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Adolescent Family Conflict as a Predictor of Relationship Quality in Emerging Adulthood

Objective: *This research examines the influence of adolescent family conflict on relationship quality in early and later emerging adulthood, while considering the interpersonal resources that protect youth against the intergenerational transmission of negative relationship quality.*

Background: *Family conflict during adolescence can impede the development of skills needed to maintain future productive interpersonal relationships. Positive peer and romantic relationships in emerging adulthood may buffer the negative ramifications of earlier family conflict.*

Method: *A longitudinal design was used to follow a sample of 850 at-risk adolescents (50% female, 50% male) who were predominantly (80%) African American. Binary logistic and ordinary least-squares regressions were run to test hypotheses.*

Results: *Adolescents who reported higher levels of family conflict in adolescence were less likely to report closeness or support from both their parents and spouses or partners during both early and late emerging adulthood. These adolescents also reported higher levels of perceived daily stressors. Positive relationships in emerging adulthood did not affect the relationship between family conflict and later relationship outcomes.*

Conclusion: *Family conflict in adolescence is associated with unhealthy relationship patterns in emerging adulthood.*

Implications: *Adolescents from high-conflict homes are unlikely to learn adaptive relationship strategies through natural maturation or exposure to positive interpersonal relationships in emerging adulthood. Direct intervention (e.g., conflict resolution skills) in emerging adulthood should be explored.*

High levels of family conflict during adolescence can impede the development of skills needed to maintain future productive interpersonal relationships (Andrews et al., 2000; Story et al., 2004). Family conflict, including both chronic interparental conflict and parent–child conflict, may contribute to children's behavioral modeling, thus contributing to the socialization processes by which family conflict tactics lead to the development of children's own conflict styles in their relationships (Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004; Miga et al., 2012; Pendry et al., 2013).

Children often develop behavioral patterns in various relationship contexts based on observing interactions between parents (Buehler et al., 1994). Kinsfogel and Grych (2004), for example, found that boys exposed to aggressive

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interparental conflict are more likely to view aggression as justifiable in a romantic relationship than boys not exposed to aggressive interparental conflict. Moretti et al. (2006) also found that adolescents were more likely to be aggressive toward their own romantic partners if they had observed aggression by their mother toward her partner than if they had not. In addition to exhibiting aggressive behaviors themselves, young adults who were exposed to high levels of aggression in the family during adolescence also were more likely to have a spouse or partner who was more aggressive (Cui et al., 2010).

Furthermore, parent–child relationships during adolescence have been linked to the style and quality of children's other interpersonal relationships (Stith et al., 2000), which is likely explained by parents' aggression toward their children (Reese-Weber & Kahn, 2005). Mother–adolescent conflict resolution styles, for example, are directly linked to both sibling and romantic-partner conflict resolution styles among adolescents (Reese-Weber & Kahn, 2005). These associations were observed in predominantly White samples, and it is unclear whether similar patterns exist in non-White populations. Researchers have found that families can be protective for non-White adolescents even when some risks originate within the family (Graham et al., 2017); thus, it is important to examine whether similar associations between family conflict and later relationships emerge in non-White populations.

Adolescents' relationship quality and styles may be affected by family of origin through both interparental conflict and parent–child conflict, and in any case, these conflicts or aggressions likely co-occur in families (Lindsey et al., 2009, Slep & O'Leary, 2005). Researchers have shown that negativity and overt conflict from marital aggression may spill over into the parent–child relationship, especially through harsh discipline (e.g., yelling, threatening, spanking, hitting, and shoving) and less parental support (see Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). Children's reactions to disturbed parenting practices due to interparental aggressions may foster further marital discord and family conflict (Busby et al., 2008; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). Such phenomena in family systems often create a family environment that is unfavorable for positive youth adjustment (Fosco & Grych, 2008), and in turn may influence youth's later close relationships

both in and outside of their immediate family. Yet these studies are limited by short follow-up periods or retrospective reporting. Prospective data documenting how family conflict exposure during adolescence is associated with nonfamily relationships is needed to understand the long-term ramifications of family conflict.

Social learning theory provides a potential explanation for the intergenerational transmission of relational functioning. Applying key tenets of social learning theory suggests that adolescents learn patterns of social interaction through parental modeling, including both hostility and emotion regulation strategies in interpersonal relationships (Kim et al., 2009). The capacities to regulate emotion and emotion-related behaviors are key aspects of adaptive social functioning, and the lack of such emotional regulation strategies may compromise the individual's ability to properly engage in social interactions and to foster close relationships (Cicchetti et al., 2009). Yet youth faced with conflictual family environments may benefit from other models of relationships given that they engage with friends and significant others with greater frequency during the transition to adulthood than in adolescence. Few researchers, however, have studied pathways (adaptive and maladaptive) between early family conflict and future relationships (Masten & Monn, 2015). We address this need by examining individual resilience to adolescent family conflict over time. In particular, we examine whether positive relationships during a developmental period of exploration can promote individual resilience against a history of negative family conflict.

Resiliency Theory

Resiliency theory suggests that interpersonal resources available to young adults may reduce the intergenerational transmission of negative relationship quality as affected adolescents begin to form adult relationships. A resiliency perspective emphasizes a framework that directs attention to successful coping and adjustment despite risk exposure (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Masten & Monn 2015). Resiliency focuses on positive individual and contextual factors that interfere with or disrupt developmental trajectories from risk to problem behaviors, mental distress, and poor health outcomes. These positive influences are called *promotive factors* because they operate

in opposition to risk factors and help youth overcome the negative effects of risk exposure. Two primary mechanisms by which promotive factors help mitigate the adverse effects of risks are *compensatory* and *protective models* of resiliency (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). The *compensatory model* involves a direct effect of a promotive factor that operates in an independent and opposite direction of a risk factor, whereas the *protective model* involves factors that moderate the relationship between a risk factor and negative outcome (i.e., an interaction effect). Research on compensatory and protective models in the study of family conflict indicate that positive features of youth's social environments may buffer the effects on negative familial relations (Formoso et al., 2000; Sturge-Apple et al., 2014).

Given the negative ramifications of adolescent–family conflict on future young adult relationships, examining social resources available to youth during the transition to adulthood—a dynamic developmental period during which individuals can redefine and construct new understandings of relationships—may help explain individuals' ability to overcome prior negative familial relationships and develop more rewarding relationships in the future. It is unclear, however, whether positive interpersonal relationships during the transition to adulthood serve as an opposing (compensatory) or moderating (protective) influence (Walsh, 2002). Furthermore, although researchers have documented sex, race, and socioeconomic status differences in resiliency in the face of hardship (Allen et al., 2016; Gutman et al., 2017), the directionality of the effect is unclear. It is possible that higher risk youth (i.e., those with more exposure) develop more resilience in the face of adversity relative to unexposed youth (Allen et al., 2016; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Positive Relationships in Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood represents a period of semiautonomy and extensive identity exploration as young adults seek independence, adapt new roles, and engage in more serious romantic relationships compared with adolescence (Arnett, 2000; Côté, 2006; Syed, 2015; Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). In addition to engagement in new relationships with peers and romantic partners,

relationships between emerging adults and their families also change (Parker et al., 2004). Establishing a more equitable parent–child relationship is frequently viewed by emerging adults as a marker for adulthood (Aquilino, 2006; Arnett, 2001), and emerging adults often report feeling closer to their parents despite having less contact (Arnett, 2000). Indeed, Arnett (1994) found that one criterion young adults reported as an indicator of adulthood was having a positive relationship with parents/caregivers as an equal adult. Child–sibling relationships may follow a similar pattern given that emerging adults report closer sibling relationships and less conflict compared with adolescents (Conger & Little, 2010). Yet relationships with parents or primary caregivers and siblings differ from the voluntary relationships that emerging adults form with friends or romantic partners (Reis et al., 2000).

As in any developmental period, considerable variability in the length, pattern of exchanges, quality, and level of support in emerging adulthood close relationships (i.e., friends and romantic partners) have been documented (Collins, 2003). Researchers debate, however, whether emerging adulthood relationships are qualitatively distinct from those of adolescence and adulthood (after approximately 30 years of age); empirical findings have been mixed (Arnett, 2004; Collins & Dulmen, 2006). Theoretically, completing developmental tasks during the transition should enable the individual to successfully transition into adult roles (Arnett, 2001). Although the development of close relationships represents one such task, Roisman et al. (2004) did not find that emerging adulthood relationships predicted successful adult adjustment over and above well-established adolescent predictors of adult outcomes (e.g., social adjustment, academic success, conduct).

Despite an extensive body of scholarship focused on relationship development during emerging adulthood, its antecedents and its centrality to what might be deemed a successful transition (e.g., see Arnett, 2000; Brown, 2004; Lefkowitz et al., 2004), few researchers have focused on peer and romantic relationships as resources during this period of transition that can influence later relationship development. Rather than focusing on predictive factors associated with positive emerging adult relationships, we examine the ways that positive emerging adult relationship experiences may

mitigate the deleterious effects of adolescent family conflict on future close relationships as predicted by the protective model of resiliency theory. Understanding whether positive relationships counteract (i.e., compensate) versus have a direct link with the association between family conflict and later relationships (i.e., moderate) has important implications for the development of intervention strategies for exposed youth.

Present Study

Although researchers have found that parental and familial discord predicts worse relationship quality for children (Ehrensaft et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2009), outcomes have typically obtained data from one time point, include one focal relationship (i.e., a spouse or significant other), and comprise predominantly White samples. To address these limitations, we examine the influence of adolescent family conflict on three relationships and a measure of general functioning (i.e., stress) at two time points during emerging adulthood, while also considering the personal and contextual resources during emerging adulthood that protect youth against the intergenerational transmission of negative relationship quality. We hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 1*: Family conflict is associated with whom adolescents later identify as the person closest to them, such that parents and other immediate family members will be less likely to be named than friends and other acquaintances.
> *Hypothesis 2*: Higher levels of family conflict in adolescence are associated with poorer parent–child relationships, as well as less supportive intimate partner relationships in emerging adulthood, as well as greater perceived stress.
> *Hypothesis 3a*: Consistent with resiliency theory, positive interpersonal relationships during emerging adulthood directly lead to more positive relationship outcomes in emerging adulthood despite family conflict (compensatory effect).
> *Hypothesis 3b*: Positive interpersonal relationships in early emerging adulthood moderate the association between family conflict and later relationships. Specifically, more positive interpersonal relationships in early emerging adulthood will buffer the negative association between family conflict and reported relationships, mitigating the distal effect of adolescent family conflict (protective effect).

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of youth participating in a longitudinal study from mid-adolescence to early adulthood. Inclusion criteria required that participants be identified as at risk for school dropout (i.e., had a grade point average of 3.0 or lower at the end of eighth grade) and not have been diagnosed as emotionally or developmentally impaired. Data were collected annually from 850 adolescents who met these inclusion criteria during their first year of high school (979 initial contacts; refusal rate = 13.2%). The sample was 50% female and predominantly African American ($n = 681$, 80.1%); others in the sample were White ($n = 143$, 16.8%) and mixed race (White and Black; $n = 26$, 3.1%). All participants attended one of four public high schools in a large Midwestern city. Data were collected at 12 time points. Waves 1 through 4 corresponded to participants' high school years ($M_{age} = 14.9$, 15.9, 16.9, and 17.8 years, respectively). Waves 5 through 8 corresponded to the second, third, fourth, and fifth years post high school ($M_{age} = 20.1$, 21.0, 22.1, and 23.1 years, respectively). Waves 9 through 12 were collected after a 4-year break ($M_{age} = 28.2$, 29.2, 30.2, and 31.2 years, respectively). For the purposes of this article, we refer to Waves 1 through 4 as *adolescence* or Time 1 (T1) and the two emerging adult follow-up periods as Time 2 (T2; $M_{age} = 21.5$ years) and Time 3 (T3; $M_{age} = 29.5$ years), reflecting broader conceptualizations of emerging adulthood as a fluid developmental stage (Arnett et al., 2014; Syed, 2015).

Procedure

Participants completed face-to-face interviews at school or in a community setting for Waves 1 through 4. For Waves 5 through 12, participants completed in-person interviews at a community location or phone interviews if they had moved from the area. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Measures

Family conflict. Five items assessed family conflict through reported levels of fighting and acting out in the individual's family in adolescence (Moos, 1981). Participants indicated how

frequently they fought in their family, how often family members got so angry they threw things, how often family members lost their tempers, how often family members criticized each other, and how often family members hit each other in anger (Cronbach's α = .76–.81). Response options ranged from *hardly ever* (scored as 1) to *often* (4). Mean family conflict scores were calculated across the four waves of adolescence (*M* = 1.68, range: 1.05–3.80).

Closest person. At each wave in emerging adulthood, participants reported the person to whom they were closest and had regular contact. Response options included spouse, partner, sibling (brother or sister), friend (nonromantic), roommate, relative (open-ended response), or other (open-ended response). At a given wave, respondents could report only one closest person. We constructed dummy measures at T2 and T3 for parents or primary caregiver, immediate family members, partner/spouse, and any other. Coding for the parent/caregiver variable in emerging adulthood, for example, proceeded as follows: The parent variable was coded as 1 for respondents who listed either parent or caregiver as their closest person at any wave in Waves 5 through 8, and the variable was coded 0 if a parent or caregiver was never listed as a closest person. We used a similar procedure for immediate family members but expanded the measure to include both parents/caregivers and siblings. We also created dummy variables for partner/spouse and unrelated/nonromantic. This scoring allowed more than one type of closest relationship during each developmental period (i.e., spanning four waves each; the same procedure was used for Waves 9 through 12).

Quality of close relationships. We assessed the quality of participants' close relationships at both emerging adult follow-up points using two measures related to intimate/close relationship satisfaction. Participants first reported whether they had a spouse/partner, boyfriend, or girlfriend, and if they did, we then asked a set of items that referred to the person with whom they were in that relationship. Because only a subset of participants reported an intimate relationship, we also included reported satisfaction with the person participants felt closest to as a separate indicator.

Perceived satisfaction with spouse/partner. Eight items borrowed from White (1983) were used to measure perceived satisfaction with the participant's partner/spouse with respect to the most recent 6 months of their relationship (Cronbach's α = .73–.81). For example, respondents were asked to indicate how happy they were with their partner's extent of understanding, amount of love and affection received, and their partner's employment status. Response options ranged from *very unhappy* (1) to *very happy* (5), with 3 as a neutral point.

Closest person support. Nine items borrowed from Vinokur and Van Ryn (1993) were used to measure the perceived supportiveness of the participant's closest person. (Cronbach's α = .80–.85). For example, respondents were asked how often their closest person understands the way they think and feel about things, acts in an angry or unpleasant manner toward them, says things that boost their self-confidence, and provides encouragement and reassurance when needed. Response options ranged from *not at all* (1) to *a great deal* (5). Negative items were reverse coded so that higher scores indicated more support.

Parent support. We used five items borrowed from Procidano and Heller (1983) to measure parent support at each follow-up in emerging adulthood (Cronbach's α = .90–.91). Example items include "My mother/father enjoys hearing what I think," "I rely on my mother/father for moral support," and "My mother/father is good at helping me solve problems." Participant responded to the same five items separately for their mother and their father. Mean scores were calculated for both parents to create a total measure of parent support.

Friendship support. We used five items from Procidano and Heller (1983) to measure perceived support of friends in emerging adulthood (Cronbach's α = .86–.91). Example items include "I rely on my friends for emotional support" and "My friends are good at helping me solve problems." Response options ranged from *not true* (1) to *very true* (5) with *somewhat true* as a middle value. Items were coded such that higher scores corresponded with more support. Mean scores were calculated at each wave, then combined within each developmental period.

Perceived stress and coping. In addition to relationship-related outcomes, we included a

general measure of daily functioning to assess whether family conflict had an effect that extended beyond relationship contexts (Heinze et al., 2017). Reported stress and coping in emerging adulthood was assessed through 11 items representing participants' reported daily hassles during the previous month (Cronbach's α = .79-.86; Cohen et al., 1983). For example, participants reported how often they felt nervous or stressed out, felt they were able to handle important life changes (reverse coded), and felt angered because of things that happened that were outside of their control. Response options ranged from *never* (1) to *very often* (5). Positive items were reversed coded such that higher scores represent greater stress.

Covariates. Researchers have noted sex and race/ethnicity-related differences in both family conflict (Andrews et al., 2000; Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000) and development in emerging adulthood (Shanahan, 2000). Thus, we controlled for participant sex and race/ethnicity in all analyses. We also controlled for participant baseline socioeconomic status (Gutman et al., 2017), which was assessed as the highest occupational prestige score for either parent (Nakao et al., 1990). Scores for participants in this study ranged from 29.28 (household work) to 64.38 (professional). The mean occupational prestige score was 39.78 (*SD* = 10.7), representing blue-collar employment (e.g., auto factory).

Analytic Plan

Across the 12 waves of data collection, we had 337 (39.6%) complete cases, with missingness ranging from 0% on baseline demographic variables and family conflict to 38.0% on emerging adult partner satisfaction. Missingness for emerging adult outcome variables ranged from 11.2% to 38.0% at T2 and 26.1 to 31.2% at T3. Following recommendations from Schafer and Graham (2002), we used chained multiple imputation in Stata for each variable in the analyses with missing values (van Buuren et al., 1999). The method was Bayesian estimation, drawing random values from posterior distributions (*n* = 20) of missing values (Rubin, 1996). Mean R^2 estimates across imputations were generated with the mibeta command in Stata using Fisher's r-to-z transformation (Harel, 2009).

We used binary logistic and ordinary least-squares regressions to examine family conflict in adolescence (M_{age} = 14.9–17.8 years) as a predictor of relationship and stress outcomes during two periods (T2 M_{age} = 21.5 years and T3 M_{age} = 29.5 years) of emerging adulthood, while also considering the compensatory and protective roles of emerging adulthood friendships and intimate relationships. To test Hypothesis 1, we used a series of binary logistic regressions to examine closest person outcomes with regression coefficients representing the odds that a given person (parent, immediate family member, spouse or partner, and unrelated/nonpartner friend) was ever listed as the person closest to the participant during either the T2 or T3 follow-ups. Because participants responded to four waves during each periods, participants could list multiple individuals within each time.

To test Hypothesis 2, we used eight ordinary least-squares regression models to examine the association between family conflict and reported (a) partner support, (b) closest person support, (c) parent support, and (d) perceived stress in each follow-up period (i.e., T2 and T3). For T3 outcomes, we also include T2 levels of each construct as controls.

To address Hypothesis 3a, we introduced friendship support, intimate partner support, and closest person support at T2 along with adolescent family conflict as predictors of T3 outcomes to examine the compensatory effect of emerging adult relationships. Finally, to test Hypothesis 3b, we introduced interaction terms among family conflict and friendship support, intimate partner support, and closest person support at T2 to examine the protective effect of emerging adult relationships on outcomes at T3. Participant sex, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status were controlled in all analyses.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Correlations and summary statistics are reported in Table 1. Examination of bivariate correlations indicated that family conflict was negatively associated with relationship outcomes at both developmental periods and positively associated with perceived stress. There were moderate positive associations between most partner outcomes within and between developmental periods and more positive relationship scores

Table 1. *Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Study Variables*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Race: White	—	—	—													
2. Race: Black	—	—	—	—												
3. Race: mixed	—	—	—	—	—											
4. Sex: male	—	—	.04	-.03	-.01	—										
5. Socioeconomic status	39.92	10.40	.02	-.02	.01	.09*	—									
6. Family conflict	1.68	0.44	.06	-.06	.02	-.12***	-.01	—								
7. Partner satisfaction (T2)	0.71	0.25	.11*	-.08	-.04	.10*	-.01	-.19***	—							
8. Closest person support (T2)	0.86	0.16	.02	.01	-.05	-.14***	-.01	-.25***	.32***	—						
9. Parent support (T2)	3.59	0.84	-.01	.05	-.09*	.08*	-.01	-.26***	.22***	.38***	—					
10. Perceived stress (T2)	2.42	0.48	-.03	.01	.05	-.11**	-.11**	.32***	-.33***	-.31***	-.27***	—				
11. Friendship support (T2)	3.18	0.86	.13***	-.12**	-.01	-.12**	.02	-.11**	.22***	.26***	.21***	-.19***	—			
12. Partner satisfaction (T3)	0.71	0.24	.10*	-.08	-.04	.09*	.04	-.23***	.85***	.32***	.21***	-.32***	.18***	—		
13. Closest person support (T3)	0.86	0.18	.01	.00	-.01	-.00	.00	-.20***	.18***	.32***	.29***	-.21***	.17***	.32***	—	
14. Parent support (T3)	3.69	1.02	-.09*	.07	-.09*	.05	-.05	-.21***	.14**	.22***	.52***	-.16***	.14**	.17***	.34***	—
15. Perceived stress (T3)	2.28	0.58	-.12***	.09*	.06	-.16***	-.05	.28***	-.28***	-.23***	-.23***	.59***	-.15***	-.39***	-.32***	-.18***

Note. Correlations are Pearson product correlations between continuous variables and point biserial correlations between dichotomous and continuous variables. Females are referent category. T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. *Binary Logistic Regressions Using Family Conflict in Adolescence to Predict Closest Person to the Participant in Emerging Adulthood*

Predictor	Parent (58.5%)			Family member (77.1%)			Spouse or partner (36.9%)			Unrelated/nonpartner (65.1%)		
	p	OR	95% CI	p	OR	95% CI	p	OR	95% CI	p	OR	95% CI
Time 2: Early emerging adolescence												
Covariates												
Male$_{female}$	.856	0.97	[0.73, 1.31]	.234	1.24	[0.87, 1.76]	.235	0.82	[0.59, 1.13]	.839	1.03	[0.76, 1.40]
Race: White$_{Black}$	.016	0.62	[0.42, 0.91]	.001	0.48	[0.31, 0.72]	.001	1.99	[1.34, 2.95]	.145	0.74	[0.50, 1.11]
Race: Mixed$_{Black}$	.181	0.56	[0.24, 1.31]	.095	0.46	[0.18, 1.14]	.029	2.56	[1.10, 5.95]	.923	1.05	[0.42, 2.61]
SES	.740	1.00	[0.98, 1.01]	.349	0.99	[0.97, 1.01]	.241	0.99	[0.98, 1.01]	.405	1.20	[0.83, 1.73]
Family conflict	.044	0.70	[0.50, 0.99]	.093	0.72	[0.49, 1.06]	.030	1.46	[1.04, 2.06]	.342	1.20	[0.83, 1.73]
Time 3: Late emerging adolescence												
Covariates												
Male$_{female}$	.367	0.85	[0.60, 1.21]	.136	0.75	[0.52, 1.09]	.004	1.77	[1.21, 2.61]	.059	0.71	[0.50, 1.01]
Race: White$_{Black}$	.001	0.46	[0.30, 0.72]	.000	0.34	[0.21, 0.53]	.000	3.68	[2.25, 6.03]	.028	0.59	[0.37, 0.94]
Race: Mixed$_{Black}$	.020	0.31	[0.11, 1.02]	.016	0.31	[0.12, 0.80]	.084	2.18	[0.90, 5.29]	.498	1.39	[0.53, 3.66]
SES	.952	1.00	[0.98, 1.02]	.319	1.01	[0.99, 1.03]	.207	1.01	[0.99, 1.04]	.878	1.00	[0.98, 1.02]
Family conflict	.335	0.83	[0.57, 1.21]	.069	0.69	[0.47, 1.03]	.320	1.24	[0.81, 1.88]	.138	1.39	[0.90, 2.04]

Note. Reference category in parentheses. CI = confidence interval for odds ratio (*OR*); SES = socioeconomic status.

were each associated with reduced stress. Participant sex was consistently (albeit modestly) associated with multiple outcomes variables, as was race. Socioeconomic status was only associated with one outcome, perceived stress at T2.

Hypothesis 1: Closest person

Consistent with our first hypothesis, participants who reported higher levels of family conflict in adolescence were less likely to list either of their parents/primary caregivers as their closest person at the T2 follow-up and were more likely to list a spouse or intimate partner as a closest person, relative to those reporting lower levels of conflict. Relative to Black participants, White participants were less likely to list a parent or immediate family member as their closest person but were more likely to list a spouse or partner.

Although coefficients were in the hypothesized direction, adolescent family conflict was not statistically associated with T3 closest person outcomes. However, the racial differences held across both follow-up periods, showing a similar pattern of differences between White and Black respondents found for both T2 and T3 outcomes. See Table 2 for detailed results of models testing Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2: Quality of Close Relationships

Family conflict in adolescence predicted the extent to which emerging adults at T2 and T3 viewed their relationship with their spouse or partner as supportive. Consistent with our prediction, those reporting higher levels of family conflict in adolescence were less likely to say they were supported by their current spouse or partner at either T2 or T3, and in fact were less likely to say their closest person was supportive at T2 and T3 no matter who was their closest person. Notably, the association between family conflict and partner supportiveness ratings at T3 attenuated when controlling for previous ratings of partner supportiveness but still suggests these associations were stable from T2 to T3.

Respondents reporting higher levels of adolescent family conflict were also less likely to report that their parents provided support in their daily lives at either follow-up. Relative to adolescents reporting lower levels of conflict, respondents coming from homes with higher levels of conflict reported less parental support at T2, and this association persisted to T3 even after controlling for the T2 rating of support, indicating that even after starting with less perceived parental support, perceptions of parental support declined at a higher rate during emerging adulthood for those who reported more family conflict in adolescence.

In addition to the consistently negative associations between adolescent family conflict and relationship outcomes, family conflict was positively associated with perceived daily stressors such that higher levels of adolescent family conflict were associated with higher reported levels of perceived stress at both T2 and T3. See Table 3 for detailed results of models testing Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3a: Direct Effect of Emerging Adult Relationships

The associations between adolescent family conflict and relationship outcomes at T3 after accounting for positive emerging adult relationships at T2 are reported in Table 4. As predicted, those reporting higher levels of friendship support at T2 reported higher closest person support at T3. Similarly, those reporting that their closest person (regardless of source) was supportive at T2 were more likely to say their current closest person was supportive at T3. Partner satisfaction at T2 was associated with more partner satisfaction, more supportive ratings of their closest person, and lower perceived stress at T3. Contrary to our prediction, no T2 relationships were predictive of whether individuals listed a parent or primary caregiver as their closest person at T3.

Hypothesis 3b: Moderating Role of Emerging Adult Relationships

Across each T3 outcome variable, we found no interaction effects between family conflict and emerging adult relationship predictors; thus, our hypothesis was not supported. Parent support ($\beta = .55$, CI [.45, .66]) and perceived stress ($\beta = .65$, CI [.54, .75]) at T2 remained statistical predictors of parent support and perceived stress, respectively, at T3.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the results support the hypothesis that conflictual family-of-origin environments during adolescence are associated with children's future relationship experiences. These results are also consistent with others who found that family conflict is associated with poorer quality relationships in childhood and adolescence (Hare et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2009; Story et al., 2004). Our work builds on this past research by examining outcomes at two points

during emerging adulthood, including multiple relationship outcomes, and comprising a traditionally underrepresented sample from a disadvantaged context and integrating a resiliency framework that suggests pathways to more positive close relationships for young adults.

Researchers have found that contentious parent–child relationships during adolescence generally improve by emerging adulthood (Conger & Little, 2010; Tanner, 2006), although our data indicate more conflicted relationships in adolescence tend to be less desirable relationships in emerging adulthood as well. Specifically, we found that emerging adults from high-conflict homes were less likely than those from low-conflict homes to report close, supportive relationships with their parents or primary caregivers. This is potentially because our measure of family conflict included items pertaining to aggressive behaviors that could lead to emotional or even physical harm, rather than relatively benign and developmentally normative parent–child conflict over boundaries, peers, rules, and control. This suggests an important distinction between normative conflict and that which represents higher levels of anger and aggression, the latter of which seems to be related to longer term ramifications. We also found that those who reported more family conflict in adolescence were more likely to establish close relationships outside of their immediate family in emerging adulthood than were those who reported less family conflict in adolescence. This may have been in an attempt to meet a need for support not fulfilled by their families of origin.

Our results are consistent with research that singled out strong family bonds as a key protective factor for youth exposed to community violence (Jones, 2007). Our finding that African Americans were more likely than Whites at both follow-up points to list a parent or immediate family member and less likely to list a partner or spouse as their closest person highlights the importance of family of origin for African American respondents. Graham et al. (2017) argued that the critical role of families in non-White racial and ethnic communities may counterbalance a variety of risks they experience, including those originating within the family, which can help promote positive adjustment in emerging adulthood. This pattern is consistent with previous work highlighting a collectivist identity in many African American families that supports

Table 3. *Ordinary Least Squares Regressions Using Family Conflict in Adolescence to Predict Relationship Outcomes in Emerging Adulthood*

Predictor	Partner support ($R^2 = .06_{T2}, .67_{T3}$)			Closest person support ($R^2 = .08_{T2}, .13_{T3}$)			Parent support ($R^2 = .07_{T2}, .27_{T3}$)			Perceived stress ($R^2 = .12_{T2}, .38_{T3}$)		
	p	B	95% CI	p	B	95% CI	p	B	95% CI	p	B	95% CI
Time 2: Early emerging adolescence												
Covariates												
Male$_{female}$	.003	0.05	[−0.02, 0.09]	.000	−0.04	[−0.06, −0.02]	.181	0.08	[−0.04, 0.21]	.054	−0.07	[−0.13, 0.00]
Race: White$_{Black}$	.022	0.05	[0.01, 0.10]	.271	0.02	[−0.01, 0.04]	.705	−0.03	[−0.19, 0.13]	.178	−0.06	[−0.15, 0.03]
Race: Mixed$_{Black}$	.458	−0.04	[−0.14, 0.06]	.210	−0.04	[−0.10, 0.02]	.083	−0.30	[−0.65, 0.04]	.278	0.10	[−0.08, 0.29]
SES	.908	0.00	[−0.00, 0.00]	.918	0.00	[−0.00, 0.00]	.760	−0.00	[−0.01, 0.01]	.007	−0.004	[−0.01, −0.001]
Family conflict	.000	−0.10	[−0.14, −0.06]	.000	−0.09	[−0.12, −0.07]	.000	−0.47	[−0.60, −0.33]	.000	0.34	[0.26, 0.41]
Time 3: Late emerging adolescence												
Covariates												
Male$_{female}$	.808	−0.00	[−0.02, 0.02]	.396	0.01	[−0.02, 0.04]	.790	0.01	[−0.14, 0.16]	.009	−0.11	[−0.20, −0.03]
Race: White$_{Black}$	.358	0.01	[−0.01, 0.04]	.824	0.01	[−0.03, 0.04]	.259	−0.10	[−0.29, 0.10]	.024	−0.12	[−0.23, −0.02]
Race: Mixed$_{Black}$	.785	0.01	[−0.05, 0.06]	.727	0.02	[−0.06, 0.09]	.346	−0.23	[−0.68, 0.22]	.548	−0.07	[−0.30, 0.16]
SES	.072	0.00	[0.00, 0.00]	.991	0.00	[−0.00, 0.00]	.232	−0.00	[−0.01, 0.00]	.979	0.00	[−0.00, 0.00]
Family conflict	.000	−0.04	[−0.05, 0.00]	.002	−0.05	[−0.09, −0.02]	.063	−0.19	[−0.37, −0.01]	.036	0.12	[0.01, 0.24]
EA partner support (T2)	.002	0.77	[0.73, 0.81]									
EA closest person support (T2)				.000	0.35	[0.26, 0.45]						
EA parent support (T2)							.000	0.58	[0.48, 0.67]			
EA perceived stress (T2)										.000	0.68	[0.58, 0.78]

Note. Reference category in parentheses. CI = confidence interval for *B*; EA = emerging adulthood; SES = socioeconomic status; T2 = Time 2.

Table 4. *Ordinary Least Squares Regression Using Family Conflict in Adolescence and Emerging Adult Relationships to Predict Relationship Outcomes in Late Emerging Adulthood (Time 3)*

Predictor	Partner support ($R^2 = .67$)			Closest person support ($R^2 = .15$)			Parent support ($R^2 = .28$)			Perceived stress ($R^2 = .40$)		
	p	B	95% CI	p	B	95% CI	p	B	95% CI	p	B	95% CI
Covariates												
Male[(female)]	.849	0.01	[−0.01, −0.03]	.474	0.01	[−0.02, 0.04]	.778	0.02	[−0.15, 0.20]	.017	−0.10	[−0.18, −0.01]
Race: White[(Black)]	.377	0.01	[−0.02, 0.04]	.802	−0.00	[−0.04, 0.03]	.145	−0.13	[−0.30, 0.04]	.052	−0.11	[−0.20, 0.01]
Race: Mixed[(Black)]	.708	0.01	[−0.04, 0.07]	.721	0.01	[−0.06, 0.09]	.346	−0.21	[−0.65, 0.23]	.505	−0.08	[−0.31, 0.12]
SES	.072	0.00	[0.00, 0.00]	.969	−0.00	[−0.00, 0.00]	.223	−0.01	[−0.02, 0.00]	.956	−0.00	[−0.00, 0.00]
Family conflict	.015	−0.02	[−0.05, 0.01]	.006	−0.05	[−0.08, −0.01]	.147	−0.13	[−0.30, 0.05]	.074	0.10	[−0.01, 0.19]
Partner support (EA)	.000	0.75	[0.71, 0.80]	.043	0.07	[0.002, 0.14]	.190	0.24	[−0.12, 0.60]	.004	−0.28	[−0.47, −0.09]
Closest person support (EA)	.023	0.06	[−0.01, 0.14]	.000	0.29	[0.19, 0.40]	.862	0.05	[−0.49, 0.58]	.828	−0.03	[−0.34, 0.27]
Friendship support (EA)	.964	0.00	[0.01, 0.02]	.017	0.02	[0.004, 0.04]	.297	0.05	[−0.04, 0.14]	.582	−0.01	[−0.06, 0.04]
EA Parent support (T2)							.000	0.55	[0.45, 0.66]			
EA Perceived stress (T2)										.000	0.64	[0.53, 0.75]

Note. Reference category in parentheses. CI = confidence interval for *B*; SES = socioeconomic status; EA = emerging adulthood; T2 = Time 2.

reciprocal social support (Brooks et al., 2004). It may be that the strong family bonds among African Americans benefit from the concomitant support systems in their families that help adolescents and emerging adults adjust to adulthood despite higher levels of family conflict. Cultural norms around kinship may thus serve as a buffer (protective factor) against the negative effects of family conflict. Although our measurement of supportive individuals allowed for nonnuclear family nominations (e.g., grandparents, neighbors, mentors), future work focused on adolescent family conflict should consider collectivism and cultural norms as potential factors that can promote resilience in youth exposed to family conflict.

In addition to early alienation from their parents, adolescents from high-conflict homes also may perpetuate their negative experiences through their engagement with nonsupportive others in emerging adulthood. Across each relationship outcome examined, higher levels of adolescent family conflict predicted poorer relationship experiences at both follow-up points, as well as higher levels of perceived stress. Two processes may explain this trend: Emerging adults may select individuals in their lives who are unsupportive, or they may introduce similar conflict learned from their families into their future relationships, thus perpetuating perceived negativity in their relationships. Adolescence is the key period when patterns of social skills are learned and reinforced within the family and peer contexts (Gilliom et al., 2002). Consistent with social learning theory, adolescents from disrupted family environments may have limited opportunities to learn constructive interpersonal skills, which in turn can affect future relationships (Busby et al., 2008; Ehrensaft et al., 2003). Fosco et al. (2012) found that family conflict in adolescence was related to aggression and other negative outcomes (poor well-being, emotional duress) in emerging adulthood, each of which may inhibit intimate partner and peer relationship development. Although we found that positive relationships in emerging adulthood can provide some counterweight to the effects of early negative family environments, such environments may make it more difficult for emerging adults to initiate those relationships in the first place.

In contrast to the potential negative effects of family conflict, our results also add further evidence to previous research indicating

that social support is associated with resiliency among adolescents. Specifically, we found support for the compensatory model of resilience because supportive relationships counteracted family conflict in the prediction of subsequent relationship outcomes. We did not find evidence, however, for the protective model of resilience; supportive relationships in emerging adulthood did not moderate the associations between family conflict and T3 outcomes. Previously, researchers have shown that supportive social relationships can mediate the effect of a variety of adverse events and lead to better physical and mental health outcomes (Karb et al., 2012) and have benefits for individuals across the lifespan (Gurung et al., 2003). However, our results suggest that emerging adults from high-conflict homes may not have access to such support. Notably, even when positive relationships were reported, they did not completely counteract the negative effect of family conflict. However, caution should be taken in accepting this finding because most adolescents in the sample reported low levels of family conflict. That said, a relatively modest increase in level of family conflict may have important implications for adolescents' future relationships with their parents and receiving support from others.

Our findings also support emerging adulthood theorists who argue that the period is a distinct developmental span in the life course. Developing close and meaningful relationships was central in the earliest writings about emerging adulthood as a developmental task necessary for successful adjustment in adulthood (Collins, 2003). Resiliency theorists have shown how interpersonal resources, such as peers and partners, allow individuals to learn and practice skills (Eccles et al., 2003), which may allow emerging adults to break negative relationship patterns learned in adolescence. Although we do not explicitly test this hypothesis, our results join those of other studies (e.g., Barry et al., 2009; Tanner & Arnett, 2011) in detailing how positive experiences in emerging adulthood can influence negative relationship trajectories from adolescence to adulthood. Notably, however, Roisman et al. (2004) found that adolescent predictors prevailed over emerging adulthood experience when considering adult relationship outcomes. One explanation for this discrepancy is that Roisman et al. did not consider domain-consistent predictors when examining adult outcomes. For example, relationships in

emerging adulthood were tested as mediators of academic and conduct problems in adolescence, rather than problematic adolescent relationships which may be expected to have stronger associations with later relationship outcomes over time. In contrast, we examined relationships (whether positive or negative) at all three time points.

Limitations and Future Directions

We note several limitations of the present study and suggest extensions for future research. First, we relied solely on self-report data and did not include data from the perspective of the participants' family members or future relationship partners. Future research incorporating dyadic reporting may offer additional insight by including reports of, for example, the target participant's supportive behaviors or the amount of reciprocity in the relationship. Yet the perception of social support is at least as relevant as objective levels of support (Uchino, 2009). Thus, reports from family members or partners may not accurately reflect the experience of the individual. Second, we were unable to account for potential overlap between the person closest to the participant and other relationships (e.g., partner/spouse or parents). That is, participants could have listed either a spouse or parent as their closest person, thus making the closest person item somewhat redundant. Although the bivariate correlations among partner, closest person, and parent support were low to moderate, some caution may be necessary when differentiating from either parent or spouse/partner support. Nevertheless, each source of support was generally associated with other variables in the models in the hypothesized direction, and the inclusion of support from closest person as an outcome brings additional depth to the understanding of how family conflict is associated with subsequent relationships. Finally, our participants were at risk for high school dropout at the beginning of the study and thus may not be representative of all urban youth. Yet grade point averages by participants' senior year in high school were more normally distributed (Heinze et al., 2017). Moreover, the sample was drawn from a particularly disadvantaged city with a lower median income and higher poverty and housing vacancy rates than comparable state or national numbers. Such contextual stressors are associated with elevated stress and conflict in families (Jones, 2007) and are present

in numerous cities and neighborhoods within which our findings may best apply. In general, however, the use of a high-risk sample means caution should be exercised before generalizing to more representative populations.

Conclusions and Implications

These limitations notwithstanding, our findings support prior research indicating that negative family environments can influence relationship patterns across generations. In addition to experiencing alienation from their parents and other immediate family members, adolescents from high-conflict homes may also perpetuate their negative experiences through their engagement with nonsupportive others in emerging adulthood. The results suggest that interventions designed to improve family interactions when adolescents are in the home or improve relationship building in emerging adulthood may have lasting benefits for young adults. Interventions designed to enhance parent–child attachment during adolescence may be particularly useful. Several early childhood interventions have improved parental sensitivity and child attachment (e.g., Moretti & Peled, 2004; Velderman et al., 2006). Our results suggest that adapting such programs for parents of adolescents may also be worthwhile. In a study of the transmission of parent aggression to subsequent adolescent relationships, secure parental attachment buffered against the intergenerational transmission of relational aggression (Hare et al., 2009). A predictor of attachment security, however, is a warm and affectionate family environment (Dinero et al., 2008), suggesting that adolescents from high-conflict homes may not be securely attached, which can have negative consequences for subsequent relationships as they transition into adulthood. A resiliency approach may shift the focus from reducing family anger in adolescence to helping create relationship skills and coping strategies for adolescents and emerging adults exposed to high levels of family conflict. Such efforts may help future young adults identify supportive others and engage in positive, reciprocal relationships despite poor modeling from their home environments. Because emerging adulthood is a relatively unstructured time of opportunities, self-focus, and identity exploration (Arnett, 2014), it may also be an opportune time for targeted relationship interventions that

would allow transitioning adults to challenge their working models of relationship functioning. Our results suggest this may be a fruitful direction for future research and prevention.

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