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**Parent-Child Closeness and Coping Outcomes in Emerging Adulthood**

Undergraduate Honors Thesis

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**Abstract**

Parents continue to play a pivotal role in their children's social and emotional adjustment into emerging adulthood (Mounts et al., 2006). This project examined the effect of parent-emerging adult closeness on emerging adult coping responses, and whether this association varied as a function of parent-child contact. The sample consisted of 180 undergraduate students ( $M$  age = 19.6,  $SD$  = 1.05, 78% female) from the University of Vermont. Participants reported on their closeness with their parent(s), their coping responses, and their patterns of contact with their parent(s). As predicted, parent-emerging adult closeness was predictive of emerging adults' coping responses. The relationship was not, however, moderated by mode or frequency of communication. Implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Emerging adulthood refers to a theorized developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood, encompassing ages 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2015). Emerging adulthood often involves significant personal growth; exploration in identity, relationships, work, and ideologies; and the pursuit of higher education (Arnett, 2015). Although many aspects of emerging adulthood are considered adaptive, the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood is also characterized by instability and increasing stressors, such as greater financial, social, and emotional burdens (Arnett, 2015; Sax, 1997). A large subset of the emerging adult population attends college, which has its own unique demands. Between 30 and 43% of college students drop out of school, with the stress of balancing school, work, and family as the most frequently cited reason (Tinto, 1993). Additionally, reports of stress, depression, anxiety, and serious suicidal ideation among college students have been consistently increasing over time in severity (Sax, 1997; CCMH, 2015). This is a substantial concern, as chronically high levels of stress during youth are associated with greater subsequent risk of disease, mental illness, and mortality (Juster, McEwen, & Lupien, 2010).

Adaptive coping behaviors are essential for managing stress and reducing risk for psychopathology (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001). Individual coping behavior is a strong predictor of mental health outcomes in college populations (Byrd & McKinney, 2012); however, in contrast to research on childhood and adolescence (Compas et al., 2001; Connor-Smith, Compas, Wadsworth, Thomsen, & Saltzman, 2000) little is known about what influences healthy coping behavior during the developmental period of emerging adulthood. Although a great deal of research suggests that parent-child closeness is important to childhood and adolescent coping (Compas et al., 2001; Ramsden & Hubbard, 2002; Kliewer, Fearnow, & Miller, 1996), less is known about how these influences upon coping behavior might

change under the unique demands of emerging adulthood. Additionally, with the increasing use of new technologies to keep in touch (Pew Research, 2014), the frequency and method of communication between emerging adults and parents also may play a crucial role in this relationship. Therefore, the goal of the present research is to examine the influence of the parent-emerging adult relationship on coping responses in college, as well as the impact of technological communication upon this relationship. The research is intended to inform efforts to improve emerging adults' coping responses during periods of heightened stress.

### **Coping and Involuntary Responses to Stress**

Research on coping behaviors in young people is essential to determining how to most productively help them face stressful situations (Compas et al., 2001). Adaptive stress responses also change throughout development; thus, it is important to examine coping over time to understand the developmental trajectory of adaptive coping behavior (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). This study focuses on coping responses in emerging adulthood, a developmental period in which youth may be particularly vulnerable to stress, and in which coping is understudied.

Under Compas and colleagues' coping framework, voluntary coping refers to the individual's conscious efforts to address a stressful situation or its related emotions (Connor-Smith et al., 2000). Coping responses can be characterized as engagement or disengagement responses. An engagement response directs attention to the source of stress or related emotions via strategies such as problem solving, emotion regulation, and social support seeking. Alternatively, disengagement turns attention away from the stressor, via strategies such as avoidance, denial, and wishful thinking (Connor-Smith et al., 2000). Engagement responses are generally more adaptive and are associated with lower levels of internalizing and externalizing

symptoms (Connor-Smith et al., 2000; Compas et al., 2006). Disengagement coping responses to stress, however, tend to be maladaptive; disengagement coping is related to higher risk for behavioral and emotional problems (Connor-Smith et al., 2000), including higher levels of depression and anxiety for adolescents (Compas et al., 2006).

Some researchers have begun to look at the effects of coping on adjustment in emerging adult populations. In most cases, the findings are in line with the research on coping in children and adolescents. For instance, in a sample of trauma-exposed students, the use of negative coping strategies (i.e., avoidance or self-blame, which are similar to disengagement coping) was associated with the onset of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder symptoms over the first two years of college. The study also found a bidirectional effect, suggesting that negative coping may both influence and be influenced by PTSD symptoms (Read, Griffin, Wardell, & Ouimette, 2014). Additionally, Villegas-Gold and Yoo (2014) examined how coping with instances of racial discrimination among Mexican American college students may mediate their subjective experience of wellbeing. Engagement coping in response to discrimination (i.e., problem solving) was positively associated with subjective wellbeing, and disengagement responses to discrimination (i.e., social withdrawal and wishful thinking) were negatively associated with subjective wellbeing (Villegas & Yoo, 2014). The detrimental effects of disengagement coping are also evident in research by Lee & Liu (2001) in which college students' indirect coping, which is similar to disengagement coping, mediated the effects of intergenerational conflict within their families on their own psychological distress. These studies indicate that college students' use of coping strategies can buffer or enhance risk for a variety of psychosocial outcomes, depending on the type of coping implemented by the emerging adult.

Although the characteristics and consequences of emerging adults' use of different coping strategies have been documented, less is known about what factors predict these coping responses in emerging adulthood. The current study examined parent-emerging adult closeness as a potential predictor of emerging adult coping responses.

### **Parent-child closeness**

The influence of parents on the development and socialization of children's coping responses is well studied (Kliewer et al., 1996; Ramsden & Hubbard, 2002; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007; Cappa et al., 2011). Additionally, attachment theory, first proposed by John Bowlby (1969) to explain the significance of infant-parent interactions, has also been applied to relationships in later life. Adult attachment theory states that one's initial attachment style heavily influences interpersonal relationships and coping responses from childhood to adulthood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Supporting this idea, college students with secure attachment relationships tend to integrate and adapt better to college life, whereas students with insecure attachments tend to use more avoidant coping and are less likely to be successful in their adjustment (Lopez, Mitchell, & Gormley, 2002). Although most emerging adults remain in close contact with their parents (Urry, Nelson, & Padilla-Walker, 2011), the direct relevance of parents to their child's coping responses becomes less clear as the child ages and gains more autonomy in their transition to adulthood.

A small body of literature suggests that parents continue to play a role in their emerging adults' coping responses. For instance, a recent study of an emerging adult population found that coping mediated the relationship between time spent with a parent or guardian and the emerging adult's mental health and substance use (Hurd, Stoddard, Bauermeister, & Zimmerman, 2014). Specifically, increased activities shared with a parent or parental mentor was associated with



adaptive coping responses, which in turn were negatively associated with psychopathology and substance use. However, the parent-emerging adult relationship is not always a positive influence on coping mechanisms; Abaied and Emond (2013) found that high levels of parental psychological control were related to maladaptive coping responses (e.g., disengagement coping). Abaied, Wagner, & Sanders (2014) found that parents' direct suggestions about coping predicted emerging adults' coping; engagement suggestions predicted adaptive responses, whereas disengagement suggestions predicted maladaptive responses (although this was moderated by the emerging adult's physiology). Parental input may therefore contribute to either adaptive or maladaptive coping, depending upon the way parents advise coping strategies and model how to face challenges. Parents' encouragement or undermining of adaptive coping seems to play a role in emerging adults' response to stress during this developmental period. The present study investigated how another specific aspect of parenting, parent-emerging adult closeness, may influence the college student's coping responses.

There is some evidence supporting the idea that a close parent-emerging adult relationship is beneficial. High parental emotional support is related to better friendship quality in the transition to college (Mounts et al., 2006), and family systems research has shown that family cohesion is closely related to new college students' perceived stress and depression (Johnson, Gans, Kerr, & LaValle, 2010). Additionally, open parental communication and proactive coping strategies predict social wellbeing in emerging adults (Zambianchi & Bitti, 2014). A mutually acknowledged level of shared responsibility between parent and child, including clear boundaries, is also an indicator of a quality parent-emerging adult relationship (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, & Knapp, 2014). Finally, less secure attachment to parents, specifically, is associated with lower self-esteem in a college student population (Laible, Carlo, & Roesch, 2004). Taken

together, these results suggest that parents continue to play a role in emerging adults' social and emotional adjustment. The question remains, however, if and how parent-emerging adult closeness directly relates to emerging adult coping responses, and how mode and frequency of communication may moderate this relationship.

### **Form and frequency of communication as moderators**

With relatively recent technological advances such as personal cell phones, email, text messaging, and video calling, emerging adults' style of communication with their parents has been rapidly changing. As of 2014, 98% of people age 18-29 own a cell phone, and 89% stay in touch using social networking sites (Pew Research, 2014). The increased availability of communication with parents may play a role in college students' use of coping strategies. For example, a study by Trice (2002) revealed that email usage between students and parents tends to increase during stressful periods. The results also suggest that parenting style may affect the frequency and topic of communication, with students from authoritative families making more contacts but fewer requests for advice from their parents than those from authoritarian families (Trice, 2002). Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Madsen, and Barry (2008) found that it was a combination of high maternal closeness and high parent-child disclosure that predicted the least drug use, alcohol use, and risky sexual behavior among college students. This suggests that if students communicate often with parents and share information about their lives, they may use fewer maladaptive coping strategies. Additional research has shown that increased contact with parents on weekend days may decrease the incidence of students' binge drinking (Small, Morgan, Abar, & Maggs, 2011). Again, these results suggest that the parent-emerging adult relationship and the communication involved may play an important role in students' coping and adjustment during this developmental period. Taken together, these studies suggest the

importance of taking into account how often and in what way parents and emerging adults communicate to get a full picture of the relationship between parent-child closeness and emerging adults' coping. Each method of communication (i.e., texting, talking on the phone, video calling) may bring different nuances and limitations to the conversations between parent and emerging adult (Cummings, Lee, & Kraut, 2006), but less research has looked at how these differences could affect quality of these interactions. Although research has looked at the effect of different modes of communication on emerging adult adjustment, no research to my knowledge has examined whether the combination of more modes of communication is predictive of better adjustment. Thus, I explored how the frequency and mode of communication between parents and emerging adults may influence the relationship between parent-emerging adult closeness and emerging adult coping.

### **Hypotheses**

I hypothesized that emerging adults who report better relationship quality, emotional closeness, and trust with their parent(s) would endorse more frequent use of engagement coping, because high parental emotional support (Mounts et al., 2006), family cohesion (Johnson et al., 2010), and open parental communication (Zambianchi & Bitti, 2014) are all related to a psychologically positive transition to college. I predicted that emerging adults who are less close with their parent(s) would endorse more frequent use of disengagement responses. I also expected that the relationship between parent-emerging adult closeness and the emerging adults' use of coping strategies would be moderated by the frequency and mode of communication used. Specifically, I predicted that parent-child closeness would be a stronger predictor of coping for those who communicate more frequently, because prior research has shown that emerging adults' communication with their parents during college is negatively associated with the use of

maladaptive coping strategies, such as binge drinking (Padilla-Walker et al., 2008; Small et al., 2011). I also hypothesized that parent-child closeness may be a stronger predictor of coping for those who used more forms of communication, because if increased parental communication is beneficial to emerging adults coping behaviors, then it is plausible that multiple pathways of communication could also positively influence this predictive relationship.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

This study uses data from the Coping with College Life Study in the Family Development Lab at the University of Vermont. A sample of 180 college students was recruited from introductory psychology courses. Participants were screened for age (18–25 years old) and a minimum of bi-monthly parental contact. The majority of the sample was White (88.5% White) and the average age was 19.6 (SD= 1.05 years).

### **Procedure**

Procedures were approved by the University of Vermont Human Subjects Review Board and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Participants completed a laboratory assessment that included tasks and questionnaires administered by trained undergraduate and graduate research assistants and received credit in psychology courses for their participation. For this report, three of the self-report questionnaires were used in analyses.

### **Measures**

**Parent-Emerging Adult Closeness.** The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) was used as a measure of parent-emerging adult closeness (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Participants rated 27 items regarding their relationship with their parents on a 5-point scale from “Almost Never or Never” (1) to “Almost Always or Always” (5). Example items

include, “I can depend on my parents to help me solve a problem,” “I feel silly or ashamed when I talk about my problems with my parents (reverse scored),” “My parents listen to my opinions,” “My parents understand me,” and “I trust my parents.” Internal reliability was acceptable in this sample ( $\alpha = .67$ ).

**Parent communication.** Participants rated the frequency with which they communicated with their mother and/or father on a 4-point scale from “1-2 times every two months” (1) to “nearly every day” (4). Participants also indicated whether or not they used the following forms of communication with their parents: telephone, text message, email, Skype, Facebook, and in-person visits.

**Emerging Adult Coping.** The Responses to Stress Questionnaire (RSQ; Connor-Smith et al., 2000) was used to measure participants’ coping responses to interpersonal stress. Participants rated their use of 57 items on a four-point scale, ranging from “Not at all” (0) to “A lot” (4). I focused on two scales from the RSQ: engagement coping (e.g., “I try to think of different ways to change the problem or fix the situation”, “I tell myself that I can get through this, or that I’ll do better next time”); and disengagement coping (e.g., “I try to stay away from people and things that make me feel upset or remind me of the problem”). Internal reliability was good in this sample (disengagement coping  $\alpha = .75$ ; engagement coping  $\alpha = .79$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

Four hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics software to examine associations between parental-emerging adult closeness and frequency of contact predicting emerging adult engagement coping (Model 1) and disengagement coping (Model 2), and associations between parental-emerging adult closeness and number of modes of contact predicting engagement coping (Model 3) and disengagement coping (Model 4). In the

first step of each model, age and gender were entered as control variables. In the second step, the main effects of parent-emerging adult closeness and the communication variable (frequency of contact in Models 1 and 2, modes of contact in Models 3 and 4) were entered. In the third step, the two-way interaction between parent-emerging adult closeness and the communication variable of interest was entered.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics among the study variables, and Table 2 displays correlations between the study variables. Emerging adults' reported closeness with their parents was positively, significantly correlated with their total forms of contact with parents, frequency of contact with parents, and use of effortful engagement coping. These correlations suggest that emerging adults who reported being closer with their parents also reported that they used more forms of contact with their parents, communicated more often with their parents, and used a higher proportion of engagement coping strategies. Emerging adults' reported closeness with parents was negatively, significantly correlated with their proportion of disengagement coping. Finally, gender was significantly correlated with frequency of contact with parents, meaning that males reported less frequent contact with their parents than females.

In regard to the forms of contact that emerging adults reported using to communicate with their parents, the vast majority of students used telephone calls to stay in contact with their parents (97%). Text messaging (82%) and e-mailing (59%) were also common forms of contact, whereas skype (17%), Facebook (24%) and in-person contact (26%) were less popular. On average, students used 3.06 different forms technology to communicate with their parents ( $SD = 1.01$ ). Their rates of contact with their parents ranged from nearly every day to 1-2 times per month, with the average rate of contact being 1-2 times per week ( $M = 3.2$ ,  $SD = 0.6$ ). Emerging

adults also reported using a much higher proportion of engagement coping strategies ( $M = .50$ ) than disengagement coping strategies ( $M = .12$ ), indicating that students are employing adaptive coping strategies more often than maladaptive.

Additionally, I ran independent samples t-tests for each method of communication, comparing students who reported using the method to those who reported not using it, and found no significant differences in engagement coping. There were also no significant differences in disengagement coping with the exception of those who use Facebook to communicate,  $t(178) = 1.14, p < .05$ , with Facebook users reporting a lower proportion of disengagement coping. However, the mean disengagement proportion scores for Facebook users and non-users were highly similar (.12 and .11 respectively), therefore this difference is likely not meaningful.

### **Regression Analyses**

Regression coefficients and confidence intervals appear in Table 3.

**Parent-EA Closeness x Total Forms of Communication.** In the first regression analysis predicting engagement coping, parent-emerging adult closeness was a significant, positive predictor of emerging adult use of engagement coping. This indicates that emerging adults who reported a close relationship with their parents also reported a higher proportion of engagement coping strategies. Age, sex, total forms of communication with parents, and the parent-EA closeness x total forms two-way interaction were all nonsignificant.

In the second regression analysis predicting disengagement coping, parent-emerging adult closeness was a significant, negative predictor of emerging adult use of disengagement coping. This indicates that emerging adults who reported a close relationship with their parents also reported a lower proportion of disengagement coping strategies. Age, sex, total forms of

communication, and the parent-EA closeness x total forms two-way interaction were all nonsignificant predictors of disengagement coping.

**Parent-EA Closeness x Mean Frequency of Contact.** In the third regression analysis predicting engagement coping, parent-emerging adult closeness was again a significant, positive predictor of emerging adult use of engagement coping, indicating that emerging adults who reported a close relationship with their parents also reported a higher proportion of engagement coping strategies. Age, sex, frequency of communication with parents, and the parent-EA closeness x frequency of communication two-way interaction were all nonsignificant.

In the fourth regression analysis predicting disengagement coping, parent-emerging adult closeness was again a significant, negative predictor of emerging adult use of disengagement coping, indicating that emerging adults who reported a close relationship with their parents also reported fewer uses of disengagement strategies. Age, sex, frequency of communication, and the parent-EA closeness x frequency of communication two-way interaction were all nonsignificant predictors of disengagement coping.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore if parent-emerging adult closeness is predictive of emerging adults' use of coping strategies, and how this relationship may be moderated by frequency of communication, or by forms of media used for communication between parent(s) and emerging adult. The hypotheses were partially supported by the results.

As predicted, parent-emerging adult closeness was a significant, positive predictor of emerging adults' use of engagement coping, and was also a significant, negative predictor of emerging adults' use of disengagement coping strategies. These findings indicate that emerging adults who reported a close relationship with their parents also reported a higher proportion of



engagement coping strategies and a lower proportion of disengagement strategies. This is consistent with prior research, which has shown that a positive, communicative parent-child relationship tends to be associated with the use of adaptive, engagement coping strategies (Hurd et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2010; Zambianchi & Bitti, 2014). Additionally, reduced closeness with parents was associated with more disengagement responses, supporting prior research suggesting that the parent-emerging adult relationship can also be harmful to coping (Abaied & Emond, 2013; Abaied et al., 2014). These findings extend the relevance of parent-child closeness into emerging adulthood. Despite the increased independence and physical distance from parents that comes with entering college, perceived closeness with one's parents still predicted emerging adults' concurrent use of coping strategies.

Contrary to the hypotheses, the two-way interaction analyses indicated that frequency of communication and total forms of communication were not significant moderators of the relationship between parent-emerging adult closeness and coping. Therefore, the frequency or mode of communication did not influence the strength of the relationship between closeness and engagement or disengagement coping in this sample. These findings are inconsistent with some of the prior literature. Padilla-Walker and colleagues (2008) found that a combination of high maternal closeness and high parent-child disclosure predicted the least drug use, alcohol use, and risky sexual behavior among college students, all of which could be viewed as forms of disengagement coping. Similar research revealed that increased communication with parents on weekend days reduced the incidence of binge drinking among students (Small et al., 2011). These conclusions lead me to believe that frequent and open communication with parents while away from home would strengthen the association between parent-emerging adult closeness and coping, yet frequency of communication did not play a moderating role in my results. Perhaps

this trend did not translate to my results because the given studies measured very specific types of disengagement coping, such as drug use, whereas my study surveyed participants about all sorts of engagement and disengagement behaviors. Choices regarding drug and alcohol use may be more swayed by recent communication with parents because many parents actively voice their disapproval of drug abuse. Other types of coping, such as avoidance of the stressor, could be less directly influenced by communication with one's parents.

Past research has shown that contact and frequent communication with parents during college is protective for emerging adults, but it is likely that the same students who stay in contact also report closeness with their parents. In this case, the two measures (closeness and form/frequency of contact) would essentially provide the same information, and one could not moderate the effects of the other. Although form and frequency of contact with parents did not have a main or moderating effect in terms of coping, both were correlated with parent-emerging adult closeness. Specifically, parent-emerging adult closeness was moderately positively correlated with form of contact and frequency of contact. This correlation is unsurprising given the pre-existing literature that says communication is positively associated with psychological closeness (Cummings, Lee, & Kraut, 2006). Communication with one's parents during emerging adulthood is therefore relevant to perceived closeness; despite this, communication does not predict coping behaviors in the regression models. This finding suggests that the quality of the relationship may be more relevant to the emerging adult's coping than the frequency with which they communicate.

Additionally, emerging adults' reported engagement and disengagement coping did not differ depending on whether they reported using each mode of communication individually. This was surprising, given that some forms of communication have previously been shown to produce

more rich and effective conversation (i.e., in person, phone call) than others (i.e., text messaging) (Gentzler, Oberhauser, Westerman, & Nadorff, 2011; Misra, Cheng, Genevie & Yuan, 2016; Novak, Sandberg, Jeffrey & Young-Davis, 2016; Turkle, 2012). For instance, when texting is used to address serious or confrontational topics, subsequent face-to-face interactions tend to be more conflictual (Novak et al., 2016). When students report having regular phone conversations with their parents, they also report more satisfying, intimate and supportive parental relationships, compared to those who use social networking sites to communicate (Gentzler et al., 2011). My expectation was that the forms of communication that produce these positive interactions between parent and emerging adult would also create a space that encourages engagement coping responses. However, the lack of influence in the present study suggests that in emerging adulthood, the way that one communicates with their parents on a weekly basis is not important enough to influence their coping mechanisms.

The findings of this study are relevant to the lives and decisions of both emerging adults and their parents. Given that parental closeness/communication is predictive of adaptive engagement coping, parents and emerging adults should make conscious efforts to communicate often and honestly. Parent-emerging adult closeness can also be viewed as a protective factor during these formative years, as closeness predicts fewer uses of maladaptive, disengagement coping such avoidance, binge drinking, drug use, or negative thought patterns. Finally, although the results for the moderating variables were not significant, these results can still inform the decisions of emerging adults and parents. They tell us that frequency and mode of communication are not necessarily important for parents to influence emerging adults' coping responses. Whether you communicate once a day, once a week, using multiple forms of media, or just over the phone, the closeness and quality of the parent-emerging adult relationship is what

matters for predicting coping strategies. This could be interesting information for those who tend to engage in “helicopter parenting” because in this case, excessive communication and involvement in the emerging adult’s life did not seem to proportionally influence the positive effects of parenting.

### **Limitations**

There were a few limitations with this study that warrant discussion. First, the sample was heavily female (78%), an imbalance that could have masked some relevant gender differences. For instance, different proportions of effortful engagement and disengagement tend to be observed between men and women. Specifically, women tend to score higher on emotional and avoidance coping styles and lower on rational and detachment coping than men (Matud, 2004). The findings from the present study may be more applicable to a female population of emerging adults, rather than the general population. Additionally, this sample was comprised exclusively of university students, which does not necessarily reflect trends in closeness and coping for all emerging adults. Emerging adulthood, while unified by some characteristics, is also defined by variability in different contexts (Arnett, 2015). Some emerging adults live independently and some still with their parents, some are students and some are in the workforce, some are single and some are in relationships. Therefore, the sample in this study of predominantly White, female, college students makes it difficult to generalize the findings to all emerging adults. In future research, it will be important to be sure that these findings are replicated in a more diverse sample with more varied life circumstances.

Another limitation is the use of self-report measures. Although self-reporting can be beneficial, given its efficiency and the reporter’s relative expertise on their personal situation compared to that of an observer, self-reporting also has drawbacks. For example, in this study,

self-report data was only collected from the emerging adult's perspective and not from their parents. The results are likely to be skewed by the bias of the reporter, who may not see the full picture of their relationship with their parents or of their own array of coping strategies.

Additionally, the internal reliability of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) was "acceptable", meaning that responses to some items may not consistently align with expected responses to other items on the survey.

A final limitation was that this study was correlational and cross-sectional in nature. If the study had been longitudinal, it may have produced a clearer picture of the way closeness, communication, and coping relate to each other over time. For example, a different study using longitudinal data found that although psychological closeness in long-distance friendships tends to decline with time, this decline is less steep among pairs who communicate more frequently (Cummings, Lee, & Kraut, 2006). Longitudinal tracking of these relationships over time could add a dimension that our data was lacking, thus allowing us to interpret the direction of these effects.

### **Future directions**

The present study offers ample directions for future research. For instance, I would be interested to investigate how far into adulthood communication with one's parents is advantageous. Would we see the same results, that parental closeness predicts coping behaviors, if the study population were in its 40s or 50s? Furthermore, the present study only looked at voluntary coping (engagement and disengagement) and did not use any data about involuntary stress responses. I am curious how parent-child closeness may influence involuntary stress responses, and also if one's proportion of voluntary to involuntary stress responses evolves throughout adulthood. Finally, future research could also take into account the size of the age

gap between emerging adults and their parents, and consider whether generational differences could play a role in the closeness of the relationship.

### **Conclusions**

The results and implications of this study are significant in the ongoing discussion of parents' role in their children's development of coping strategies. Coping with stress is recognized as an essential part of survival. When one uses adaptive forms of coping, such as asking for help, they are set up to succeed, but when one uses maladaptive coping, such as abusing alcohol or suppressing emotions, they are subject to more adverse psychological or behavioral outcomes (Connor-Smith et al., 2000; Compas et al., 2006). The present study suggests that emerging adults who report lower parental closeness also report using a higher proportion of disengagement coping and a lower proportion of engagement coping. Thus, effortful maintenance of parent-emerging adult closeness represents a potential avenue through which emerging adult coping could be improved. In addition, these results suggest that emerging adults, especially those in college, who do not have a close relationship with their parents could potentially benefit from additional support addressing alternative ways of learning effective coping.

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Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables*

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Gender (male = 0, female = 1)			.78	.42
Age	18	22.83	19.50	1.04
Total forms of contact	1	5	3.06	1.01
Mean frequency of contact	1.5	4	3.19	.60
Proportion effortful engagement	.24	.87	.50	.13
Proportion effortful disengagement	.01	.21	.12	.04
Mean parent-EA closeness	1.59	5	4.10	.66

Table 2  
*Correlations among study variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender (male = 0, female = 1)	1						
2. Age	-.06	1					
3. Total forms of contact	.12	-.13	1				
4. Mean frequency of contact	.26*	-.12	.11	1			
5. Proportion of effortful engagement	-.08	.03	.00	.05	1		
6. Proportion of effortful disengagement	.04	-.15*	-.06	-.02	-.50*	1	
7. Parent-emerging adult closeness	.08	.08	.19*	.21*	.42*	-.45*	1

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3

*Regression Analyses and Interactions:**Parent-Emerging Adult Closeness x Total Forms of Communication, and**Parent-Emerging Adult Closeness x Mean Frequency of Contact*

Variable	Engagement Coping		Disengagement Coping	
	R <sup>2</sup> change	Standardized Coefficients	R <sup>2</sup> change	Standardized Coefficients
Step 1	.01		.02	
Age		.02		-.14
Gender		-.08		.03
Step 2	.18*		.20*	
Parent-emerging adult closeness		.44*		-.45*
Total forms of communication		-.07		.00
Step 3	.00		.01	
Parent-EA closeness x Total forms		.14		.55
Variable	R <sup>2</sup> change	Standardized Coefficients	R <sup>2</sup> change	Standardized Coefficients
Step 1	.01		.02	
Age		.02		-.15
Gender		-.07		.00
Step 2	.17*		.20*	
Parent-emerging adult closeness		.43*		-.45*
Mean frequency of contact with parents		-.02		.06
Step 3	.01		.01	
Parent-EA closeness x Mean contact		.72		-.71

\*  $p < .05$