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Jena Thormodson

Concordia University St. Paul, thormodj@csp.edu

Hannah Torkelson

Concordia University St. Paul, hillh1@csp.edu

Benjamin Diers

Concordia University St. Paul, diersb@csp.edu

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How Communication with Parents Affects the Psychological Well-Being of

Traditional First-Year University Students

Jena Thormodson, Hannah Torkelson, & Ben Diers

Concordia University St. Paul

COM 442.1 Communication Theory

Professor Dr. Kim Flottemesch, PhD

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Traditional first-year university students are experiencing one of life's greatest transitions. For many students, they are learning how to live independently for the first time, navigate relationships and support, and deal with new experiences that happen in college. Since traditional first-year students are not considered developmentally as adults, this study sought to determine how parental communication can influence how students feel during this time of transition of both college and emerging adulthood. More specifically we measured how the frequency of communication and type of parental support can affect the student's psychological well-being. A survey was used to gather this data from students at a private university in the Midwest. We concluded that the frequency of communication and parental support does affect certain areas of a first-year university student's psychological well-being.

Introduction

Young adults from the ages of 18-24 years old are at a pivotal point in their psychological development because they are gradually leaving adolescence and learning how to emerge into adulthood. Coincidentally, this age group makes up the largest portion of enrolled college students today (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, & Annual Report of the Commissioner of Education, 2018). Although pursuing higher education after high school is not a relatively new trend, college as we know it is drastically changing from generation to generation. Because of this change, further exploration is needed to understand how college impacts separation-individualism with traditional first-year university students and their parents.

The primary focus of this case study is to understand how the relationship of parental communication relates to the psychological well-being of traditional first-year university

students as they adjust to college and live away from home. This age group is unique because for many, it is the first time they've been given the opportunity to self-govern without parental guidance. This study examines if there is a relationship between the level of parental involvement and frequency of communication correlates with the level of autonomy their child develops and their overall psychological well-being. We used Attachment Theory, Self-determination Theory, and Relational Dialect's Theory to interpret our results.

After reviewing what outside factors students experience in college, the nature of separation individualism, and how emerging adults practice relational maintenance behaviors with their parents we came up with two hypotheses. We believe there is a positive relationship between frequency of communication with parents and the psychological well-being of traditional first year students. We hypothesize the more frequently first year students communicate with their parents, the better they will report their psychological well-being. When it comes to type of parental support (emotional, academic, and financial support) we hypothesize that the more support a first-year student receives, the less it will negatively affect their psychological well-being. However, with this said, we hypothesize that too much support will also negatively affect this age group as well, so we predict that the more helicopter parenting a first-year student experienced, the more it will negatively affect their psychological well-being.

The results of this case study are to help call for further research. We believe this study will help educate parents about the importance of their role in their children's development, even if they move off to college. It is our hope that parents don't believe their children will be fine without them but also that their children deserve some autonomy so they can gradually learn how to enter into adulthood. There is little research on how emotional neglect affect the psychological well-being of traditional college students, so this study hopes to investigate if there is a

relationship between lack of emotional, financial, and academic support and psychological well-being of first year students. We believe the data collected could help universities and parents understand what factors affect students' ability to succeed by looking at the type of support impacts their psychological well-being.

Literature Review

“Although the development of autonomy begins in adolescence, it continues to progress in college. Many students enter college still immersed emotionally and psychologically in their family of origin, but by the time of graduation, most have achieved a new level of independence,” (Cullaty, 2011). This phenomenon is also known as psychological separation-individualism; a term used to describe the process of 18-25-year-olds who are continuously renegotiating their levels of separation from their parents in order to gradually enter adulthood (Medlin, 1991). The term “emerging adulthood” has been used by scholars in recent decades to categorize this age group because they are no longer viewed developmentally as children however, they are also not considered full adults (Sax & Wartman, 2010). Because the transition into adulthood is gradual, this age group still needs the support of their parents as well as adapt the roles and expectations along the way in order to maintain a healthy psychological well-being; especially during the student's first year (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). While students can have experiences within college that affect their well-being, one of the preventable factors of harm to an emerging adults is the parental communication and support they receive throughout this transition. Because parenting styles are constantly evolving and adapting to the culture they are in, it becomes important to analyze the current cultural climate of each generation to understand the challenges and what is necessary for the psychological development of 18-25-year-olds.

Parents of College Students Today

Studies show that 7 out of 10 traditional-age college students report communicating with at least one parent frequently (Sax, & Wartman, 2010). Sax and Wartman concluded that there are three main contributing factors as to why this generation communicates so frequently with their parents. They explain that this generation as a whole has generally experienced higher levels of cohesion with their parents which has historically not been present in previous generations (Sax, & Wartman, 2010). One reason for this cohesion according to Sax & Wartman is that children born in the 1990's were used to their parents shuttling them "...from activity to activity and manage their overscheduled kids with dominancy," (Sax, & Wartman, 2010, p. 220). Another reason why college students today talk frequently with parents is tuition increases have become alarmingly high that it often becomes a financial burden without the assistance of parents or the government (Sax, & Wartman, 2010).

To compare generationally, the average tuition, room and board, and fees for a full-time student attending a 4-year college was \$26,120 in 2015-2016 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, & Higher Education General Information Survey). For the parents of most traditional college aged students today, the average was only \$5,013 in 1989-1990 (U.S. Department of Education, et al., 2006). Sax and Wartman explain that "this new trend of parental involvement in higher education represents a cultural shift in the relationship among three respective parties: student, parent, and institutions" (Sax & Wartman, 2010, p. 220). Although parental relationships do serve a developmental purpose for this age group, there can be some dangers of the level of involvement the parent has that can affect the psychological well-being of first-year university students.

Dangers of Parental Involvement

In past generations it was common for parents to trust the university to take care of their children and replace the needs of parental figures with teachers and faculty (Sax & Wartman, 2010). Today, the relationship between parents and their children's institution is very different; "According to Merriam (2006) who surveyed student affairs administrators, 93% of respondents said that there had been an increase in the number of interactions they had with parents in the previous 5 years" (Sax & Wartman, 2010, p. 220). A parent being involved in their child's life as they enter into college is not generally a bad thing, until the parent becomes so involved that their behavior is developmentally inappropriate for the age of their child; this behavior is also referred to as helicopter parenting (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014). According to Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, the most common reason parents cross these boundaries is the belief they are protecting their children from negative experiences and promote chances of success (2014). One of the biggest dangers of this parenting style is that it prevents the child to take responsibility for decisions and research has shown a "...correlation between helicopter parenting and neuroticism, lower to openness to new experiences, and dependency," (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014, p. 315). In addition, a study conducted by 500 students of this age group who grew up with this parenting style showed a "...sense of entitlement, or the extent to which the young adults believe other people should solve their problems," (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014, p. 315). While over-involvement can cause many challenges for the child to properly separate from their parents and create a sense of individualism, a lack of parental involvement can also have a lasting effect of the developmental process of emerging adulthood.

Prior research often records sexual or physical abuse of college students and their parents but little research about students who experience emotional neglect and psychological abuse from their parents; it is believed this population is not accurately represented due to the lack of reporting (O'Dougherty-Wright, Crawford, & Del Castillo, 2009). O'Dougherty-Wright, Crawford, and Del Castillo believe that "...students who experience emotional maltreatment may actually be the most prevalent form of child abuse however it is also hidden and the least studied form of abuse," (2009, p.60). Examples of emotional maltreatment include but are also not exclusive to "verbal abuse, spurning, terrorizing, isolation, ignoring, being psychologically unresponsive or unavailable" (O'Dougherty-Wright, et al., 2009, p. 61). With that said, what researchers do know is that emotional maltreatment can hinder the psychological development of emerging adults because they haven't had proper relationships with authority figures, might struggle with experiencing intimacy, and creating their identity due to the lack of guidance and support (O'Dougherty-Wright, et al., 2009). One of the reasons parental support is so important for traditional first-year university students is that they might experience new challenges in their environment and parents can either offer support, inappropriately intervene, or neglect the situation completely. Although every experience is unique, there are many recurring trends of college related experiences that students encounter where parents have an opportunity to help the student cope.

Well-being of First-Year University Students and Affecting Factors

"The multiple life events and ongoing academic, social, and financial challenges that characterize the transition into college can overwhelm many freshman students, resulting in compromised psychological health and in turn, academic failure and college attrition" (Ruthig, Haynes, Stupnisky, & Perry, 2009, p. 243). It's worth noting not only the psychological well-

being state of first-year university students, but also the conditions that may play a role negatively affecting their well-being. Transitioning into college leaves first year students vulnerable to high levels of stress. Circumstances such as meeting and living with new people, being away from home, and experiencing things in life for the first time are among just a few of the many causes (Ruthig, et al., 2009). Stress contributes to negatively affecting a student's well-being and in turn impacting their ability to succeed. Students who face high levels of stress are more susceptible to mental illnesses such as depression. The data however does suggest, that students who make an effort to be positive do experience overall less levels of stress (Ruthig, et al., 2014).

In addition to, and in relation with stress, data suggests that students who are struggling with stress or depression tend to take part in drinking alcohol and experience more negative consequences from doing so (Martens, Martin, Hatchett, Fowler, & Fleming, 2008). In contrast, Bowman (2010) found that drinking alcohol was related to causing lower levels of psychological well-being. Moreover, the data suggests that alcohol use is common with first-year university students and causes a decline in students' academic work (Small, Morgan, Abar, & Maggs, 2011). Haas and Smith (2012) examined a key piece of information displaying that students don't even recognize drinking alcohol as having a negative effect on their health (Haas & Smith, 2012). This may represent a dangerous cycle of a reduction in positive well-being that students should be aware of when transitioning into their first year of college.

With the numerous psychological hardships that many first-year university students encounter, it's helpful for parents and faculty to have awareness of and understand factors that can have a positive effect on the student's well-being. Awang, Kutty, & Ahmad (2014) stated, "Student well-being has diverse dimensions including academic attainment, happiness and

enjoyment, ability to adapt with the campus life, and social life in- and out- of university compound” (p. 263). Social support is one of the top factors directly relate to the well-being of first-year college students. The data suggests that having supportive friends in the first year of college is essential in a student’s development of independence, as well as learning (Awang, et al., 2014). In addition to supportive friendships, having parents and siblings that play a supportive role academically by being able to converse about various challenges in college positively related to the success of traditional first-year students (Awang, et al., 2014). Overall “...students with strong support systems of family, friends, and significant others are likely to experience lower levels of stress and depression compared to those with weaker social support” (Ruthig, et al., 2009, p. 234).

Along with social support there are other factors that are positively associated with a first-year university student’s psychological well-being. Bowman (2010) examined college experiences such as positive encounters to diversity to be positively related to the highest rankings of psychological well-being. Bowman (2010) also noticed a large decline in well-being with students who experience negative encounters or experiences with diversity. In college classes geared towards learning about diversity may assist with the gain of well-being and help to eliminate negative encounters. Data suggests that students who take at least two classes with the focus of diversity are boosted with a greater sense of contentment as well as appreciation and comfortability with intercultural students (Bowman, 2010). The likelihood of this increase of well-being continues to grow with the more diversity classes a student takes (Bowman, 2010). Interestingly, another study suggested that international students have higher levels of social isolation, which led to negative measures of mental health (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009). This may imply the importance of not only intercultural relationships for both parties within the first year

of college, but the significance of diversity courses to help students with what for some, is yet another challenge of the transition into college.

Emerging adults encounter a complex time as first-year university student. The challenges they are faced with lead to great levels of overall stress. On top of that, their psychological well-being is shown to be affected both negatively and positively from a variety of factors both based off characteristics of the student, as well as in college experiences. However, communication between these emerging adults and their parents is discovered to contribute largely to the overall state of the student's well-being. Therefore, it's essential to discover this topic more largely in and of itself.

Relational Maintenance Behaviors Between Emerging Adults and Their Parents

During college the amount of relational maintenance behaviors practiced between first-year students and their parents may be a predictor of a student's overall well-being. Myers and Glover (2007) identified that both first-year college students and their parents regularly practiced six of the seven relational maintenance behaviors (positivity, openness, assurances, networks, tasks, conflict management, and advice). Of these seven, the only one with a mean below the midpoint was openness (Myers & Glover, 2007). Data from further research suggests that the use of text messaging between parents and emerging adults may reduce stress (Ruppel, Burke, Cherney, & Dinsmore, 2018). Ruppel et al. (2018) states, "...reframing text messaging as a viable means of personal contact for students and their parents might improve well-being among the vulnerable population of students with low social competence." These findings were stated to also be applicable to students not considered to have low social competence. Data from this research also suggested a relationship between stress from a previous day and levels of

student-to-parent communication. “Higher previous-day stress was associated with more current-day use of text messaging with their parent” (Ruppel, et al., 2018).

One of the key variables in the relationship between emerging adults and their parents is the frequency of their communication. Yogan, Freedle, & Ringenberg (2017) stated, “On average, participants said they communicated with their student/parent one to three times a week (53.4%, $n = 126$), with 31.4% ($n = 74$) of the total sample reporting communication two to three times a week. However, a relatively high percentage of students and parents (30.9%, $n = 73$) reported talking with their counterpart once a day.” Of this communication between parents and college students, the most common method of communication was text messaging. The data from this study also suggested that increased levels of parent-to-student communication, both in person and via instant messaging, were negatively associated with student’s self-reported levels of academic adjustment (Yogan, Freedle, & Ringenberg, 2017).

Data from other research suggests that college students who communicate with their parents frequently were less likely to drink alcohol (Small, Morgan, Abar, and Maggs, 2011). “Parents and students communicate often, and that increased parent communication is associated with less drinking among first-year college students” (Small, et al., 2011). The data suggests that communication with parents (possibly practicing some of the seven relational maintenance behaviors) among college students can have several positive effects on things like alcohol consumption as well as a student’s psychological well-being.

Research Questions/ Hypothesis & Justification

Studies have shown that the best possible outcome for traditional first-year university students is parents providing a source of support (Kins, Soenens, & Beyers, 2011).

Understanding what kind of support works best is what this study is trying to uncover. One of the

biggest challenges for this age group is the psychological development of entering into adulthood and families renegotiating the relationship as their child's level of autonomy increases (Sax & Wartman, 2010).

RQ1: Does frequency of communication impact the psychological well-being on traditional first-year university students living on campus?

Although parental communication is a predictable stressor, there are also other factors that contribute to the well-being of traditional first-year college students. There is research that suggests many traditional first-year university students encounter a great amount of stress that may lead to an increased difficulty to cope with depression (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). It is concerning that "...as many as 40% of students encounter serious difficulty and failure to complete their degrees due to these emotional stressors," (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000, p.10). These increased levels of stress create a foundation for a certain vulnerability to experiences, conditions, and characteristics that influence a student's well-being both negatively and positively. As 18-25-year-olds are still learning how to enter adulthood, parents have the ability to provide support that can aid in this transition as their child experiences different unpredictable factors at college (e.g. peer pressure to drink, roommate conflicts, lack of motivation). This research looks to explore if frequency of communication with parents provides positive effects to traditional first-year university students psychological well-being.

RQ2: Does the type of communication and the amount of support parents offer (emotional, financial, and academic support) positively affect traditional first-year university students?

In the past, parents have left the responsibility of support on a university's shoulders in the belief that it is the role of these institutions to take care of their students

and provide support. Due to the change of cultural climate, parents have been more involved in their child's college experience than ever before. While in many ways this is great, there are also concerns about parents crossing boundaries that would hinder the student's ability to gain independence (Sax & Wartman, 2010). With that said, there are negative psychological effects of students who experience emotional neglect from their parents as well. Although it is believed this abuse is more prevalent on college campuses, there is not enough research on the effects of an emotional neglecting parent has on the well-being of a traditional first-year student (O'Dougherty-Wright, et al., 2009). This study hopes to understand how emotional, academic, and financial, impacts the psychological wellbeing of traditional first year university students living on campus as well as confirm that over-parenting and emotional neglect hinders the well-being of traditional first year students (Bradley-Geist, & Olson-Buchanan, 2014).

Methodology

This study will be using a quantitative-based cross-sectional research design to test both hypotheses. The primary goal for using this data is to explore if there is a relationship between psychological well-being and parental communication through measuring frequency and type of involvement for traditional first-year university students.

Participants

The participants of this case study were determined using nonprobability sampling at a private university in the Midwest. Participants were purposively selected because they needed to be traditional first-year university students living on campus for the fall semester of 2019. This study is field-independent, due to students having the leisure to take the survey when and where they choose. Of the 216 students that were contacted through email to take the survey, 63

responses were completed, giving us a response rate of 29.2%. Of the respondents, 50 identified as female and 13 were male. All students who took the survey were considered for our results.

Procedures

The survey was self-administered by the students through a website called Survey Monkey. The participants were sent an email that included a quick introduction about who the researchers were, the purpose of the study, how long the survey would be, and a link of where to access the survey if interested. The survey was opened on October 2nd, 2019 and available for a total of 35 days. An additional email was sent on October 7th, 2019 but no incentives were given to participate in the survey.

The survey consisted of 13 closed ended questions. The first two questions asked about gender and whether or not they consented to take the survey. The remaining questions were divided into four different categories of analysis for further comparison. First students were asked to report how often they communicated with at least one parent, how often they felt different types of parental support, and what was the current state of their psychological well-being. All questions besides 1 and 2 were measured on a Likert scale of frequency. For questions regarding type of parental involvement the Likert scale was as following: never, rarely, sometimes, often. When reporting psychological wellbeing students could measure based on a scale of the following: almost always/more than half the time, about half the time, less than half the time/rarely/never. And lastly for measuring frequency of communication with parent's students could choose from the following: about once a month or less, two or three times a month, a few times a week, and almost every day.

The survey questions were designed to focus on how impactful parental communication was to traditional student's ability to adjust and maintain a healthy

psychological well-being while beginning the separation process. To test if frequency of communication and the types of support students were receiving from parents positively related to psychological well-being, a chi-square test was done to compare these variables.

Results

All traditional first year university students that were living on campus for the fall semester of 2019 were asked a series of 13 questions to see if there was a correlation between frequency of communication with parents and the type of support their parents offer to the participant's psychological well-being. From the 216 traditional first year students who were sent the survey, 63 students responded giving this study a response rate of 29.17%. Of those 63 respondents, 50 identified as female and 13 as male. These results were then used for further analysis by using a Chi-square test.

To test the first hypothesis, we gathered the participant's perception of their perceived emotional well-being (feeling lonely or depressed) to how often they communicated with at least one parent. These results determined there is no association ($p = .334$) (see figure 2.1). Therefore, the researchers accept the null hypothesis.

We sought out to see if participants felt overwhelmed while in their first year of college. To do this, we asked participants how often they experienced feeling stressed or anxious. 38.1% ($N=24$) of participants selected "Always-more than half the time" (see figure 1.6). We then took this data and compared it to the question determining how often students communicated with at least one parent. We determined that the p-value was greater than .05 therefore, there wasn't a significant connection found (see figure 2.2). The data fails to reject the null hypothesis.

When participants were asked if they were worried about their future while in college, over half 50.79% ($N=32$) selected "Yes" (see figure 1.7). We used this data to compare it with the participants response of how often they communicated with at least one parent. The results ($p = .058$) indicated that

there is no association between levels of worry and frequency of parent communication (see figure 2.3).

Therefore, the data fails to reject the null hypothesis.

Lastly, participants were asked if they felt an overall sense of happiness while at college. A large number of participants 63.49% (N=40) selected “Yes” (see figure 1.8). We then compared these responses with the student’s responses of how often they communicated with at least one parent. We were able to determine that there was a significant connection between the two. ($P < .05$) (see figure 2.4). This concludes that we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative, showing that there is a relationship between reporting of happiness and the frequency of communication with parents.

To test the second hypothesis, we took data from how the participants felt emotionally, financially, and academically supported from their parents and compared these results to their reported psychological well-being. We also wanted to see if there was a relationship between parents being overly supportive in a way that would be considered developmentally inappropriate to their child’s psychological well-being. We used the data collected to see if these results related to the overall feeling of depressed/lonely and stressed/anxious.

To determine if some participants experienced a helicopter parenting style as a means of support, we asked participants how often their parents involving themselves into situations that they deemed inappropriate. More than half of the sample size (N=46) said they “Rarely” or “Never” experienced their parents being overly involved, 14.29% (N=9) said “Sometimes”, and 12.7% (N=8) reported “Often” (see figure 1.1).

We then compared these results to the feeling of depression and loneliness with helicopter parenting and found that there was a relationship between the two variables and the results were significant ($P = .004$). A total of 66.67% (N=42) said they felt depressed or lonely “Less than half the time”, “Rarely”, or “Never” (see figure 2.5). Of those 42 participants, 78.57% (N=33) said they “Rarely” or “Never” experienced helicopter parenting (see figure 2.5).

Because the p-value was less than .05 these findings reject the null hypothesis meaning helicopter parenting styles does impact the reported feeling of depression and loneliness. In contrast, when

comparing reports of helicopter parenting style with frequency of feeling anxious/stressed the p-value was greater than .05 ($P=.06$) concluding that the data was not significant. Because the p-value is over the value of 0.05 this data suggests there is no relationship between the two variables and therefore we accept the null hypothesis.

Because college has a large focus on academics, we asked the participants if they felt academically supported by their parents. Our findings conclude that 60.32% ($N=38$) felt academically supported “Often”, 26.98% ($N=17$) said “Sometimes”, and 12.69% (8) reported “Rarely/Never” (see figure 1.3). When considering the relationship of how academic support from parents relate to feelings of depression and loneliness our findings conclude that we reject the null hypothesis because our p-value was less than .05 ($P=0.0369$). Almost half of the participants (49.2%) reported receiving academic support “Often” and felt depressed/lonely “Less than half the time”, “Rarely”, or “Never ($N=31$) (see figure 2.7)

Similarly to helicopter parenting styles, there was a significant difference between the two variables of feeling academic support to feeling anxious or stressed (see figure 2.8). The p-value was greater than .05 ($P=0.6$) which concludes that the data was not significant. These results accepting the null hypothesis which means there is no relationship between feelings of academic support and reported levels of anxiety and stress.

To gain a better understanding of how a student's financial situation in college may affect their psychological well-being, participants were asked separate questions about the degree of financial support they felt from their parents and questions related to feelings of loneliness or depression. To determine if there was a relationship between these two variables (see figure 2.10), we compared the results of the two questions. The results showed that there was evidence of a significant relationship between these variables ($P=.024$). In this case, we reject the null hypothesis and accept that there is a relationship between a student's financial support and psychological well-being.

We also compared financial support to feelings of anxiousness. To determine whether there is a relationship between participant's feelings of stress or anxiety and the participants feelings of financial

support, we compared the two variables. The results (see figure 2.11) showed that there was evidence of a significant relationship between these variables ($P=.045$). In this case, we reject the null hypothesis and accept that there is a relationship between financial support and feelings of anxiousness.

Finally, the survey asked about the degree of emotional support participants felt from their parents. To compare the relationship between participant's feelings of loneliness or depression and participants' feelings of emotional support, the two variables were compared. (see figure 2.9). The results showed that there was evidence of a significant relationship between these variables ($P=.0002$). The researchers reject the null hypothesis and accept that there is a relationship between a student's feelings of emotional support and feelings of loneliness or depression.

Discussion

Relational Dialectics Theory

Relational Dialectics Theory was first introduced in 1988 by Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery (Baxter, & Sharp, 2015). This theory has led to a new understanding of people, the way they communicate, and the relationships they possess. Within this theory, three main tensions were observed within relationships: openness and closedness, certainty and uncertainty, and lastly, inclusion and seclusion (or connection and autonomy) (Baxter, 1990). The contradiction of inclusion and seclusion describes a tension of wanting to remain close to a person, while also wanting to contain individuality. This tension was coined by Baxter as being the most primary of the three (Baxter, 1990). It is also the primary contradiction that was witnessed through the research of first year university students and their interaction with their parents.

It was indicated that there was no relationship between students who reported having low levels of emotional well-being (experiencing feelings of loneliness or depression), and the

frequency of which they communicated with at least one parent. This may suggest that students have become more independent from their parents at this time in their lives, and thus other factors may cause low levels of emotional well-being. Research suggests that, “During school-to-university transition students are experiencing an important stage in their personal development: they are becoming more independent in both life and study” (Feng, 2017, p. 603). Along with that, this time of autonomy, though may result in not communicating with parents as often, may lead students to seek out a deeper connection with their parents. Showing that perhaps the quantity of communication doesn’t matter, but rather the quality of communication with parents is what is important to first year university students. Developing a deeper relationship with others is shown to be needed for a person to figure out who they are and continue to grow both individually and within that relationship (Baxter, 1990). So, this time of transition is one of seeking autonomy, but needing and seeking connection, particularly with parents, in order to grow successfully.

Because a significant portion of students reported feeling anxious “More than half the time” during their first year of college (38.1%) and admitted that, “Yes,” they feel worried about their future while at college (50.79%), but no significant relationship between these two and how often students communicated with their parents was found, this may suggest that students may experience these high levels of overall anxiety, due to not reaching out to their parents in these times, caused by a strive for autonomy. Relational dialectics theory suggests that people want to maintain who they are as a person and have their own independence, but also want to connect and be close to their loved ones (Fox, Osborn, & Warber, 2014). This tension can result in multiple outcomes. “Struggles emerge in the attempts to communicate and distinguish these overlapping identities as individuals, as a couple, and as part of the network” (Fox, Osborn, &

Warber, 2014, p. 529). Therefore, the participant's feelings of anxiety and worry, may have been a struggle that was an outcome from trying to navigate this tension of integration-separation.

The students that reported that "Yes", they were happy at college, are the students who reported communicating with their parents weekly and daily. This strong relationship that was indicated between how often students communicate with their parents and their report of feeling an overall happiness while at college, relates back to the idea that students in their first year of college seek for quality of communication over quantity. This association suggests that students experiencing this happiness, reach out to their parents seeking to share this happiness with them, and therefore further their connection. Baxter states, "Relationships achieve meaning through the active interplay of multiple, competing discourses, or voices" (as cited in Fox, 2014, p. 528). This is evident in that students want to maintain autonomy by limiting when they communicate with their parents, choosing to share and communicate with their parents when they are happy, further making the relationship stronger and more meaningful for them.

Conversely, looking at the relationship between depression and feelings of emotional support from parents, the results indicate some level of correlation. Of the 35 participants who responded as feeling emotionally supported by their parents often, 31 of them responded as feeling depressed "Less than half the time", "Rarely", or "Never" (see figure 3.9). These results paired with the statistical analysis indicating the results are likely significant suggests that strong levels of emotional support are positively correlated with lower levels of depression among first-year college students. According to prior research, "Specifically, when stress reactivity was lower, individuals with higher levels of family emotional support exhibited the lowest levels of depressive symptoms compared to those with average and lower levels of family emotional support, whereas, when stress reactivity was higher, family emotional support did not appear to

significantly impact depressive symptoms” (Levens, Elrahal, Sagui, 2016, p. 352). These findings paired with the findings of this study strongly suggest a correlation between emotional support and feelings of depression, although other factors like stress reactivity may also be involved.

Self Determination Theory

Self Determination Theory (SDT) is an approach that was first introduced by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci in their book *Self-Determination and Intrinsic Motivation in Human Behavior* published in 1985 (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This theory states that every person has 3 basic psychological needs; autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Schiffrin, Liss, Miles-Mclean, Geary, Erchull, & Tashner, 2014). SDT says that when these three basic needs are met people are often less depressed and are more satisfied with how things are going in their life (Schiffrin et al., 2014).

When it comes to children who are entering into the emerging-adulthood developmental stage, it is important for parents to meet these psychological needs by not “over-parenting” their children. A common behavioral trait of helicopter parents is trying to control various aspects of their children's lives even though they may not live at home anymore and developmentally can make these decisions on their own. SDT says that “when parents engage in controlling behaviors, students’ sense of personal autonomy may be diminished. Feeling a lack of volition and control can lead to depression,” (Schiffrin et al., 2014, p. 554).

Out of 48 participants that said their parents “Rarely” or “Never” experienced helicopter parenting behaviors, 71.74% (N=33) said they felt depressed or lonely “Less than half the time” “Rarely” or “Never” (see figure 3.5). These findings support our second hypothesis, leading us to believe that there is a relationship between helicopter parenting and the psychological well-

being of traditional first year university students. Through Self Determination Theory we believe the participants in our survey have experienced were rarely depressed because their psychological need of autonomy was being met.

Attachment Theory

The development of attachment theory has a rather long and complicated timeline, but psychologists today use this theory in a variety of ways and one of those being the attachment styles of children in the emerging-adulthood stage. According to Bowlby (1988) and Ainsworth (1989) who collaboratively wrote their ideas on attachment theory, they said one of the "...primary functions of attachment (for parents) is to provide a secure base of support, being available as a source of help and comfort when needed and thereby promoting environmental exploration and mastery," (Kenny & Rice, 1995, p. 435). They also said that children of this age who are "emotionally stable and self-reliant are likely to have parents who are available to provide support when needed while also permitting and encouraging autonomy," (Kenny & Rice, 1995, p. 436).

This kind of support can look in a variety of ways. According to Kenny and Rice some common examples of children looking for parental support is having the ability to call whenever something concerning or worrisome comes up (1995). When interpreting our data to what we know about attachment theory we assume that students reported being less depressed when they were supported academically because they possibly have that support knowing there is someone to always talk to when concerns about academia come up.

What's interesting about our findings regarding academic support is our results showed no direct correlation between levels of anxiety or stress with academic support. Although approximately 67% of the participants said they experienced anxiety or stress "About half the

time” or more (N=42) the level of academic support did not have a relationship to the level of anxiety (see figure 3.8). Reason for this could possibly be when talking about stress and college students most of their anxiety and stress comes from external factors. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America “7 out of 10 adults claim to experience stress or anxiety at least at a moderate level on a daily basis” (Beiter, Nash, Mccrady, Rhoades, Linscomb, Clarahan & Sammut, 2015, p. 90).

When talking about traditional first year university students one of the biggest concerns, according to Thurber and Walton (2012), is homesickness (Beiter, et al., 2015). On an academic level there is lots of anxiety towards academic goals such as “meeting grade requirements, test taking, volume of material to be learned and time management” (Beiter, et al., 2015, p. 90). We believe because there isn’t a relationship with parental academic support to anxiety and stress that these factors could possibly be uncontrollable outside sources like the examples given in other research.

Though there was no correlation found between anxiety and academic support, our findings do suggest a possible correlation between levels of anxiety and levels of financial support. Among those who responded as feeling stressed or anxious “almost always” or “more than half the time,” 88% responded as feeling financially supported “never” or “rarely” (See figure 3.11). These findings, paired with statistical analysis indicating the results are statistically significant ($P=.045$), suggest that there is a possible link between financial support from parents and anxiety levels. According to prior research, “Regarding finances, the high level of concern is most likely a result of more than simply the financial cost of going to college. “For many students, college is the first time that they are living away from home and are responsible for the

cost of everyday living expenses, such as food, clothing, rent, and utility bills,” (Beiter et al., 2015, p. 93).

Limitations

This study includes several limitations. Due to the small sample size used in this case study, we feel we couldn't make any connections or generalizations to a greater population. Along with that, our participants were predominantly female, leaving the question of differences of gender unanswered. Because the length of the study was limited, it did not provide us the benefits of longitudinal study. Conducting a cross-sectional study only allowed us to see how the student was feeling at that given moment of time. A longitudinal study would have allowed us to see other possible outcomes that may not have emerged that would have otherwise. Another limitation is the self-reporting of well-being and perceived parental support from our participants in this study. Our participants may not have fully self-disclosed or altered the truth to their liking. Because we decided to collect quantitative data through a survey, we were also unable to collect additional outside factors or the participants' explanations to some of their responses.

Suggestions for Further Research

Relating to the limitations that were present within our study, there are a few specific directions we believe future research on this topic should be taken. The first of these directions relates to sample size. Our sample size was relatively small, so results could not be generalized to a larger population. If a similar study were to be conducted with a much larger sample size, the results would be more accurate and could be generalized. This could also lead to a higher representation of males, something that our study lacked. Another possible area of future study involves asking similar questions over a much longer period of time. Conducting a longitudinal study in this fashion would allow researchers to identify how these variables may change over

the course of time. Replacing the survey with interviews may also be beneficial as the results will give the opportunity for more insight into why participants feel the ways that they do and give into account their circumstances.

Emerging adults are going to be the future leaders of tomorrow. College is becoming almost a necessity for young people to eventually be able to provide for themselves. Although college is almost considered a necessity for success it still is a decision with a lot of risks and stressors like the financial burden. Many other factors play into each student's ability to adjust, cope, and succeed. Our research showed that parental support goes beyond academic success but also related to the student's ability to feeling that they can succeed. However, it's not so much the how often a child talks to their parent but rather the quality of the conversations and perceived support. Confirming that there are possibly outside factors that contribute to college success can help both universities and parents know what steps need to be taken to help their student/child successfully emerge into adulthood.

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Appendix

Figure 1:

(1.1)

Q4 I feel at least one parent involves themselves into situations at school or my personal life that I feel is inappropriate for a parent.

(1.2)

Q6 I feel financially supported by at least one of my parents

(1.3)

Q7 I feel academically supported by at least one of my parents.

(1.4)

Q8 I feel emotionally supported by at least one of my parents.

(1.5)

Q9 How often do you feel lonely or depressed?

(1.6)

Q10 How often do you feel stressed or anxious?

(1.7)

Q11 I tend to worry about my future at college.

(1.8)

Figure 2:

(2.1)

	ALMOST ALWAYS (1)	MORE THAN HALF THE TIME (2)	ABOUT HALF THE TIME (3) (3)	LESS THAN HALF THE TIME (4)	RARELY (5)	NEVER (6)	TOTAL
Q3: About once a month or less (A)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
Q3: Two or three times a month (B)	33.33% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 1	33.33% 1	0.00% 0	4.76% 3
Q3: A few times a week (C)	6.45% 2	12.90% 4	25.81% 8	29.03% 9	22.58% 7	3.23% 1	49.21% 31
Q3: Almost every day (D)	5.56% 1	0.00% 0	11.11% 2	33.33% 6	38.89% 7	11.11% 2	28.57% 18
Q3: More than once a day (E)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	27.27% 3	36.36% 4	36.36% 4	0.00% 0	17.46% 11
Total Respondents	4	4	13	20	19	3	63

Test Stat	6.857
D.F.	6
P-Value	0.334

(2.2)

	ALMOST ALWAYS	MORE THAN HALF THE TIME	ABOUT HALF THE TIME	LESS THAN HALF THE TIME	RARELY	NEVER	TOTAL
Q3: About once a month or less (A)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
Q3: Two or three times a month (B)	33.33% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 1	33.33% 1	0.00% 0	4.76% 3
Q3: A few times a week (C)	16.13% 5	22.58% 7	35.48% 11	19.35% 6	6.45% 2	0.00% 0	49.21% 31
Q3: Almost every day (D)	11.11% 2	38.89% 7	16.67% 3	11.11% 2	22.22% 4	0.00% 0	28.57% 18
Q3: More than once a day (E)	9.09% 1	9.09% 1	36.36% 4	36.36% 4	9.09% 1	0.00% 0	17.46% 11
Total Respondents	9	15	18	13	8	0	63

Test Stat	3.307
D.F.	4
P-Value	0.507

(2.3)

	YES	SOMETIMES	NO	TOTAL
Q3: About once a month or less (A)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
Q3: Two or three times a month (B)	33.33% 1	66.67% 2	0.00% 0	4.76% 3
Q3: A few times a week (C)	67.74% 21	32.26% 10	0.00% 0	49.21% 31
Q3: Almost every day (D)	38.89% 7	50.00% 9	11.11% 2	28.57% 18
Q3: More than once a day (E)	27.27% 3	63.64% 7	9.09% 1	17.46% 11
Total Respondents	32	28	3	63

Test Stat	9.089
D.F.	4
P-Value	0.058

(2.4)

	YES	SOMETIMES	NO	TOTAL
Q3: About once a month or less (A)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
Q3: Two or three times a month (B)	0.00% 0	66.67% 2	33.33% 1	4.76% 3
Q3: A few times a week (C)	51.61% 16	45.16% 14	3.23% 1	49.21% 31
Q3: Almost every day (D)	88.89% 16	11.11% 2	0.00% 0	28.57% 18
Q3: More than once a day (E)	72.73% 8	27.27% 3	0.00% 0	17.46% 11
Total Respondents	40	21	2	63

Test Stat	18.36
D.F.	4
P-Value	0.001

(2.5)

	ALMOST ALWAYS (1)	MORE THAN HALF THE TIME (2)	ABOUT HALF THE TIME (3)	LESS THAN HALF THE TIME (4)	RARELY (5)	NEVER (6)	TOTAL
Q4: Never (A)	13.04% 3	0.00% 0	8.70% 2	21.74% 5	52.17% 12	4.35% 1	36.51% 23
Q4: Rarely (B)	0.00% 0	13.04% 3	21.74% 5	43.48% 10	21.74% 5	0.00% 0	36.51% 23
Q4: Sometimes (C)	0.00% 0	11.11% 1	66.67% 6	22.22% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	14.29% 9
Q4: Often (D)	12.50% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	37.50% 3	25.00% 2	25.00% 2	12.70% 8
Total Respondents	4	4	13	20	19	3	63

Test Stat	14.9343
D.F.	4
P-Value	0.004939

(2.6)

	ALMOST ALWAYS	MORE THAN HALF THE TIME	ABOUT HALF THE TIME	LESS THAN HALF THE TIME	RARELY	NEVER	TOTAL
Q4: Never (A)	17.39% 4	13.04% 3	21.74% 5	30.43% 7	17.39% 4	0.00% 0	36.51% 23
Q4: Rarely (B)	13.04% 3	30.43% 7	26.09% 6	21.74% 5	8.70% 2	0.00% 0	36.51% 23
Q4: Sometimes (C)	11.11% 1	55.56% 5	22.22% 2	11.11% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	14.29% 9
Q4: Often (D)	12.50% 1	0.00% 0	62.50% 5	0.00% 0	25.00% 2	0.00% 0	12.70% 8
Total Respondents	9	15	18	13	8	0	63

Test Stat	8.98332
D.F.	4
P-Value	0.06152

(2.7)

	ALMOST ALWAYS (1)	MORE THAN HALF THE TIME (2)	ABOUT HALF THE TIME (3)	LESS THAN HALF THE TIME (4)	RARELY (5)	NEVER (6)	TOTAL
Q7: Never (A)	50.00% 1	0.00% 0	50.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.17% 2
Q7: Rarely (B)	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	9.52% 6
Q7: Sometimes (C)	0.00% 0	23.53% 4	29.41% 5	29.41% 5	17.65% 3	0.00% 0	26.98% 17
Q7: Often (D)	5.26% 2	0.00% 0	13.16% 5	39.47% 15	34.21% 13	7.89% 3	60.32% 38
Total Respondents	4	4	13	20	19	3	63

Test Stat	10.2139
D.F.	4
P-Value	0.03698

(2.8)

	ALMOST ALWAYS	MORE THAN HALF THE TIME	ABOUT HALF THE TIME	LESS THAN HALF THE TIME	RARELY	NEVER	TOTAL
Q7: Never (A)	50.00% 1	50.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.17% 2
Q7: Rarely (B)	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	9.52% 6
Q7: Sometimes (C)	11.76% 2	35.29% 6	23.53% 4	17.65% 3	11.76% 2	0.00% 0	26.98% 17
Q7: Often (D)	10.53% 4	21.05% 8	34.21% 13	21.05% 8	13.16% 5	0.00% 0	60.32% 38
Total Respondents	9	15	18	13	8	0	63

Test Stat	2.506
D.F.	4

P-Value	0.6436
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(2.9)

	ALMOST ALWAYS (1)	MORE THAN HALF THE TIME (2)	ABOUT HALF THE TIME (3)	LESS THAN HALF THE TIME (4)	RARELY (5)	NEVER (6)	TOTAL
Q8: Never (A)	0.00% 0	100.00% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.17% 2
Q8: Rarely (B)	12.50% 1	12.50% 1	50.00% 4	0.00% 0	25.00% 2	0.00% 0	12.70% 8
Q8: Sometimes (C)	11.11% 2	5.56% 1	33.33% 6	38.89% 7	11.11% 2	0.00% 0	28.57% 18
Q8: Often (D)	2.86% 1	0.00% 0	8.57% 3	37.14% 13	42.86% 15	8.57% 3	55.56% 35
Total Respondents	4	4	13	20	19	3	63

Test Stat	31.142
D.F.	9
P-Value	0.0002

(2.10)

	ALMOST ALWAYS (1)	MORE THAN HALF THE TIME (2)	ABOUT HALF THE TIME (3)	LESS THAN HALF THE TIME (4)	RARELY (5)	NEVER (6)	TOTAL
Q6: Never (A)	100.00% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.17% 2
Q6: Rarely (B)	14.29% 1	0.00% 0	28.57% 2	14.29% 1	42.86% 3	0.00% 0	11.11% 7
Q6: Sometimes (C)	6.67% 1	13.33% 2	26.67% 4	26.67% 4	26.67% 4	0.00% 0	23.81% 15
Q6: Often (D)	0.00% 0	5.13% 2	17.95% 7	38.46% 15	30.77% 12	7.69% 3	61.90% 39
Total Respondents	4	4	13	20	19	3	63

Test Stat	19.0609
D.F.	9
P-Value	0.024

(2.11)

	ALMOST ALWAYS	MORE THAN HALF THE TIME	ABOUT HALF THE TIME	LESS THAN HALF THE TIME	RARELY	NEVER	TOTAL
Q6: Never (A)	100.00% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.17% 2
Q6: Rarely (B)	28.57% 2	57.14% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	14.29% 1	0.00% 0	11.11% 7
Q6: Sometimes (C)	20.00% 3	20.00% 3	26.67% 4	33.33% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	23.81% 15
Q6: Often (D)	5.13% 2	20.51% 8	35.90% 14	20.51% 8	17.95% 7	0.00% 0	61.90% 39
Total Respondents	9	15	18	13	8	0	63

Test Stat	12.840
D.F.	6
P-Value	0.0456