

# 1

## **Transformations in Close Relationship Networks**

### **Parent–Child Relationships and Their Social Extensions**

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**T**he ascendance of research on close relationships and their developmental significance springs from both theoretical and empirical roots. Theoretically, socialization and acculturation are now regarded as occurring within interdependent social units marked by bidirectional rather than in the top-down processes assumed in earlier models of rearing by adults (Collins, 2010; Collins & Laursen, 2004). A key implication of this interdependence is that multiple persons of varied ages may become a part of such dyadic units and, as such, contribute to the interpersonal processes of attaining social competence. Empirically, burgeoning research findings in the past decade have shown that close relationships

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involving partners other than parents foster the development of social competence in and beyond childhood and adolescence (for reviews, see Aquilino, 2006; Collins & Steinberg, 2006). As a consequence, the research questions now driving both theory and research on socioemotional development have shifted from concerns of *whether* and *how much* particular types of relationship partners to interest in *how* and *under what conditions* relationship partners of different types contribute to functioning and development during significant developmental transitions (Collins, 2010).

Developmental transitions provide rare opportunities to examine changes in close relationships because of the relative density of salient changes in the nature and functions of close relationships. Researchers interested in parent-adolescent relationships first focused on transitional periods to move beyond questions of whether parental influence declined during the social and maturational changes of early adolescence. Research findings consistently showed that although characteristics of interaction and emotional experiences were more variable during early adolescence than before or after, parents remained influential and adolescents generally continued to be connected with parents (Collins, 1995; Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998). In short, relationships were transformed and, thereafter, the dyadic processes between the two generations continued to play significant roles in the young person's development.

Such functional transformations almost certainly occur in other significant developmental transitions, such as the transition to adulthood. However, research on the continuities and changes in the qualities and functions of relationships *after* adolescence is, if not in its infancy, in its toddlerhood. Even so, an emerging theme in the literature offers a potentially important guidepost for future efforts to identify and examine the distinctive developmental tasks and issues of relationship development in this period. Whereas research on relationships during the transition from childhood to adolescence revealed important patterns in changes within specific categories of relationships (parent-child, friendship, romantic relationships), research on transitions in young adult relationships implies that relationships with parents, friends, and romantic partners increasingly overlap and complement each other as early adulthood approaches (Ainsworth, 1989; Collins & Laursen, 2000). In two recent essays, Collins and Laursen (2000, 2004) have argued that relationships with parents, friends, and romantic partners increasingly overlap and complement each other as early adulthood approaches (Ainsworth, 1989). Thus, understanding the transition to adulthood challenges researchers to understand

not only patterns of change within relationships of a given type but also the interplay among the various relationships that are significant in the lives of youth approaching adulthood.

The purpose of this chapter is to take stock of the current status of knowledge about relationships in the transition to adulthood. Thus, the focus is research on the close relationships of individuals ages 19 to 28 (Arnett, 2000; Collins & van Dulmen, 2006). We first review briefly the conceptual hallmarks for research on relationship transformations in early adulthood. Next, we distill the evidence concerning typical changes in relationships with family members, especially parents, friends, and romantic partners. We give particular attention to the interplay among differing types of close relationships. Finally, we point to future research that may lead to a better understanding of the conditions and processes of interplay among relationships during early adult transitions.

## CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

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Three lines of inquiry converge in research on relationships in early adulthood: (1) the nature of close relationships, (2) the balance and social-psychological implications of continuity and change in the transition to adulthood, and (3) the role of relationships in developmental changes.

### **Relationships and Relational Processes**

The term *relationship* refers to a pair of persons who are *interdependent*, in that each person affects and is affected by the behavior of the other person over time. Interdependence in relationships varies in degree. Some pairs manifest a high degree of mutual impact over a period of years; the involvement and impact of other pairs may be more transitory (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). For convenience, in this chapter the terms *close relationships* and *personal relationships* will be used interchangeably to refer to the two most salient types of interdependent relationships outside of the family: friendships and romantic relationships.

Relationships, whether with family members, friends, or romantic partners, vary in the content or kinds of interactions; the patterning, or distribution of positive and negative exchanges; quality, or the degree of responsiveness that each shows to the other; and the cognitive and

emotional responses of each individual to events in the relationship (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009; Hinde, 1997). Pairs who consider themselves close also report mostly positive thoughts and feelings (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989; Laursen & Williams, 1997). However, a minority of close relationships are marked by highly interdependent and mutually influential negative behaviors, few mutual positive emotions (e.g., Huston, Niehuis, & Smith, 2001), and by little sense of subjective closeness (Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007). This negative pattern may be somewhat more likely in familial and romantic relationships than in friendships, although no explicit comparisons have been reported.

### **Continuity and Change in the Transition to Adulthood**

The key premise of a developmental perspective on close relationships during late adolescence and early adulthood is that individuals devote an increasing proportion of time to interactions with others outside of the family. Gradually, these extrafamilial relationships come to serve many of the same functions that appeared exclusive to familial relationships during childhood (Collins & Laursen, 2004; Collins & Steinberg, 2006).

This developmental perspective incorporates a consideration of both continuity and change within and between close relationships, whereas the popular framework associated with the relatively recent concept of emerging adulthood is focused primarily on distinctions between young adult experiences and those of earlier periods. Arnett's (2000) proposal that the years from the late teens to the late 20s constitute a distinctive period of experiences in social relationships stems partly from readily apparent social and demographic changes, rather than from developmental theorizing. As a result, ages 18 to 28 have become a prolonged period of uncertainty and temporizing marked by secular trends toward later marriage and childbearing, longer stints in education and other programs preparatory to career paths, and labor–market changes affecting the availability of long-term employment patterns. Arnett has speculated that this new timetable for assuming adult responsibilities and roles foster intense self-focus, exploring a wide variety of relationships and avoiding commitments to particular partners and lifestyle arrangements (Arnett, 2000, 2004). Although research findings keyed to Arnett's predictions are sparse, his proposal called attention to the need for research on late adolescence and early adulthood. In addition, he raised provocative issues regarding whether the close relationships of 18- to 28-year-olds

are developmentally distinct from those of earlier and later periods or a complex combination of continuities from teenage patterns extended into the college and postcollege years along with functional developmental changes appropriate to the incipient developmental challenges of adulthood (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006).

### **Theoretical Views of Relationships in Developmental Transitions**

Theoretical views of adolescent relationships have the common goal of explaining the differentiation of relationships during the second decade of life. Theorists have given particular attention to apparent increases in distance from parents and increased closeness to peers during the second decade of life (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). These views vary, however, in how they account for these complex phenomena and in their implications for the eventual integration of disparate relationships during young adulthood.

One group of theories, *endogenous-change perspectives*, emphasizes biological and motivational pressures toward developmental changes in relationships. Psychoanalytic perspectives (e.g., Blos, 1979), for example, attribute perturbed parent–child relations and increasing orientation toward peers to psychic pressure for individuation from parents and a shift to interpersonal objects appropriate to adult roles. Similarly, evolutionary theorists view changing relationships as fostering autonomy and facilitating the formation of nonfamilial sexual relationships (Steinberg, 1988). Endogenous-change views depict the integration of relationships in young adulthood in terms of increases in the relative dominance of peer and, especially, romantic relationships, at the expense of continued intimacy between parents and offspring.

A second group of theories gives greater weight to exogenous factors in changing adolescent relationships. *Social–psychological perspectives* attribute changes in relationships to pressures associated with age-graded expectations, tasks, and settings, often in combination with maturational changes (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Hill, 1988). Differences between parent–adolescent and peer relationships thus reflect differing salient contexts and shared activities. This view carries at least two possible implications for relationships during adolescence and for their eventual integration in young adulthood. One possibility is that, during transitions first to adolescence and later to adulthood, the proliferation of contexts and life

tasks and the apparently differing demands of families and peers may heighten ambient anxiety and tensions. These negative emotions then may be expressed in conflictual or diminished interactions within the relatively safe confines of familial relationships but not in the more potentially fragile social environment of friendships and romantic experiences. Gradually, emotional perturbations may subside, or individuals may manage emotions more constructively, allowing for improved relationships with family members, as well as with extrafamilial partners. A related possibility is that age-graded expectations give relatively greater emphasis to the importance of success with friends and actual or potential romantic partners; consequently, adolescents and early adults may neglect or even devalue the importance of maintaining positive relationships with family members while investing heavily in harmonious relationships with other adolescents. In adulthood, familial expectations may become more finely attuned to the demands of lives beyond the family.

Finally, two formulations emphasize functional similarities even as relationships change over time. Compared to the endogenous- and exogenous-change perspectives, these formulations give relatively greater emphasis to the importance of the history of relationship experiences with which an individual enters a new life period. *Attachment perspectives* hold that specific interactions vary as a function of changing developmental challenges from one age period to the next but are still guided by cognitive representations formed during early life that are essentially stable (Ainsworth, 1989; Allen, 2008; Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). For example, aloof, seemingly shy adolescents both elicit and actively respond to different types of overtures from peers than do more outgoing, relaxed, sociable individuals (Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999). At the same time, the relationship histories of interaction partners play a role. Outgoing, relaxed, sociable individuals are mostly likely to manifest these personal characteristics when interacting with others who show similar characteristics or those who appear vulnerable and needy; whereas usually positive, sociable adolescents often appear more tense and conflict-prone when interacting with aloof, unresponsive, or domineering partners (Collins & Sroufe, 1999).

*Interdependence perspectives* also emphasize the joint patterns in which the actions, cognitions, and emotions of each member of the dyad are significant to the others' reactions. Interdependence, defined in terms of the frequency, diversity, strength, and duration of interactions, reflects the degree of closeness between two persons (Reis et al., 2000). Changes in relationships, such as those during adolescence, thus constitute

altered patterns of interdependence. Interdependencies continue within familial relationships but in different forms than in earlier life; whereas interdependencies increase within friendships and romantic relationships. Parents and offspring both adjust expectancies in the service of optimal interdependence (Collins, 1995, 1997). Close peers must develop skills for maintaining interdependence on the basis of shared interests, commitments, and intimacy even when contact is relatively infrequent (Parker & Gottman, 1989). Mismatches between expectancies may precipitate conflicts, which in turn may stimulate adjustments of expectancies that both restore harmony and foster developmental adaptations in the dyad (Collins, 1995). Accounts of interdependence and attachment attempt to explain how the qualities of relationships prior to adolescence are linked to an individual's experiences with others in later life periods.

In contrast to the endogenous-change and social-psychological views, attachment and interdependence perspectives imply that the degree of eventual integration of parent-child, friend, and peer relationships varies across individuals and relationships. For example, histories of positive, supportive relationships with parents and successful relationships with peers portend strong, communal relationships with both parents and peers, including romantic partners, in young adulthood. By contrast, unreliable relationships with parents and peers may be associated with less cohesive patterns of familial and extrafamilial patterns in adulthood (Collins & Sroufe, 1999).

Examining the nature and significance of these developmental adaptations has presented considerable methodological, as well as conceptual, challenges, and researchers have used highly varied methods to meet them. Sociologists have relied almost exclusively on self-report methods, most often using them in cross-sectional surveys (e.g., Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992). Social psychologists, too, have relied almost exclusively on self-report methods but have reported some findings from experimental manipulations (e.g., Regan, Kocan, & Whitlock, 1998). The well-known PAIRS Project (e.g., Huston et al., 2001) is an example of research tracking romantic partnerships from emerging adulthood to later life. Developmental psychologists have relied more extensively on longitudinal studies. In most cases, the methods of choice involve self-report from interviews and questionnaires; in some studies, the reports of other individuals (e.g., teachers, observers) sometimes have been included (e.g., Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchey, 2002). Some ethnographically influenced work consists primarily of informants' open-ended accounts (e.g., Arnett, 2003). Only a minority of studies have included

formal observational methods (see Roisman, Madsen, Hennighausen, Sroufe, & Collins, 2001, for an exception). In general, research on the nature and changing features of close relationships requires methods that capture the richness afforded only by a dyadic unit of analysis. The empirical examples described in the remaining sections of the chapter underscore the value of methods that are especially keyed to the study of dyads.

## RECENT EMPIRICAL ADVANCES

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Research on multiple changing close relationships has burgeoned since the first reviews of the evidence. In this section, we give particular attention to three dominant themes in that research (Collins & Laursen, 2004; Collins, Haydon, & Hesemeyer, 2007): (1) developmental changes in the nature and functional significance of these connections, (2) the expansion and diversification of relationship networks, and (3) increasing interrelations among the significant relationships that typify social connections in late adolescence and early adulthood.

Unfortunately, understanding this transition in parent–child relationships is limited by researchers' heavy reliance on single-informant questionnaires (typically from the child alone), despite the inherently dyadic nature of parent–child relationship (for an exception, see Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2011). Consequently, most current findings testify only to the importance of individuals' perceptions of the relationship quality with their parents. Dyadic measures of interaction such as observations or even reports from both parties are necessary to elucidate the relationship dynamics and processes between parents and children that promote the quality of the child's adaptation during the transition to adulthood.

### **Changes in Nature and Functional Significance**

Just as transitions in relationships between childhood and adolescence involve adapting to often unexpected discrepancies between parental expectations and individual and normative behaviors and attitudes of children (Collins, 1995), transitions during late adolescence and early adulthood involve adapting to new expectations associated with changes in adult social and legal status (Aquilino, 2006; Collins & van Dulmen, 2006).

Parents face pressures to adjust their expectations of control, while continuing to provide emotional and sometimes material support. In turn, offspring must move toward greater autonomy and responsibility while remaining connected to parents (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). Research on the nature and significance of these changes consistently has shown that maintaining functional relationships with parents in late adolescence and early adulthood is both normative and psychologically adaptive (see Aquilino, 2006, for a review).

In contrast to research on earlier transitions, however, research examining changes in nature and functional significance of relationships during late adolescence and early adulthood has revealed that the interplay of parental relationships with extrafamilial relationships often may account more fully for developmental changes than any single relationship does. The interplay may take several forms. For example, despite the stereotype of incompatible or contradictory influences of parents and friends, relationships with parents set the stage for both the selection of friends and the management of these relationships from childhood forward (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000; Collins & Steinberg, 2006). Friends and romantic partners typically are the individuals with whom early adults most like to spend time (proximity-seeking) and with whom they most want to be when feeling down (safe haven function). Parents, however, are just as likely to be the primary source from which early adults seek advice and whom they depend upon (Fraleley & Davis, 1997). Representations of romantic relationships are linked to representations of other close relationships, especially relationships with friends, and these interrelated expectancies parallel interrelations in features like support and control (Furman et al., 2002).

It is important to note that these normative transformations within and between relationships are important signs of convergence across differing relationships. Qualities of friendships in middle and late adolescence are associated with concurrent qualities of romantic relationships (Collins et al., 2009; Furman et al., 2002). Working models of friendships and romantic relationships are interrelated as well (Carlivati & Collins, 2007), and displaying safe haven and secure base behaviors with best friends is associated positively with displaying these behaviors with dating partners. This apparently greater coherence among an individual's significant relationships may indicate that the growing importance of romantic relationships makes the common relationship properties across types of relationships more apparent than before. It is also likely,

however, that the parallels between early adults' relationships reflect their common similarity to current and prior relationships with parents and peers (Owens et al., 1995).

Links between qualities of friendships and romantic relationships, as well as between familial and romantic relationships, are equally impressive (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006). Relationships with parents, friends, and romantic partners serve overlapping but distinctive functions. Typical exchanges within each of these types of dyads differ accordingly. In comparison to childhood relationships, the diminished distance and greater intimacy in adolescents' peer relationships may satisfy affiliative needs and also contribute to socialization for relations among equals. Intimacy with parents may provide nurturance and support, but may be less important than friendships for socialization to roles and expectations in late adolescence and early adulthood (Collins, 1997; Laursen & Bukowski, 1997).

In a longitudinal study, Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke (2007) documented that even in late adolescence changes occur in the functional significance of relationships with parents, friends, and romantic partners. These authors further showed that the self-reported quality of relationships with friends and romantic partners mediated the links across time between relationships with parents in adolescence and self-and parent reports of internalizing and externalizing behavior at age 17 and self-reported symptoms of psychopathology at age 21. Extrafamilial relationships often show interactive effects, as well. Meeus, Branje, Van der Valk, and De Wied (2007) documented age-related shifts in the relative importance of intimate relationships with romantic partners, relative to best friendships, for individual emotional functioning.

Findings such as these have moved the field forward in two ways. First, they add to evidence of the developmental significance of extrafamilial, as well as familial, relationships. Second, they illustrate the importance of examining jointly the nature and significance of experiences with parents, with friends, and with romantic partners in late adolescence and young adulthood in accounting for the developmental significance of differing categories of close relationships. As an example, findings that romantic relationships were more salient and were differentially related to emotion and behavior in early adulthood compared to adolescence may reflect one or both of two underlying developmental trajectories (Meeus et al., 2007; van Dulmen, Goncy, Haydon, & Collins, 2008). One is that early-adult romantic relationships are likely better quality because developmental capacity for intimate relationships is more advanced at the older ages (Collins & Sroufe, 1999; Collins et al., 2009). The age-related increase in

stability of relationship commitment and the associated decline in emotional problems in these findings are consistent with the improve quality hypothesis. The second possibility is that forming intimate relationships in early adulthood is more important to acquiring age-related norms of social roles than in early adolescence. Adhering to developmental norms is generally regarded as an indicator of positive emotional functioning at every age (Sroufe, Duggal, Weinfield, & Carlson, 2000). Together, these findings underscore the need to go beyond simply determining the presence or even the number of relationships in a network by also assessing the quality and content of multiple types of relationships.

### **Expansion and Diversification of Networks**

The importance of multiple social relationships is apparent in research on both human and infrahuman species (Reis et al., 2000). Moreover, varied relationship partners provide overlapping, as well as distinctive, benefits (Laursen & Bukowski, 1997; Reis & Collins, 2004). Recent findings from research on relationships during the transition to adulthood underscore the salience, as well as the significance, of changes in close relationship networks in this period. For example, perceptions of parents as primary sources of support generally decline during adolescence; at the same time, perceived support from friends increases, such that friendships are seen as providing roughly the same or greater support as parental relationships (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2000; Scholte, van Lieshout, & van Aken, 2001). Friends and romantic interests emerge as the individuals with whom early adults prefer to spend time and with whom they most want to be when feeling down (Ainsworth, 1989; Cassidy, 2001; Waters & Cummings, 2000). Although parents are just as likely as friends to be the primary source from which adolescents and early adults seek advice and upon whom they depend (Fraleigh & Davis, 1997), components of attachment relationships (namely, maintaining proximity, using the other as a safe haven, and using the other as a secure base) also begin to typify relationships with extrafamilial partners (Furman et al., 2002). Thus, not only parental nurturance but also mutual support and intimacy in friendships provide essential training for intimate romantic partnerships. Friendship intimacy may even be relatively more significant than the parent–child relationship in preparing adolescents for social roles and expectations in late adolescence and early adulthood (Collins, 1997; Laursen & Bukowski, 1997). Eventually

marriage and formation of new families alter the hegemony of same-gender peer relations to close relationships with intimate partners.

Parent-child relationships also become increasingly egalitarian, with parents more often functioning as a general source of social support, rather than an active guiding agent during the transition to adulthood (see Collins, 1995; Masche, 2008; Nelson, Padilla-Walker, Christensen, Evans, & Carroll, 2011). At the same time, increasingly extensive daily contacts with friends and romantic partners and perceived support from friends and romantic partners rivals and sometimes exceeds that provided by parents (Collins et al., 2009). Indeed, intimacy, mutuality, and self-disclosure between friends intensify during late adolescence, possibly heightening the developmental salience of friendships in the transition to adulthood (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

Both familial and extrafamilial relationships contribute significantly to development and functioning during the transition to adulthood. In a longitudinal study, Van Wel and colleagues (Van Wel, Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2002; Van Wel, Linssen, & Abma, 2000) found that indicators of well-being for young adolescent participants were reliably predicted by the participants' reports of the quality of their bonds with their parents, peers, and romantic partners; the parental bond was not the exclusive predictor of well-being, but it was a stronger predictor than bonds with peers and romantic partners. Significantly, when the follow-up assessment was conducted 3 years later, the parental bond was equivalent to being in a steady relationship with a romantic partner as a predictor of individual well-being, and the same was found in a third assessment after another 3 years. These findings underscore the need for research that addresses simultaneously the possible separate functions of differing types of close relationships and the potential for combined and interactive effects among them in the development of individuals.

Diverse relationship partners provide distinctive, as well as overlapping, benefits (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Laursen & Bukowski, 1997). For example, the role of friendships as a template for all subsequent close peer affiliations (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Sullivan, 1953) undoubtedly helps to facilitate romantic relationships and pair bonding in early adulthood (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Meeus et al. (2007) further supported this speculation by showing that the transition from best friend to romantic partner as the primary intimate relationship is associated with increased and more stable commitments. The expansion and diversification of relationship networks thus is a gradual elaboration of the less extensive networks of earlier periods.

Functional similarities and differences within social networks may set the stage for considerable influence between close dyadic relationships in the 18- to 28-year-old period. Pertinent evidence comes from research in which the networks of parents and friends significantly influence continuation or dissolution of a romantic relationship. For example, Sprecher and Felmlee (1992) showed that network support for a relationship was associated positively with the quality of the relationship. Numerous other studies have shown that although couples vary in the degree to which they remain integrally involved with their former networks of kin and friends those who do continue close involvements show effects of the support or interference they receive (e.g., Connolly & Goldberg, 1999). Findings like this raise the possibility that involvement in, and qualities of, distinct dyads may moderate the effects of each other.

Normative changes in networks of close relationships should not mask considerable individual differences in the size and scope of relationship networks. Early adults who are romantically uninvolved report greater reliance on friends than their romantically involved peers do. Single adults name friends as their top companions and confidants, and, along with mothers, the primary source for all facets of social support (Carbery & Buhrmester, 1998). Engagement and marriage are both linked to partial withdrawal from friends. Although total social network size remains the same after marriage, single adults have more friends than kin in their social network, whereas married adults report a balance of kin and friends (Fischer, Sollie, Sorrell, & Green, 1989).

As the number of family roles increases, adults depend less on friends to satisfy their social needs. Although this change is most marked between the single and married phases of life, social networks are reorganized again across the transition to parenthood. Both mothers and fathers report a decline in the number of friends in their social networks after the birth of a child, but this decline is greater for fathers. Fathers also report less mutual support in friendship networks and less satisfaction with friendships over time compared to their wives (Bost, Cox, Burchinal, & Payne, 2002).

### **Increasing Interrelations Among Relationships**

The findings already reviewed appear consistent with Collins and Laursen's (2000, 2004) assertion that "... affiliations with friends, romantic partners, siblings, and parents unfold along varied and somewhat

discrete trajectories for most of the second decade of life, then coalesce during the early twenties into integrated interpersonal structure" (2000, p. 59). Much remains to be learned concerning the implications of increasing interrelations among relationships in the course of development. The theme of interrelations of relationships is especially apparent in the accumulating evidence that friendship quality may either have compensatory or exacerbating effects on adjustment problems, depending on other interpersonal influences. Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke (2007) and Ciairano, Rabaglietti, Roggero, Bonino, and Beyers (2007) identified specific patterns in which friendships both moderate the impact of changing relationships in families and the converse. Larsen, Branje, Van der Valk, & Meeus (2007) focused on similar moderating effects, though with respect to the impact of interparental, rather than parent-adolescent, relationships. To be sure, these findings are complex and, in combination, difficult to interpret. The contradictory picture of the significance of friendship quality vis-à-vis the functioning of other relationships, however, only underscores the importance of acknowledging and examining interrelations among relationships. Similarly, although the particular form of interrelation examined differs across studies, the finding of a normative, clearly functional segue from best friends to romantic partners as primary intimate relationships illuminates the social development process in the years approaching adulthood.

The aggregated findings represent a heretofore relatively neglected line of research in the larger literature on close relationships in the teens and 20s. Most research with adolescent samples has focused on the simple additive effects of relationships. Several exceptions, however, are telling. Wood, Read, Mitchell, & Brand (2004) showed that parental involvement with adolescents moderated peer influences on drinking behavior; Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee, & Sippola (1996) found that the degree to which mutual friendships are linked positively to adolescents' psychological well-being depends on the degree to which the adolescent also experiences familial cohesion and adaptability. These instances and those reported in the present collection of articles broaden simplistic cause and effect models of the impact of close relationships. Rather than focusing only on the assumption that association with one close relationship partner or another causes the outcomes to which correlational findings commonly link them, this new attention to moderator effects underscores the possibility that relationships contribute to

individual development by altering the impact of other sources of influence, even those emanating from other relationships.

## TOWARD FURTHER RESEARCH ON RELATIONSHIPS NETWORKS AFTER ADOLESCENCE

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Research on relationships prior to adulthood seeks to describe and explain transformations in relationships under conditions of rapid and extensive changes in participants and in key contexts. Current findings on friendships and romantic relationships in the teens and 20s supplement and extend evidence from earlier periods that adaptations in relationships preserve their functional significance in the midst of change. Social networks expand during adolescence and early adulthood to include an increasing number and diversity of personal relationships, though these extrafamilial bonds also become increasingly interrelated with familial relationships by the late 20s. Although familial relationships often appear to decline in importance in this process, the decline is a relative, rather than an absolute, one. Individual adjustments and reactions by both parties are essential components in this developmental process.

These three themes in the research literature effectively mount the case for continuing to pursue new directions in research on changing networks of close relationships in the second and third decades of life. To be sure, emerging findings admonish future researchers to encompass relationships with parents, friends, and romantic interests—when applicable. Findings from such inclusive designs raise the possibility that adolescents' intensifying involvement in more extensive relationship networks powerfully shapes their future, as well as their current dyadic relationships. An especially significant implication is the importance of looking at the constellation of adolescent close relationships, rather than one type alone, in predicting adjustment.

Consequently, the agenda for filling gaps in research on relationships during early adulthood is a lengthy one. Broader perspectives are needed in research on development and change in relationships. Research largely has been directed toward interpersonal antecedents of deterioration and termination in voluntary adult relationships such as courtship and marriage. Integrating this tradition with perspectives on processes that link

individual and relational changes is one possible step toward understanding how relationships are adapted to change in every period of life.

The most compelling accounts would come from longitudinal data sets in which repeated accounts are sought from the same individuals across the three age periods, using standard reporting devices and using standard metrics. Further research on the nature and significance of early adults' close relationships can be pursued most beneficially within the theoretical frameworks of the rapidly growing science of relationships (Reis et al., 2000).

In addition, measurement strategies should be directed toward a broad range of relationship features, moving beyond relationship status to include the content and quality of relationships (Collins et al., 2009). Especially needed are research designs that are sensitive to both similarities and differences between types of relationships and changes in these in the transition to adulthood. New research designs and strategies will be required in this more comprehensive approach to relationships and their developmental significance. Today, the most commonly used statistical approaches often necessitate pitting one relationship against another—that is, controlling the influence of one to test unique contributions of another. In the future, we will need methods that allow us to recognize the nonlinear, nonadditive, dynamic interrelations among parents, peers, and romantic relationships. In rising to these challenges, researchers may gain significant new knowledge of how relationships in every life period both adapt to and influence individual functioning across the life course.

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