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2023

Romantic Relationships in Young Adults: The Influence of Parents and Friends

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Recommended Citation

Thompson, J. E. (2023). Romantic Relationships in Young Adults: The Influence of Parents and Friends. Retrieved from <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/222>

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**Brief Summary: Romantic Relationships in Young Adults: The Influence of Parents and
Friends**

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Romantic relationships occur in the context of family and friend relationships and in the context of the greater culture. Studies using a variety of methods have found that young adults are more likely to be interested in a romantic partner, have longer relationships, and have more satisfying and more loving relationships when their parents and friends approve of their romantic relationship (e.g., Parks et al., 1983; Le et al., 2010; Sinclair & Ellithorpe, 2014). Evolutionary psychology provides motives for parents and friends to form opinions and attempt to influence romantic relationships (Trivers, 1974). Developmentally, emerging and young adults navigate changing relationships with increasing importance on romantic relationships within the context of parent and friend relationships (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1963). The primary purpose of this study was to examine the importance that young adults place on the approval and disapproval of their parents and friends with consideration given to other potentially relevant variables (e.g., self-construal, acculturation, and social support).

Two-hundred and thirty-eight young adult participants (18-39 years old) responded online to a survey regarding their relationships. All participants completed a demographic survey, Dating Appropriateness Questions (Thompson, 2020); Singelis Self-Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994); the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale (Cross et al., 2000); Vancouver Index of Acculturation (Ryder et al., 2000); Perceived Social Support, Modified (Procidano & Heller, 1983); Interpersonal Dependency Inventory, Six (McClintock et al. 2017); Parental Influence on Mate Choice (Buunk et al., 2010); and Parent and Friend Influence on Romantic Relationship Decisions (Thompson, 2022). Participants who were currently in a romantic relationship also completed Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale (Sternberg, 1988) and the Social Networks Opinion Scale (Sinclair et al., 2014). In addition to quantitative questionnaires, participants also responded to open-ended questions regarding the influence of

parents and friends on their romantic relationships and narratives regarding conflicts with their parents and friends related to these relationships.

Analysis with a subsample of participants involved in romantic relationships at the time of the present study ($n = 142$) reiterated past research such that positive parent and friend opinion of the relationship was associated with more loving relationships. However, this relationship was not moderated by self-construal as originally hypothesized. The three subscales of the Parent and Friend Influence on Romantic Relationship Decisions were used as outcome variables (Thompson, 2022; Parent Disapproval Importance, Friend Disapproval Importance, and Parent and Friend Approval Importance). Social support from parents and friends was associated with greater importance given to parent and friend disapproval of a romantic relationship, respectively. Higher interdependent self-construal was also associated with greater importance given to parent disapproval. Acculturation was not associated with the importance placed on parent and friend approval/disapproval. Narratives were analyzed. Themes from conflicts with parents and friends related to romantic relationships included *Partner Characteristics*, *Treatment Concerns*, *Pressure on the Relationship*, *Failure to Fulfil Other Expectations*, *Safety/Behaviour Concerns*, *Disapproval for Unclear or Unstated Reasons*, and, for friends only, *Jealousy*. Additionally, frequency, but not severity, of relevant conflicts with parents was associated with the parent and the participant reports of fewer shared ideal characteristics for a romantic partner.

These results have scholarly implications for understanding how parent and friend relationships impact romantic relationships within the context of cultural values. The current study provides initial support for a new measure, the Parent and Friend Influence on Romantic Relationship Decisions (PFI; Thompson, 2022). Recommended next steps include further modification and validation of the PFI. In addition, future research on parent and friend

approval/disapproval importance within the context of specific ethnic or cultural groups would likely benefit from including other potentially relevant variables such as religiosity and ethnicity of friends.

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