation to their overall life satisfaction. They found that each had its own independent effect on life satisfaction. Further, if romantic relationship satisfaction was high, then friendship satisfaction was not necessary for predicting life satisfaction, and if friendship satisfaction was high, romantic relationships were not necessary for life satisfaction. If participants reported satisfaction with their friendships and romantic relationship satisfaction was low, they still maintained high levels of life satisfaction in comparison to individuals who reported satisfaction with both types of relationships. Additionally, Kaufman et al. (2022) found that family relationships were also important for life satisfaction. In other words, it is having a high quality relationship, not the domain in which it exists (romantic, familial or platonic), that supports overall life satisfaction. This insight refutes previous research that emphasized the importance of only romantic relationships for life

satisfaction and demonstrates that love can be in any form to support human happiness. It is likely that, when certain relationships are lacking, individuals turn to other relationships to lean on, so it would be fair to argue that having a stronger relationship with family members or friends as a foundation would help life satisfaction at least as much as romance.

In young adults and college students, the significance of friendship and social support is even more visible and prevalent to well-being. Deficits in friendship quality often predict lower levels of psychological adjustment and lower levels of social support. Bagwell et al. (2005) conducted a study of 52 same-sex friend duos who were observed and asked to complete self-report questionnaires to examine the quality of their friendships predicted clinical symptomatology and to explore how changes in relationships predicted psychosocial adjustment in young adulthood. Among the conclusions was this noteworthy finding: negative features of friendships and clinical symptomatology were correlated, and positive features of friendship were correlated with higher levels of self-esteem. Negative features in friendships included higher levels of conflict including hostility and opposition; these negative features were associated with anxious feelings and psychopathological symptoms. There were also dynamics within the friendship that were important to their findings. For instance, if the friends did not align in their perceptions of the quality of their friendship, the pairs of friends were more likely to demonstrate clinical symptoms and to report lower levels of social support. In addition, friends who had more power or influence in the relationship had higher levels of self-esteem and demonstrated low levels of interpersonal sensitivity. An important takeaway from the Bagwell et al. (2005) study was that negative features had a stronger association compared to positive features in regards to psychosocial functioning in the sense that there were more substantial and visible outcomes. Although the results of this study are correlational and therefore there is a

directionality problem, it provides a basis for understanding the cyclical relationship of friendship quality and psychological symptoms.

If friendship is a significant aspect of encouraging a healthy mentality, then it is possible that college students would suffer when friendship is lacking. Indeed, college students' psychosocial well-being has been well established as an important factor in their success. Rotenberg and Morrison (1993) gave us a glimpse into the significance of social support as they studied 916 college students and measured loneliness and college dropout rates. These researchers controlled for the number of students who dropped out due to poor grades and found that independently students who reported lower levels of social support were more likely to drop out of college. This finding was true for both male and female students. College is now quite significant for success in life and career paths, so this has a powerful implication for the importance of our friends, skills for cultivating healthy relationships and appreciation of the support that friends offer.

Looking beyond whether students stay in the academic game or drop out, Bronkema and Bowman (2019) wanted to learn how participants' closest friends influenced the participants' academic performance, achievement during college and graduation rates. The study design involved having participants answer open-ended questions about their four closest friends. Having even one strong close friendship was associated with reported levels of emotional connectedness to campus. The better the quality of their close friendships, the more it predicted higher GPAs and even a six-year graduation rate. Overall, the Bronkema and Bowman (2019) study's findings suggested that stronger peer networks are associated with higher academic success through indirect and direct roles. Their study adds to the significance of the current study as it serves as a reminder that research on friendship quality in college students is important to

expanding the knowledge about how to encourage a thriving college environment. Further, it suggests that we remember to attend to not only quantity but also the quality of those friendships.

Friendships seem to be susceptible to the influence of parents as well. In a study guided by attachment theory, Markiewicz et al. (2001) examined mothers' interpersonal relationships and the adolescents' personal attachment to their parents and friends as a predictor of the quality of those adolescent friendships. This group of researchers asked 69 adolescents and 69 of their friends to complete questionnaires and to participate in videotaped discussions that focused on measuring their attachment security, prosocial behaviors and friendship qualities. They also reported on their mothers' marital and friendship qualities. Markiewicz et al. (2001) results suggested that adolescents' perceptions of their parents' marital quality predicted the adolescents' attachment security to their parents and directly related to their attachment to their friends. Specifically, adolescents who were more securely attached to their mothers were more likely to report higher friendship quality, but increased attachment security to the father predicted lower attachment security to friends. In turn, attachment security to their friends was a predictor of the friendship quality they reported. Furthermore, reports of perceptions of the mothers' quality of social network and marital quality were associated with the adolescents' prosocial behaviors. Again, this study provides support for the premise that the security children have with their parents impacts many aspects of their well-being, including directly influencing the qualities of their friendships. The results support attachment theory and social learning perspectives as they demonstrate the importance of a child's perceptions of security within the home and the imitation of a parents' social and interpersonal behaviors.

Although there is a gap in the literature surrounding the relationship between children's exposure to interparental conflict and their friendships in later-life that this current study intends

to fill, there are a few studies that have come closer to examining college students and friendships specifically in reference to exposure to interparental conflict. A few have examined the broader aspects of family dynamics on friendship quality. For instance, Green and King (2009) considered how exposure to domestic violence and divorce may influence friendship quality in college students. They found moderate effects of divorce for college students from divorced families who described their relationships with their best friends as less affirming or favorable compared to students from intact families. College students exposed to domestic violence found their best friends to be less affirming and found lower practicality or usefulness within their friendships and more trouble maintaining relationships compared to participants from intact families. This again emphasizes the influence of conflict within the home and maladjustment over time.

With a more emotive angle, Johnson et al. (2001) looked into how a family environment leads to feelings of loneliness, social anxiety and avoidance through perception of interparental conflict and family cohesion. Specifically Johnson et al. (2001) surveyed 124 first-year college students with an average age of 20 years old. Their findings showed that both perceptions of interparental conflict and low family cohesion predicted greater feelings of loneliness. The Johnson et al. (2001) study further supports the idea that deficits in the family environment can lead to social adjustment problems; specifically the way this study established a relationship between feelings of loneliness to social anxiety and avoidance is compelling. The current study further supports previous research that has emphasized the continuum of the influence of family on social well-being.

Wise and King (2008) found similar results in their study that examined family environment in relation to college student friendships. Wise and King (2008) surveyed 408

college students and found interesting patterns surrounding gender and different aspects of friendship qualities. Women who reported low intellectual and cultural dimensions, which refers to the extent to which family members are interested in political, intellectual or cultural activities within their families, also reported friendships that were not stimulating or supportive compared to women with high family cohesion who reported more supportive friends. Overall, in the Wise and King (2008) study, lower levels of family cohesion were associated with non-supportive and non-stimulating friendships compared to those who reported higher levels of family cohesion, where friendships were more supportive and more stimulating.

While there are few studies that look directly at the link between interparental conflict on friendship quality, in one study children's perceptions of interparental conflict were directly linked to the quality of their friendships. Kitzmann and Cohen (2003) examined how parents' and children's perceptions of the interparental conflict predict multiple dimensions of the children's peer relationships. Using a diverse sample of 40 children ranging from third to sixth grade, Kitzmann and Cohen (2003) administered questionnaires to see if parents and children showed corresponding levels of perceptions of interparental conflict. Using the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict scale (Grych et al., 1992), they also examined how different domains of conflict were associated with children's friendship qualities. That scale measures conflict intensity, conflict frequency, perceived threat, conflict resolution, coping efficacy, self-blame, triangulation and stability. They found that children who reported poor friendship quality were more likely to report witnessing high intensity conflict, frequent conflict, and higher perceived threat to self from the conflict. The fourth specific feature of conflict was the most significant predictor which was conflict resolution as children who reported higher levels of perceived maladaptive conflict resolution between parents seemed to have lower levels of

friendship quality. Additionally, poor conflict resolution in parents seemed to transmit into the children's friendships.

Overall, the previous research discussed a priori has provided evidence for the influence of childhood exposure to interparental conflict on numerous aspects of childrens' lives including problems with psychological, academic, and social adjustment. Researchers have investigated and found relationships between interparental conflict exposure and problems with peer relations in childhood, as well as romantic relationship deficits in adulthood (Simon & Furman, 2010, Kitzmann & Cohen, 2003). Further, previous research has established that friendships are crucial to overall success in college from academics to psychological well-being (Kaufman et al., 2022, Bagwell et al., 2005). Therefore, the current study was conducted to examine interparental conflict in relation to college students' friendships and perceived social support.

Much of the research has focused on young children and older adults' romantic relationships, and may ignore a crucial phase of college where social life is a primary focus. Social life in college is connected to academic performance and social support may help foster better academic results (Simon & Furman, 2010, Turner, 2008). There has also been a deficit in the research to date in terms of connection between the quality of individuals' friendships and perceptions of social support, or perhaps even willingness to seek social support. Therefore, college students were recruited for the purposes of this study because they are at the age where social competence is an especially significant aspect of life; this is typically the first time adult children leave and move out of the house and live with roommates. It is particularly useful to understand how sustained exposure to high levels of interparental conflict may influence people in early adulthood, especially as one establishes oneself, and one's friendships, outside of one's family of origin.

The current study recruited undergraduate college students and surveyed them on their perceptions of interparental conflict from their childhood, and asked about their current friendships and social support. Students were surveyed using measures that allowed for a closer examination of positive features (i.e., satisfaction, emotional support, companionship) and negative features (i.e., pressure, dominance, criticism) of their relationship with their best friend, and their overall perceptions of support from their broader social network of friends and family.

I hypothesized that, overall, college students who reported more exposure to high levels of interparental conflict would report that the quality of their friendships were more negative. Secondly, I hypothesized that students' with higher perceptions of exposure to interparental would report experiencing lower levels of both friend and family social support (Kitzmann & Cohen, 2003, Markiewicz et al., 2001). For instance, previous studies discussed prior, such as Wise and King (2008), found that low levels of family cohesion predict one experiencing more unsupportive friends, and interparental conflict relates to lower levels of cohesion between family members. Therefore, I hypothesized that interparental conflict would be associated with low levels of emotional support from friends. Conversely, students with low levels of perceived interparental conflict from childhood were expected to demonstrate more positive qualities of their friendships and higher overall perceived social support from family and friends. I also hypothesized that higher levels of negative features of friendship quality with the best friend would predict lower levels of overall social support, based on Bagwell et al. (2005). Based on prior research such as Kitzmann and Cohen (2003), I hypothesized that exposure to more difficulties with conflict resolution between parents would be visible in students' friendships and predict more negative features with the quality of relationship of their best friends, as resolution styles can be taught and transmitted through generations. Additionally, I hypothesized that higher

levels of reported interparental conflict intensity and frequency of conflict would predict more negative features of friendship quality (Kitzmann & Cohen, 2003). Based on prior studies that have linked interparental conflict to social anxiety and avoidance in children (Cusimano & Riggs, 2013, Weymouth et al., 1988, Shahinuzzaman et al., 2016), I hypothesized that higher reports of perceived threat to self from interparental conflict would predict more negative features in friendship and lower levels of overall social support, from family and friends.

Method

Participants

The participants were 114 undergraduate students recruited from Union College in Schenectady, NY. The group was made of 85 females, 20 males, 4 gender non-binary, and 4 respondents who preferred not to say. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 23 with a mean age of 20.12. In terms of class year, there were 31 freshmen, 15 sophomores, 26 juniors, 41 seniors, and one individual who selected “other”. The participants primarily identified as White, as 82 participants chose White or European, 9 chose Latinx, 4 chose multiracial, 2 selected Black or African American, 12 selected Asian, and 5 participants selected “Other” and filled in their response (i.e., Indian, Middle Eastern, and prefer not to say).

In terms of parental status, the overwhelming majority of participants (88) came from families with intact marriages. Only 10 participants had separated or divorced parents that are both still single, 3 had divorced parents that are both remarried, 8 had one remarried parent, 88, and 5 selected “other” or “prefer not to say”. If participants did not have two caregivers, they were asked to skip the questionnaire about interparental conflict. The majority of participants (90) still reside in their family home with both parents when not at college, but 13 lived with

only one of their parents, 6 lived with a parent and a step-parent, 2 lived on their own as financial independents, and 2 participants selected “other”.

Materials and Procedure

Participants enrolled in the current study through a Qualtrics link that was distributed through email or accessible through Sona Systems for psychology students. The email provided incentives to encourage participation including out-of-class credit for students enrolled in two psychology courses or the option to enter a raffle for a \$50 Amazon gift card after completion. Prior to completing the questionnaires, participants were presented with an informed consent form that emphasized that responses were voluntary. The informed consent form indicated that participants had the option to skip questions they did not wish to answer. It stated that all information would be anonymous and confidential, and gave a brief description of what the survey would entail and how long it would take, and offered resources to call upon if participants had questions or if they felt any feelings of anxiety arise. (The exact wording of the consent form can be found in Appendix A.)

The next section of the questionnaire contained 7 demographic questions about age, race, and gender identity. In addition, three personal questions were included. The first was “my biological or adoptive parents are” with five response options: “still married to each other”, “separated or divorced, both are single”, “separated or divorced, both are remarried to someone else”, “separated or divorced, one parent is remarried” and “other/prefer not to say”. The second question was “when I am not in college I typically live with”; and response options included “both my mom and my dad”, “only one of my parents”, “with one parent and a step-parent”, “another relative”, “on my own”, or “other”. The final question was “for the majority of my childhood the two adults who primarily raised me were”; and response options for this included

“both my parents”, “my divorced parents”, “my parent and a step-parent”, “only one parent or caregiver”, and “other. These questions allowed for insight into the status of the parent’s relationship and the dynamics of conflict. If participants were raised by only one caregiver, they were asked to skip to part 3.

Measuring Perceptions of Interparental Conflict

The second section utilized the *Children’s Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale* from Grync and Fincham (1992). It contains 49 questions that measure overall exposure to interparental conflict from the child’s perspective and looks at specific properties of interparental conflict including the frequency, intensity, resolution, content, perceived threat to self, coping efficacy, self-blame, triangulation, and stability of conflict, each of which has its own subscale. Each subscale had about 4 to 6 statements. Sample statements included “My parents get really mad when they argue” or “When my parents argue, I worry that one of them will get hurt”. Participants were asked to rate how much they agreed with the statement on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “*very false*” and 5 meaning “*very true*”. The scale was modified to include a range of 1 to 5 rather than the original 1 to 3 to allow for descriptive responses.

In the current study, I created the variable “overall conflict” by using participants' total perceptions of exposure to conflict scores and using the mean score of their responses after reverse-scoring negatively worded responses rather than creating a total sum score. Higher scores indicate higher perceived levels of exposure to interparental conflict. I used the mean scores from the subscales frequency, intensity, resolution, and perceived threat to self for my specific properties of conflict variables. The scale was originally developed by Grync and Fincham (1992) and tested on fourth and fifth graders and significant associations were found between children’s perceived interparental conflict and their adjustment. Grync and Fincham

(1992) also found good reliability and validity when conducting correlations on children's reports against parent reports of marital conflict and aggression. Bickham and Fiese (1997) later tested the reliability of the scale for young adults by recruiting 215 undergraduate students and their Cronbach's alpha ranged from .85 to .95 for the subscales. Additionally, Bickham and Fiese (1997) found that the scale had a strong test-retest reliability as their Pearson's correlation after 2-weeks with their Cronbach's alphas ranging from .81 to .95. In the current study, Cronbach's Alpha for overall conflict, which used the mean score from all statements, was .96. For the specific subscales used, the Cronbach's Alphas were also very good. For frequency it was .89, intensity was .90, and perceived threat to self was .77.

Measuring Friendship Quality

The third section of the questionnaire was *The Network of Relationships - Relationship Quality Version Scale* (Furman & Buhrmester, 2008) from a combination of the Furman and Buhrmester (1985) *Network of Relationships Inventory* and a family relationship measure from Buhrmester et al. (1991). Participants were asked to think of their relationship with their best friend before answering, and then filled out description questions about their best friend including how long they have been friends and the age of their friend. This section contained 30 statements that measure participants' perceptions of the positive and negative features of their friendships. The positive features include companionship, emotional support, approval, intimate disclosure, and satisfaction with the relationship. The negative features include conflict, criticism, pressure, exclusion, and dominance. Sample statements included "I tell this person things I don't want others to know", "I disagree and quarrel with this person", and "This person seems really proud of me". Participants were asked to rate how much they agreed with on a

Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 meaning “*Never or hardly at all*” and 5 meaning “*Always or extremely much*”).

I created the two variables “negative features of friendship” and “positive features of friendship” by using the mean scores from the subscales of positive and negative features. Higher scores indicated either higher negative or higher positive features of perceived friendship quality. In a sample of 223 young adolescents, Furman and Buhrmester (2008) found that the scale had strong reliability by testing the scale on participants' perceptions of support from female friends, male friends, romantic friends, siblings, and mother and father. The mean Cronbach's alpha across each type of relationship was .75 for negative features and .81 for positive features (Furman & Buhrmester, 2008). For positive features, it was .81. Similarly, in the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for positive features was .84 and for negative features, it was .72.

Measuring Perceived Social Support from Friends and Family

The fourth section of the questionnaire was *The Perceived Social Support Scale* from Procidano and Heller (1983). It has two different parts, each containing 20 statements. The first scale measured participants' perceived social support from friends and the second measured perceived social support from family. The first scale asked for statements in regard to participants' broader social network of friends. Participants were asked to rate how much they agreed on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “*Definitely no*” and 5 meaning “*Definitely yes*”. Example statements included “My friends give me the moral support I need”, “My friends seek me out for companionship”, and “I wish my friends were much different”. The second scale asked participants to rate levels of agreement with statements in the same manner as the last, but instead regarding their family members. The statements were similar to the ones of the friends,

but instead looked like the following: “I rely on my family for emotional support” and “My family is sensitive to my personal needs”.

To create the variables “social support from friends” and “social support from family”, scores were calculated using the mean score, after reverse scoring the negatively worded statements. Higher scores indicate higher perceived levels of social support. Procidano and Heller (1983) found that the scale had a high test-retest reliability over 1 month in a sample of 222 undergraduate students ($r = .83$). In the current study, the Cronbach’s Alpha for perceived social support from friends was .93 and perceived social support from family members was .95.

Debrief

Finally, at the end of the survey participants were given a debrief of the intentions of the study that explained that I was exploring “whether being exposed to conflict between parents while growing up is related at all to the quality of college students’ friendships and dynamics” and provided resources again if the questionnaire triggered any feelings of anxiety. Students were then able to choose the incentive and were sincerely thanked for participating. The exact wording can be found in Appendix B.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

The means and standard deviations for each variable can be found in Table 1. First I checked for gender differences in all the major variables. I conducted an independent samples t-test with gender as the independent variable and overall conflict as the dependent variable. I did not find any statistically significant difference in reported exposure to interparental conflict based on gender, $t(100) = -0.12$, $p = .90$, $d = -.031$, CI [-0.34, 0.30]. I then conducted an independent samples t-test again with gender as the independent variable and overall social

support and positive/negative features of friendships as the dependent variables. An interesting unanticipated finding was that there was a significant difference between males and females in terms of overall social support and positive features of friendship. For social support, there was a significant gender difference as males reported lower levels of social support, $t(102) = -2.41, p = .018, d = .600, CI [-0.68, -0.07]$. Further, there was a significant gender difference for positive features of friendship quality with the best friend, with females being more likely to report higher positive features compared to males, $t(103) = -3.11, p = .002, d = -.772, CI [-0.71, -0.16]$. Since no significant gender difference was found in the key variables, I combined males and females for the remaining analyses.

Divorce

Means and standard deviations as a function of the divorce groups can be found in Table 4. For the divorce or non-divorced groups, participants were divided based on their response to the question regarding their parents' marital status. The divorced group was all parents who are divorced regardless of whether they are married or single now. The non-divorced group was all participants who reported parents with intact marriages. The results of an independent samples t-test did not indicate that there was any statistically significant difference in overall exposure to interparental conflict based on whether participants had parents who are divorced or not divorced, $t(106) = -2.15, p = .034, d = -.532, CI [-0.65, -0.26]$. Furthermore, I did not find any significant difference in reported negative features of friendship quality when looking at the divorced group compared to the nondivorced group, $t(105) = -1.70, p = .092, d = -.414, CI [-0.43, -0.03]$. There was also no significant difference in positive features, $t(105) = 1.51, p = .135, d = .367, CI [-0.07, -0.58]$.

Exposure to Conflict and Negative Features in Friendship Quality

Means and standard deviations as a function of conflict groups can be found in Table 3. Participants were divided, using a median split, into two groups based on high or low interparental conflict exposure scores. The median was a score of 2.36. To test whether participants who reported higher levels of interparental conflict had more negative features in their friendship quality, I conducted an independent samples t-test. I compared the low-conflict and high-conflict groups as the independent variable and positive/negative features of friendship as the dependent variable. A significant difference was found between the high-conflict group and low-conflict group when comparing the negative features of friendships. The high-conflict group reported significantly more negative features in friendship quality in comparison to the low-conflict group, $t(106) = -3.61, p < .001, d = -.70, CI [-0.50, -1.45]$. However, there was no significant difference found between the two groups in the level of positive features within their friendships, $t(106) = 0.81, p = .432, d = 1.16, CI [-.013, 0.31]$.

Friendship Quality and Social Support

To test the hypothesis that high interparental conflict would be associated with lower levels of friend and family social support, I conducted a multivariate t-test with the independent variable as the conflict group (high and low perceived conflict group) and the dependent variables as perceived friend support and perceived family support. There was a significant difference between conflict groups and family support as the higher conflict groups reported lower levels of family support, $F(1, 103) = 26.48, p < .001, \eta^2p = .21, CI [0.47, 1.06]$. There was a borderline significant difference between the conflict groups and total friend support with slightly lower friend support reported with the higher conflict group, $F(1, 103) = 4.00, p = .024, \eta^2p = .04, CI [-0.01, 0.51]$. I performed a Bonferroni correction for the probability level based on the two tests.

To test the hypothesis that negative features of friendship quality with the best friend were related to overall lower levels of social support, I combined the scores from two variables – perceived social support from friends and perceived social support from family– to form an overall social support variable. I computed the Pearson Product-Moment correlation using overall social support and negative features of friendship quality. I found that there was a significant negative correlation between the two variables, such that the more negative features reported, the lower the overall level of social support reported, $r(109) = -.24, p = .011, CI [-0.41, -0.06]$.

Features of Conflict and Negative features of Friendship Quality and Social Support

To delve deeper into the specific features of conflict that may be associated with negative features in friendship quality and social support, I examined specific features of conflict by creating mean scores for the participants on four of the subscales that make up the overall conflict scores from the *CPIC* scale. The subscales I examined were perceived conflict intensity, conflict frequency, level of resolution, and perceived threat to self. I hypothesized that greater exposure to poor conflict resolution and high conflict intensity would be associated with negative features of friendship quality. To assess my hypotheses, Pearson Product-Moment correlations were conducted for the four specific features of conflict against the negative and positive features of a friendship. The first hypothesis that greater exposure to poor conflict resolution would be associated with more negative features in friendship quality was supported by a significant positive correlation, $r(110) = .29, p = .003, CI [0.10, 0.45]$. My second hypothesis about conflict features was that a high conflict frequency score would be related to more negative features in friendship quality was supported, as I found a positive correlation, $r(106) = .28, p =$

.003, CI [0.10, 0.45]. However, my hypothesis that conflict intensity would be related to negative features of friendship was not supported; these results can be found in Table 2.

My hypothesis that individuals who perceived higher levels of threat to themselves from interparental conflict would be more likely to report more negative features in friendship quality was also supported; there was a positive correlation between these two variables $r(106) = .24, p = .011 [0.06, 0.41]$. The correlations also supported the hypothesis that perceived threat to self would be related to social support; however, perceived threat to self was only significantly negatively correlated to family social support, $r(103) = -.54, p < .001, CI [-0.66, -0.38]$. I did not find a significant correlation between perceived friend social support and perceived threat to self, as is visible in Table 2.

Discussion

The current study focused on examining the relationship between exposure to interparental conflict during childhood and the quality of relationships with the participants' best friends as well as their reported perceptions of social support from family and friends. The hypothesis that high levels of reported exposure to interparental conflict were predictive of more negative features of friendship and lower levels of social support from family members was supported by my results. Furthermore, the perceived frequency and quality of resolution of interparental conflicts were correlated with negative features of best-friend friendships among college students. I also found that participants' reports of their perceived "threat to self" (i.e., the extent to which children perceived a threat to themselves from their parents' conflict) from the childhood exposure to conflict were correlated with both negative features of friendship and lower levels of reported social support from family members.

My study allows for the expansion of the results of prior research from Kitzmann and Cohen (2003), who found that exposure to interparental conflict predicted children's (aged 8-12) quality of their friendships. Using a similar method, I found that childhood exposure to interparental conflict predicted the quality of friendships in college students. My study also supported Kitzmann and Cohen's (2003) findings that the specific features of perceived interparental conflict, frequency, resolution, and perceived threat, significantly predicted more negative features of friendships of college students. Kitzmann and Cohen (2003) found that higher scores on these three subscales were correlated with more negative features in young children's friendships. My findings build upon theirs and suggest that the relationship between interparental conflict and young children's friendships may extend into adulthood. My results differed from Kitzmann and Cohen (2003) as I examined the perceived threat to self in relation to perceived social support, and although I did not find a significant relationship to social support from friends, I did find that higher perceived threat to self predicted a decrease in perceived family support. Additionally, Kitzmann and Cohen (2003) found a significant relationship between conflict intensity and increased negative features within children's friendships; while my results did not support this finding in young adulthood, that may be due to other factors, such as memories of the intensity of conflicts lessening over the years.

My study supports prior research that has also examined the importance of specific features of conflict. Davies and Cummings (1993) asserted that children's perceived levels of resolution of the conflicts between their parents were related to the intensity of their negative emotional reaction to the interparental conflict. My study supported their emphasis on the importance of examining conflict resolution as a key mediator of children's perceptions of their

parents' conflicts as I found that students' reports of poor interparental conflict resolution were predictive of more negative features of friendships.

My findings also reinforce prior research that emphasizes the ramifications of exposure to interparental conflict on children's interpersonal relationships and extends these consequences to young adulthood. Hess (2022) found that children who reported their parents as having higher levels of conflict within their relationships also reported their parents to demonstrate lower levels of warmth and increased negative communication. The children of these parents were therefore more likely to struggle with their relationships with peers and demonstrate lower levels of prosocial behavior. Hess (2021) explained that children who observed frequent conflict were more likely to replicate maladaptive conflict behaviors and accept them as normal. My study may allow us to infer that negative conflict behaviors that children learn from their parents may last into adulthood, presenting a challenging cycle to break.

In addition, my results align with previous research into how exposure to interparental conflict may predict behaviors and negative features in romantic relationships. Although previous studies have not examined the influence of interparental conflict on college students' friendships in the way the current study has, previous research regarding romantic relationships has. My results encourage the inference that the cycle in which behaviors are passed through parents to their children's romantic relationships may be similar to their children's friendships. Simon and Furmon (2010), for example, found that higher levels of perceived interparental conflict in childhood were predictive of higher levels of conflict in romantic relationships for adolescents. My findings are similar as the consequences to friendships seem to be similar to those to romantic relationships; this suggests that exposure to interparental conflict may influence broader interpersonal skills, not just romantic relationships.

A natural next question is to inquire about the mechanisms by which these patterns are carried over to friendships. Research shows that children tend to replicate the behavior of parents and affiliate with people who feel similar, which is why focus on romantic relationships makes sense in this body of research so far (Bandura, 1971, Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004). In high conflict families, children tend to develop an anxious perspective, which feeds psychological distress. This may prevent them from developing robust coping skills, and that can make social interactions and relationships more stressful. In sum, this may perpetuate the cycle of dysfunction into relationships, romantic and platonic. My research suggests that high interparental conflict in childhood affects later adult relationships for a variety of reasons, not only with romantic partners, but with platonic ones. Adult children of high-conflict parents may not consciously realize how their own focus, actions, and inactions contribute to the breaks in connection that they intended to avoid.

Among the interesting work on romantic relationships is research done by Kinsfogel and Grych (2004). In their study, boys who reported witnessing higher levels of aggression between parents were more likely to believe that aggression is justifiable in romantic relationships and they were more likely to report hostility and abusive behavior in their own romantic relationships. While Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) did not find consistent results for girls, they argued that there may be an aspect of avoidance of all aggressive relationships. In addition, teens who experienced more conflict within the home tended to report having friends who engaged in higher levels of verbal and physical aggression with romantic partners (i.e., they seem to have affiliated with friends who replicated feelings from the home). It is possible that if children come to believe that conflict is acceptable and normal within their romantic relationships, they would also learn to expect, start, or accept conflict with other loved ones, such as their friends. It seems

friendships arguably occupy a more significant role as young people delay marriage, friendships remain important at all phases of life. Yet they have been relatively overlooked by other researchers, who understandably drew a line between the romantic or coupled dynamics of parents to the romantic relationships of their adult children. In that sense, my current research seems a logical and needed extension of the work to date.

In a similar vein to Kinsfogal and Gryncz (2004), Turner and Kopiec (2006) provided insight into the association between exposure to interparental conflict and higher levels of strain in college students' romantic relationships, as well as reported lower levels of self-esteem. They emphasized that students who reported greater levels of exposure to interparental conflict were more likely to report a high strain in their relationships with their parents and romantic partner, which in turn was predictive of higher levels of psychological distress. Turner and Kopiec (2006) provided support for the influence of interparental conflict on self-concept by finding that higher levels of exposure predicted lower self-esteem, which was in turn associated with symptoms of depression.

My findings were similar to Bagwell et al. (2005) found that negative features of friendships were stronger predictors of clinical symptomatology as compared to positive features of friendships. This is similar to my finding that negative features of friendships were stronger predictors of lower social support from peers compared to positive features of friendships. Bagwell et al. (2005) found that the quality of friendships in young adults and college students predicted psychosocial adjustment in college. Negative features such as conflict and hostility in friendship were associated with higher levels of clinical symptoms, whereas positive features were associated with increased self-esteem. It seems plausible to infer that lower levels of self-esteem and increased clinical symptomatology would contribute more to difficulties in social

relationships and competence as compared to high self-esteem and lower symptomatology. However, to connect their findings to Turner and Kopiec's (2006), there may be a bidirectional relationship. Exposure to conflict increases symptoms of depression and strain in interpersonal relationships, conversely, the strain in interpersonal relationships (such as romantic) increases psychological distress. The symptoms of psychological distress often interfere with the ability to maintain social relationships. It is easy to imagine a downward spiral that would be hard to recover from, and easy to perpetuate these intrapersonal and social difficulties unconsciously.

The findings from my study may also add evidence for the argument that exposure to interparental conflict may change how children grow to appraise social relationships. I found that as hypothesized, higher scores on perceptions of threat to self were predictive of higher negative features of friendship and lower levels of social support from family, which adds to the evidence from previous research. Shahiuzzaman et al. (2016) found that threat to self was a significant predictor of psychological distress in adolescents and, in turn, was linked to lower levels of perceived social support. They explained that threat to self seemed to be linked to poor coping mechanisms in response to parental conflict that fueled anxiety and depression.

Whereas Shahiuzzaman et al. (2016) found that threat appraisals were higher for children exposed to interparental conflict, which increased social anxiety and that, in turn, was related to lower levels of social support. The results of my study differed as I did not find a statistically significant correlation between the perceived threat to self and social support from friends. This difference in results could possibly be due to developmental gains made between adolescence and college, as college students have more resources, a bit more distance and independence from their families of origin, and possibly even have benefitted from counseling or therapeutic interviews, which I did not assess in the current study. Davies and Cummings (2018) posited that

such an increase in negative features in children's friendships was due to the undermining of affiliation with children's best friends; they indicated that may be due to a learned response to be hypervigilant and defensive when it comes to stress in personal relationships. It is logical that an overfocus on risks, which goes with anxiety, might reduce behaviors that enable good relationships for children. For argument's sake, in college, that might look like failing to make proactive positive investments in a relationship (e.g., planning fun outings), more negative than positive communications, perhaps an inability to express oneself and ask for what you need, and even a defensiveness in the face of conflict. All of those seem essential to sustaining a strong best friend connection, as well as a romantic one.

Cusimano and Riggs (2013) also found that the memories of interparental conflict from childhood were correlated with negative features in adolescents' romantic relationships, such as increased levels of pessimism and fear of rejection. This fear of rejection may also support the idea that children exposed to high interparental conflict may fear interpersonal relationships as unreliable or threatening. Cusimano & Riggs (2013) also found that memories of interparental conflict from childhood were correlated with more symptoms of psychological distress and attachment anxiety or avoidance in adolescence. This is consistent with prior research such as Weymouth et al (2019), who found that high levels of reported childhood exposure to interparental conflict were correlated with levels of social support from peers. Weymouth et al. (2019) discussed their findings that there may be a pathway that forms as adolescents exposed to more interparental conflict were more likely to report social anxiety symptoms, and participants with high social anxiety symptoms were more likely to report decreased perceptions of social support from friends. These college students may enter friendships with fear of rejection or conflict. Such anxieties may prevent those students from actively seeking out or initiating

connections (ex. joining clubs, attending social gatherings). For those individuals in my study who had high levels of exposure to conflict and more negative features within their friendships, fear of rejection and social anxiety may bring more negative features into the friendship (e.g., not speaking up for themselves when conflict arises or conversely arguing too much). Social anxiety and fear of rejection from others hold them back from looking for new relationships and they may settle for lower quality connections.

Social anxiety that manifests from increased threat appraisals may further undermine children's network of social support. My hypothesis that high scores on childhood exposure to interparental conflict would be associated with low levels of perceived social support from both friends and family was supported. Scores on exposure to interparental conflict were statistically significant in predicting reported social support from family, and I found borderline statistical significance in predicting social support from friends as well. Johnson et al. (2001) similarly emphasized the importance of the connection revealed in my findings, as they found when studying college students that feelings of low family cohesion predicted greater feelings of loneliness which were also associated with social adjustment problems such as social anxiety and avoidance. Specifically, Johnson et al. (2001) noted that both perceptions of interparental conflict and low family cohesion predicted greater feelings of loneliness.

As Harold and Sellers (2018) discussed in a review, children exposed to high amounts of interparental conflict often reported an increased amount of conflict with their siblings, as well as with peers, which may help to explain why there was a significant notable decrease in family social support. Turner and Kopiec (2006) also reported similar findings as they discussed how interparental conflict is associated with an increased amount of strain in their relationship with their parents. Additionally, Li et al. (2022) found that adolescents who were exposed to higher

levels of interparental conflict, specifically unresolved conflict, predicted higher levels of hostility in the home and more depressive symptoms compared to adolescents living with lower levels of conflict. This relates back to my findings on the importance of resolution in terms of consequences for participants. Again and again, researchers coming from different angles uncover similar insights that allow us to begin to see a cyclical pattern. As social anxiety and low-self esteem occur, it becomes much harder to connect and social difficulties also occur, which then feed the person's social anxiety. It all seems to happen in an unconscious manner that is hard to see, interrupt and reset.

Knowing that interparental conflict puts children at risk for increased negative features within their friendships, one might wonder if these negative features make it harder for children to recover their social competence later in life. I found that as expected, increased negative features of friendships with college students' best friends were related to lower levels of overall social support from both family and friends. This relates back to my discussion of the Davies and Cummings (2018) study in which they explored children's longitudinal development of social problems from kindergarten through high school. They explained that insecurity in childhood seemed to last into high school and found that children exposed to higher levels of interparental conflict were more likely to report less value placed on their best friendships. If we now know that interparental conflict is predictive of negative features of friendship quality in college students, it may help us to understand the cyclical nature of lower levels of social support. Children who tend to undermine their affiliation with their best friends may find it harder to learn how to be socially connected or competent later in life.

Higher levels of interparental conflict in childhood increase the likelihood of social anxiety and hypervigilance to threat appraisals and therefore encourage antisocial behaviors

(Weymouth et al., 2019). Although we are unable to figure out the technical directionality of these problems, it seems that excessive, unresolved conflict exposure tends to seed and feed social difficulties from childhood to adulthood. It is possible that when children are living in a high interparental conflict environment where they are consistently appraising a threat, it may be harder to ask for what they need or to trust that they can rely on those close to them. Children may learn from a young age that their needs are not prioritized by themselves so they cannot be prioritized by others.

My findings align with the foundational framework on which I based my study, which was the emotional security hypothesis from Davies and Cummings (1994). To reiterate, the emotional security hypothesis emphasizes that interparental conflict alters children's psychological and social well-being through three major processes. First, children's arousal levels increase due to high levels of exposure to destructive conflict, which leads to emotional reactivity and hypervigilance. Second, coping behaviors in response to the interparental conflict may become maladaptive as children may be motivated to involve themselves or participate in intense avoidance. Third, the conflict alters children's appraisals of conflict and therefore they may become overly sensitive to the threat of conflict.

If children are in an environment of persistent unresolved conflict, they may logically learn to scan the environment and develop an ability to read the emotions of their parents (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Is it safe? Can I trust this moment of peace? When is the other shoe going to drop? That vigilance serves them well, of course, from a survival standpoint and represents some sophistication in adapting. However, it seems logical that these children would under-manage their own connections to their own feelings, wants, and needs; and in a stressful environment, they might find it difficult or even unnecessary to voice their less important wants

and needs (Emery, 1982). Those two habits, vigilance towards others' moods and reactions coupled with under-attention to their own wants and needs, seem like they would make relationships in the future harder (Davies & Cummings, 1994, Emery, 1982). These children might even be drawn to relationships that mimic the conflict they were accustomed to as children (Bandura, 1971, Hess, 2021). All of these things suggest the need for earlier therapeutic interventions to teach these children what healthier relationships look like, with themselves to begin with and with others. One would also imagine that children could be affected by multiple factors, including age, birth order, and gender.

It is important to note that in the preliminary analysis, I did not find any statistically significant difference for conflict variables based on gender. However, I did find that female college students were more likely to report higher positive features of friendship compared to male college students overall. Males were also more likely to report lower levels of perceived overall social support. A meta-analysis conducted by Rhoades (2008) may be helpful to understand these results. Rhodes found that in reviewing cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physiological responses to interparental conflict in children 5 to 19, there were a few gender differences that may stem from societal gender norms. For instance, maladaptive cognitions such as increased threat or self-blame were predictors for more externalizing problems in boys compared to more internalizing problems in girls. Males may feel less comfortable sharing or discussing emotions which may lead to behavioral outbursts whereas females have been taught to internalize and are centered around emotions. Females may even be warned against being disruptive or acting out. Additionally, females also tend to be socialized towards more communal behaviors and interpersonal acumen; and there may be some benefit from that socialization in this context (i.e., they expect to give and receive support).

In terms of the influence of divorce, my study emphasizes what many other prior studies have argued such as Leys et al. (2018) and Emery (1982); interparental conflict supersedes the act of divorce in terms of immediate and long-term consequences for children. My study supports this finding as the sample included children of divorced and non-divorced parents. Indeed, I did not find a statistically significant difference in the conflict variables when dividing the sample by whether their parents were divorced or intact. This means that the individuals in my sample whose parents were divorced averaged a similar amount of exposure to conflict as did those with intact or married parents. It is possible that the act of divorce may save the children from prolonged exposure to conflict, and therefore possibly be beneficial or at least not as harmful as assumptions may go. For instance, Emery (1982) argued that it was the frequency of conflict that dictates the consequences for children rather than the act of divorce. Further, Leys et al. (2018) found no significant relationship between having divorced parents and symptoms of anxiety and depression in adults; however, in a similar pattern to previous studies I mentioned, Leys et al. found that across their sample, increased exposure to interparental conflict predicted more symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Friendships enrich our lives in various ways, including reduced stress, less loneliness, social support, and more (Kaufman et al., 2022, Bagwell et al., 2005). Social support and friendship have even been associated with better health outcomes including lower rates of morbidity such as a decreased risk of cardiovascular, immune, and neuroendocrine diseases (Uchino, 2006). Social support appears to be so important that it impacts biological mechanisms and may lower blood pressure as well as decrease cortisol levels (Uchino, 2006). Further, strong social support and friendship may even decrease mortality risk by 50% (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Social support may mitigate psychological distress, provide both emotional, but also

instrumental support, and promote healthy behaviors that lead to better outcomes for individuals across the board. Research such as the current study surrounding interparental conflict and friendship quality provides us with the opportunity to work to prevent negative outcomes (i.e. educational programs for parents, interpersonal therapy, etc.), which seem especially prevalent when associated with health risks (Uchino, 2006).

In college, good friendships are linked to success and overall life satisfaction; and the lack of or deficits in friendship predicts worse academic and psychological adjustment (Rotenberg & Morrison, 1993, Bronkema & Bowman, 2019). Students with lower social support are not only more likely to drop out (Rotenberg & Morrison, 1993); but, according to Bronkema and Bowman, lower friendship quality also predicts lower GPAs and lower graduation rates. Knowing that the overall perceived quality of friendships matters in predicting life satisfaction, independently from romantic or familial relationships, it is important to address friendships in research because, unlike romantic relationships, friends are supposed to be there throughout all phases of life (Kaufman et al., 2022).

If children grew up in homes where there was a strain in their familial relationships, friendships should be a place where they can find comfort and reassurance rather than another relationship to struggle with. My findings that childhood exposure to interparental conflict predicts friendship quality and social support in college is important because it allows us to understand the possible damage that exposure to destructive interparental conflict can have on children, not just in the short term but also over the long term. With this knowledge, we can focus on how to reverse some of these ramifications of interparental conflict and it gives us the opportunity to work on fostering healthy social behaviors or at least work to intervene and prevent them from occurring. Further, this would be crucial for clinicians, teachers, and others to

know when working with children exposed to interparental conflict because increased negative features have been strongly associated with poor psychological functioning.

Having established the consequences of high-conflict situations on children over time, future research might begin to look at why and how to close this cycle. For example, I imagine that high-conflict individuals are less likely to have a strong social life (i.e., who wants to have dinner with a constantly arguing, tense, or passive-aggressive couple?). As a result, children may not be exposed to sustained strong friendships over time and may need role models for healthy friendship behaviors (Hess, 2021). The quality of our relationships predicts so much of our life satisfaction that we can rest assured of having identified yet one more path that could lead to gains in connection, insight, and well-being if understood and addressed (Kaufman et al., 2022).

Overall, the biggest limitation of my study is that it is primarily correlational so it is important to consider that the results could be bidirectional in nature, and there could be multiple other variables at play. For example, anxious children may fuel conflict or disagreements between parents over discipline styles which may then increase anxiety in children. Additionally, children and young adults whose temperaments predispose them to increased negative features may struggle in balancing interpersonal relationships. For example, it is possible in studies that linked deficits in friendships to increased psychological distress, that the participants with clinical symptoms provoke more negative features in their friendships, as the other way around.

This kind of research is limited in the sense that it is primarily focused on the binary family system and it is difficult to encompass the large variety of family structures and dynamics. A few questions in the survey had language that referred to a heterosexual relationship for parents which may have made it hard for some respondents with same-sex parents such as “When my parents fight, my mom expects me to take her side” and therefore potentially altered

the inclusion of the data, limiting external validity. The participants were at a small liberal arts college of fewer than 3,000 students which may have implications for the type of respondents for this sample. In a school this small, there are systems in place to recognize when students may be lacking support. Further, it may be a more close-knit community and may attract individuals who are more comfortable with social interaction whereas at big universities it may be easier to isolate. A larger and more diverse sample size would allow for greater generalizability of my results and improve the external validity. If this study were replicated or redone, adding interviews or open-response questions would allow future researchers to understand more how aware or how students feel their exposure to conflict has impacted them, and to what level they are consciously aware that it translates into their behaviors in other interpersonal relationships.

Future work would benefit from investigating the mediating variables between exposure to interparental conflict and friendship quality and social dynamics. Are there protective factors such as therapeutic measures that may help certain individuals turn their experiences into empathy or increase their interpersonal skills? Despite what I had expected, my study did not find a significant difference in positive features of friendship based on exposure to conflict, but parents who struggle with conflict would benefit from research that focuses on what counteracts the negative features and fosters these positive features. There is obviously variability in all family dynamics, including conflict, so it would be intriguing to know more about what perpetuates or prevents negative features in interpersonal relationships. Additionally, future work should investigate perceptions of interparental conflict exposure from childhood in relation to adult or post-college friendship quality and social support. Since college is an inherently social experience, it may be valuable to look at later adulthood because it is a time when more effort must be put into forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships, so negative features in

friendships may be more identifiable. I would be interested in focusing more on what protective and perpetuating factors there are when examining specifically social support compared to individual friendships. There is a lot of variability in the number of friends that people have which may cause different responses about a best friend vs. overall social support (i.e. one really close friend vs. multiple friends who you go to for different purposes or support).

References

- Ainsworth, M. S. (1979). Infant–mother attachment. *American psychologist*, 34(10), 932.
- Bagwell, C. L., Bender, S. E., Andreassi, C. L., Kinoshita, T. L., Montarello, S. A., & Muller, J. G. (2005). Friendship quality and perceived relationship changes predict psychosocial adjustment in early adulthood. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22(2), 235–254. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407505050945> :
- Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). *Social learning theory* (Vol. 1). Prentice Hall: Englewood cliffs.
- Bickham, N. L., & Fiese, B. H. (1997). Extension of the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale for use with late adolescents. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 11(2), 246–250. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.11.2.246>
- Bronkema, R. H., & Bowman, N. A. (2019). Close Campus Friendships and College Student Success. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 21(3), 270–285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025117704200>
- Bukowski, W. M., Hoza, B., & Boivin, M. (1994). Measuring friendship quality during pre-and early adolescence: The development and psychometric properties of the Friendship Qualities Scale. *Journal of social and Personal Relationships*, 11(3), 471-484. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407594113011>
- Cummings, E.M. (1994), Marital conflict and children's functioning. *Social Development*, 3: 16-36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.1994.tb00021.xa>
- Cummings, E. M., Simpson, K. S., & Wilson, A. (1993). Children's responses to interadult anger as a function of information about resolution. *Developmental Psychology*, 29(6), 978-985. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.29.6.978>
- Cusimano, A. M., & Riggs, S. A. (2013). Perceptions of interparental conflict, romantic attachment, and psychological distress in college students. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, 2(1), 45–59. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031657>
- Davies, P. T., & Cummings, E. M. (1994). Marital conflict and child adjustment: An emotional security hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116(3), 387-411. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.116.3.387>
- Davies, P. T., Hentges, R. F., Coe, J. L., Martin, M. J., Sturge-Apple, M. L., & Cummings, E. M. (2016). The multiple faces of interparental conflict: Implications for cascades of

- children's insecurity and externalizing problems. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 125(5), 664–678. <https://doi.org/10.1037/abn0000170>
- Davies, P. T., Martin, M. J., & Cummings, E. M. (2018). Interparental conflict and children's social problems: Insecurity and friendship affiliation as cascading mediators. *Developmental psychology*, 54(1), 83. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000410>
- Emery, R. E. (1982). Interparental conflict and the children of discord and divorce. *Psychological Bulletin*, 92(2), 310–330. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.92.2.310>
- Green, J. M., & King, A. R. (2009). Domestic violence and parental divorce as predictors of best friendship qualities among college students. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 50(2), 100-118. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/10502550802365805>
- Grych, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (1990). Marital conflict and children's adjustment: A cognitive-contextual framework. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108, 267–290. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.108.2.267>
- Grych, J. H., Seid, M., & Fincham, F. D. (1992). Assessing marital conflict from the child's perspective: The Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale. *Child development*, 63(3), 558-572. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1131346>
- Harold, G.T. and Sellers, R. (2018), Annual Research Review: Interparental conflict and youth psychopathology: an evidence review and practice focused update. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry*, 59: 374-402. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12893>
- Hess, S. Effects of Inter-Parental Conflict on Children's Social Well-Being and the Mediation Role of Parenting Behavior. *Applied Research Quality Life* 17, 2059–2085 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-021-10022-y>
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLoS medicine*, 7(7), e1000316. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>
- Hunt, S.J., Krueger, L.E. and Limberg, D. (2017), The Relationship Between Interparental Conflict and Self-Reported Grade Point Average Among College Students. *Journal of College Counseling*, 20: 237-249. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jocc.12072>
- Johnson, H. D., Lavoie, J. C., & Mahoney, M. (2001). Interparental conflict and family cohesion: Predictors of loneliness, social anxiety, and social avoidance in late adolescence. *Journal of adolescent research*, 16(3), 304-318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558401163004>

- Kaufman, V., Rodriguez, A., Walsh, L. C., Shafranske, E., & Harrell, S. P. (2022). Unique Ways in Which the Quality of Friendships Matter for Life Satisfaction. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-022-00502-9>
- Kinsfogel, K.M., & Grych, J.H. (2004). Interparental conflict and adolescent dating relationships: Integrating cognitive, emotional, and peer influences. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18, 505–515 <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.18.3.505>
- Kitzmann, K. M., & Cohen, R. (2003). Parents' Versus Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict as Predictors of Children's Friendship Quality. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 20(5), 689–700. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075030205007>
- Leys, C., Arnal, C., Kotsou, I., Van Hecke, E., & Fossion, P. (2020). Pre-eminence of parental conflicts over parental divorce regarding the evolution of depressive and anxiety symptoms among children during adulthood. *European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 4(1), 6. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejtd.2019.02.005>
- Li, X., Wang, M., Zhang, X., Sun, P., & Liu, M. (2022). The role of parental conflict in predicting adolescent depression symptoms during the covid-19 pandemic: A longitudinal study. *Current Psychology: A Journal for Diverse Perspectives on Diverse Psychological Issues*, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03696-6>
- Long, N., Forehand, R., Fauber, R., & Brody, G. H. (1987). Self-perceived and independently observed competence of young adolescents as a function of parental marital conflict and recent divorce. *Journal of abnormal child psychology*, 15(1), 15-27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00916463>
- Markiewicz, D., Doyle, A. B., & Brendgen, M. (2001). The quality of adolescents' friendships: Associations with mothers' interpersonal relationships, attachments to parents and friends, and prosocial behaviors. *Journal of Adolescence*, 24(4), 429-445.
- O'Hara, K. L., Rhodes, C. A., Wolchik, S. A., Sandler, I. N., & Yun-Tein, J. (2021). Longitudinal Effects of PostDivorce Interparental Conflict on Children's Mental Health Problems Through Fear of Abandonment: Does Parenting Quality Play a Buffering Role? *Child development*, 92(4), 1476–1493. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13539>
- Rhoades, K. A. (2008). Children's responses to interparental conflict: A meta-analysis of their associations with child adjustment. *Child development*, 79(6), 1942-1956. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jado.2001.0374>
- Rotenberg, K.J., & Morrison, J. (1993). Loneliness and College Achievement: Do Loneliness Scale Scores Predict College Drop-Out? *Psychological Reports*, 73, 1283 - 1288. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1993.73.3f.1283>

- Shahinuzzaman, M., Saha, A. K., & Akhtar, S. (2016). Adolescents' perception of interparental conflict and impact on psychological distress. *Journal of Psychosocial Research, 11*(2), 367-376.
- Simon, V. A., & Furman, W. (2010). Interparental Conflict and Adolescents' Romantic Relationship Conflict. *Journal of research on adolescence : the official journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence, 20*(1), 188–209.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2009.00635>.
- Turner, H. A., & Kopiec, K. (2006). Exposure to interparental conflict and psychological disorder among young adults. *Journal of Family Issues, 27*(2), 131-158.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X05280991>
- Uchino, B. N. (2006). Social support and health: a review of physiological processes potentially underlying links to disease outcomes. *Journal of behavioral medicine, 29*, 377-387.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-006-9056-5>
- Wallerstein, J. S., & Lewis, J. M. (2004). The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: Report of a 25-Year Study. *Psychoanalytic psychology, 21*(3), 353.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0736-9735.21.3.353>
- Weymouth, B. B., Fosco, G. M., Mak, H. W., Mayfield, K., LoBraico, E. J., & Feinberg, M. E. (2019). Implications of interparental conflict for adolescents' peer relationships: A longitudinal pathway through threat appraisals and social anxiety symptoms. *Developmental psychology, 55*(7), 1509–1522. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000731>
- Wierson, M., Forehand, R., & McCombs, A. (1988). The relationship of early adolescent functioning to parent-reported and adolescent-perceived interparental conflict. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 16*(6), 707. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00913480>
- Wise, R. A., & King, A. R. (2008). Family environment as a predictor of the quality of college students' friendships. *Journal of family issues, 29*(6), 828-848.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X07309461>
- Zhang, H., Gao, T., Hu, Q., Zhao, L., Wang, X., Sun, X., & Li, S. (2022). Parental marital conflict, negative emotions, phubbing, and academic burnout among college students in the post pandemic era: A multiple mediating models. *Psychology in the Schools*, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22707>

Table 1*Means, Standard Deviations, and Confidence Intervals for Variables*

Dependent Variables	N	M	SD	95% CI
1. Positive Features	112	4.16	0.57	[4.06, 4.27]
2. Negative Features	112	2.17	0.48	[2.08, 2.26]
3. Overall Conflict	110	2.41	0.65	[2.29, 2.54]
4. Frequency	110	2.98	1.01	[2.79, 3.18]
5. Intensity	110	2.63	0.89	[2.46, 2.79]
6. Resolution	110	2.70	0.98	[2.52, 2.89]
7. Perceived Threat	110	2.16	0.83	[2.00, 2.31]
8. Total Friend Support	111	3.85	0.69	[3.72, 3.98]
9. Total Family Support	109	3.79	0.86	[3.63, 3.96]
10. Overall Social Support	111	3.82	0.63	[3.70, 3.94]

Table 2*Correlations for Specific Properties of Conflict and Positive/Negative Features of Friendship*

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Positive Features	---					
2. Negative Features	-.126	---				
3. Perceived Threat	.045	.244*	---			
4. Frequency	.015	.282**	.641	---		
5. Intensity	.061	.184	.661	.778	---	
6. Resolution	-.002	.286**	.638	.857	.795	---

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 3*Means and Standard Deviations as a Function of Conflict Group*

Dependent Variable	Low Conflict			High Conflict		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Positive Features	54	4.21	0.53	54	4.12	0.61
Negative Features	54	2.02	0.30	54	2.34	0.58
Friend Social Support	53	4.00	0.56	52	3.72	0.77
Family Social Support	53	4.20	0.71	52	3.40	0.82

Table 4*Means and Standard Deviations as a Function of Divorce Group*

Dependent Variables	Non-Divorced			Divorced		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Positive Features	86	4.20	0.53	21	2.34	0.61
Negative Features	86	3.98	0.30	21	2.14	0.58
Overall Conflict	88	2.36	0.62	20	2.70	0.62

Appendix A

Informed Consent:

My name is Lindsey McDonald and I am a senior psychology major at Union College. Thank you for choosing to participate in my thesis research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose whether to participate or not. I am interested in learning more about how different kinds of relationships, such as with parents and friends, might influence each other. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire that asks about your interpersonal relationships (i.e. friends) and your parent's relationship with each other. This will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes. It is important to know that all information will be **anonymous and confidential**. If you no longer wish to continue participating in the study, you have the right to withdraw, without penalty, at any time. You may also skip questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be given the opportunity to choose to be entered into a raffle for a \$50 Amazon gift card or to receive out-of-class activity credit.

Even though all aspects of the study may not be explained to you beforehand (e.g., the entire purpose of the study), during the debriefing session you will be given information about the study and have the opportunity to ask questions. If you have any questions concerning the study please contact Lindsey McDonald (mcdonall@union.edu) or Professor Stanhope (stanhopl@union.edu). If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the Union College Human Subjects Review Committee Chair Professor Joshua Hart (hartj@union.edu) or the Office for Human Research Protections (<https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/>).

By clicking "I Agree" you indicate that you understand the information printed above, and that you wish to participate in this research study and you are giving your consent for me to use your anonymous answers in my senior thesis.

Appendix B

Debrief:

Thank you so much for participating in my senior thesis study! I am exploring whether being exposed to conflict between parents while growing up is related at all to the quality of college students' friendships and dynamics. Prior research surrounding parental conflict is heavily focused on romantic relationships or childrens' peer relationships, and I am aiming to expand the research to broader implications for interpersonal relationships in young adulthood. All of your responses are confidential and anonymous, and will only be used for the purpose of this study. If the questionnaire has triggered any feelings of anxiety or depression, please do not hesitate to contact Wicker Wellness (518-388-6120; counseling@union.edu) or The Crisis Text Line (741741; text "HOME") to talk to someone.

If you would like to receive out-of-class course credit for your participation, please complete this pre-signed form. If you have any trouble downloading the pdf, please reach out to mcdonall@union.edu. If you did not participate in this study for out-of-class course credit, you are eligible to enter a raffle for a \$50 Amazon gift card. If you would like to enter the raffle, please email mcdonall@union.edu with the words "thesis raffle" and your name. This is not linked to your answers from the questionnaire. I will email the winner by the end of the winter term! If you have any further questions please contact Lindsey McDonald