Family, Intimate Partners, and Adult Self-Concept

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(Honorable Mention in the 2015 Sociology Krassowski Award for Student Research)

ABSTRACT. This study evaluated the ways family (in childhood and adulthood) and romantic relationships differentially affected the self-concept of those raised in traditional and non-traditional families. Analyses of survey data from the 2012 New Family Structures survey (n=2,765, a subset of the original 15,058 respondents), and interviews with eight helping professionals, revealed that romantic relationships were the most relevant for positive adult self-concept, irrespective of early family structure. These findings reinforced the Chicago school of symbolic interactionism and self-concept. However, childhood family, and to some extent romantic relationships, were more influential for the self-concept of those who grew up in traditional than in non-traditional families, specifying the "boundary limiting" parameters of family influence. The findings also added to the literature on family structures, relationships, and well-being.

INTRODUCTION

The American Declaration of Independence declared that, "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (Declaration of Independence 1776). In other words, emotional well-being, an essential part of one's self-concept or identity, is important in American society. Many different factors can arguably influence an adult's self-concept, including one's choice in romantic relationships. Depending on the type and quality of the relationship, one's emotional health can be negatively or positively affected. But, emotional well-being is also shaped by other relations, such as familial relationships. Findings from this study, which evaluated the comparative influence of family and romantic relationships on adult self-concept, will add to the sociology of childhood family and adult relationships, be they with parents or romantic partners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the extant literature on family and intimate relationships identified many influential factors in individuals' life course. Some of the influences were: romantic relationship quality, parental support, family structure, socioeconomic status, and health of familial relationships.

Family in Childhood and in Adulthood

Given that the family is a fundamental social institution, it is not surprising that scholars of well-being have honed in on different aspects of family life. Some important dimensions of family life that support wellbeing were: socioeconomic resources, quality of familial relationships, family structure, and continued parental support.

Socioeconomic Resources and Children

Children's overall health and academic performance is partly dependent on their parents' finances (Mazumder and Davis 2013). For instance, children whose parents made higher wages were more likely to be healthy and to keep up with the school curriculum. Parents' salaries could also make a difference in their children's future, specifically with their college enrollment and future earnings in adulthood.

Researchers have identified some illustrative examples of the salience of parental socioeconomic status during a child's early developmental stages for their later success. As reported by Mollborn, Lawrence, James-Hawkins, and Fomby (2014), children born to financially struggling teen parents increasingly lagged behind, developmentally, their peers, even if the parents improved their socioeconomic standing. Although Mollborn and collegaues only followed children until they reached kindergarten, they highlighted similar studies in the literature that tracked children into later school years. Disadvantages experienced by children of teen parents either remained constant in Turley's study (cited by Mollborn et al. 2014) or even worsened, in Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg's study; children actually increasingly fell behind their peers from school entry throughout childhood and adolescence.

Quality of Familial Relationships

Aside from financially struggling parents, unhealthy familial relationships have also been shown to be detrimental to children, enticing them to engage in troubled behaviors. As seen in Fosco, Stormshak, Dishion, and Winter's (2012) study of 179 middle school aged students, sibling conflict led to more behavioral problems while father-youth connectedness and strong parental monitoring led to fewer problematic behaviors.

Researchers have specified the particular aspects of parent relationships that are protective of problem behaviors in children. A case in point; Murray, Dwyer, Rubin, Knighton-Wisor, and Booth-LaForce (2013) found that aggressive behavior in children was jointly evoked by low quality child-parent relationships and parental control. For instance, paternal control generated aggression when children had a low quality relationship with their mother, and vise versa; maternal control led to aggressive behavior when children had a poor quality relationship with their father. Another dimension of parent-child relationships is the frequency, or infrequency as the case might be, of family activities, such as sharing meals. Along with very low quality child-parent relationships, infrequent sharing of family meals, were proven to damage children's well-being (Meier and Musick 2014). Conversely, children who had regular family meals and high quality parent relationships experienced lower levels of depressive symptoms, fewer delinquent behaviors, and a reduced probability of substance use. It is worth noting that sharing family meals were only beneficial to children who had strong child-parent relationships.

Family Structure versus Relationships

Relationship quality has been a strong indicator of children's well-being, irrespective of family structure. For example, children living with both parents generally did better emotionally when compared to those living with only their mother. However, parental relationship hostility proved to be a stronger detriment to a child's well-being (Baxter, Weston, and Lixia 2011) than their family structure. That is, healthy parental relationships were more important for children's emotional well-being than the number of parents they lived with. However, living with parents, even if it is one parent, is beneficial to children. Health insurance status of children and their health can vary depending on who raises them (Ziol-Guest and Dunifon 2014). For instance, children of single mothers were more likely to be insured, while those of single fathers were the healthiest. But, children raised by grandparents seemed to be the worst off, not having health insurance and having the poorest health.

Yet, when children transition into adulthood is when family structure regains its relevance. In a study of 8,841 participants, frequent changes in children's family structure resulted in a quicker transition into adulthood, meaning earlier entry into the work force, lower rates of college completion, and earlier progression into parenthood (Fomby and Bosick 2013). And females were more sensitive towards the family structure in which they grew up than men. A study by Hofferth and Goldscheider (2010) found that women (n=2,853) who had never lived with their father had the most rapid progression into motherhood. In contrast, the family structure in which men (n=2,949) grew up was not deemed to be important in determining early transition into fatherhood.

Another life course stage where early family structure and parent's marital status can spill over into is one's romantic life. In particular, adults with married biological parents had the best quality relationships, followed by those with divorced parents; adults whose parents never married had the worst romantic relationships. In other words, the

romantic relationships of one's parents can set a trend for their own intimate relationships.

Continued Parental Support

Parents are known to support their children not only early in life but throughout their children's life as well. When parents continued to monitor and support their children into adulthood, their grown children were less likely to engage in criminal behaviors (Johnson, Giordano, Manning, and Longmore 2011). Moreover, the amount of support a parent provides to their adult children also matters. Grown children who received sustained parental support were more satisfied with their lives than those who did not get the same amount of support (Fingerman, Cheng, Wesselmann, Zarit, Furstenberg, and Birditt 2012; Rhoades, Galena, Scott Stanley, Howard Markman, and Erica Ragan. 2012).

Relationships in Adulthood

The transition into adulthood can be defined in a number of different ways, including getting married. However, before making a marriage commitment, many young adults often get involved in intimate relationships that do not last. The quality and permanence of romantic relationships have been noted as additional precursors to well-being, or lack thereof, in adulthood.

Romantic Relationships

According to Fleming, White, Oesterle, Haggerty, and Catalano's (2010) study, terminating a romantic relationship led to increases in substance use, particularly cigarette smoking and marijuana use. And those who used drugs had a lower quality of life than those who did not use drugs (Low, Koh, and Wong 2011).

Even after a couple gets married and starts their own family, the quality of their marriage has consequences for the couple and their children. For one, since raising children can be challenging, spouses often rely on each other for support. When a couple is not supportive of each other, there can often be distress within the family. On the other hand, when couples had satisfying relationships, that translated into having a better relationship with their children (Malinen, Kinnunen, Tolvanen, Rönkä, Wierda-Boer, and Gerris 2010).

But, what exactly makes a marriage satisfying? Economic pressures can put a huge dent in marital health (Choi and Marks 2013), but the effects can vary it the male of female partner (Hardie, Geist, and Lucas 2014). On the one hand, women were happier in their marriages when they were not financially struggling. But, economic stability was

not as important factor to men, as it was to women. Men were more satisfied in their marriage if their partner also contributed financially.

Summary

On balance, the research reviewed above focused on the unique and separate ramifications of family and romantic relationship in two key stages of the life course: childhood and adulthood. The study conducted for this paper examined the comparative impacts of family structure, relationships (early and in adulthood) and romance on adult self-concept. The research goals were to provide better insights into how family and romantic relationships during different life course stages affected persons differently, if at all, depending on the family structures in which they were raised.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The following set of research questions were posed for these analyses: What are the differential impacts of family relationships, both in childhood and in adulthood, as well as romantic relationships on adult self-concept? And how were the effects of family and romantic partners different, if the adult grew up in a traditional or nontraditional family structure? Drug use (Low, Koh, and Wong 2011), economic resources (Mazumder and Davis 2013), and gender (Hofferth and Goldscheider 2010) were used as controls in the multivariate analyses, since they have been reported to be mediating factors in well-being or relationship quality.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research was framed within the Chicago and Iowa schools of symbolic interactionism and self-concept (Herbert Blumer 1969; Manford Kuhn 1964; Powers 2010:192-202) as well as Glenn Elder's life course perspective (as cited in Fugita and Fernandez 2004:11). The effects of childhood and adult (later) family relationships on the adult self-concept have been theoretically elaborated by the Iowa and Chicago schools of symbolic interactionism, respectively. The life course perspective was then used to specify the "boundary limiting conditions" (Powers 2010: 76) of the symbolic interactionist dynamics of family and romantic relationships with adult self-concept.

According to the symbolic interactionists, people's social selves are products of social interactions. For instance, social relationships, such as family, both during childhood and adulthood, and romantic relationships, operate as "looking-glasses" (Cooley 1902: 136-178) as people are socialized into developing their sense of their own being. All relationships, whether negative or positive, are socializing experiences that help shape how individuals think about themselves and ultimately contribute to their self-concept.

However, not all socialization experiences have the same effects on the development of self-concept. For example, according to the Iowa School, the 'core self-concept,' developed early on through family socialization, does not change much throughout one's life (Manford Kuhn 1964; Powers 2010:198-201). Therefore, based on the Iowa School's symbolic interactionism, it was hypothesized that early family relationships will have a stronger positive effect on adult self-concept than later adult relationships (both with the family and a romantic partner), net of economic resources, drug use, and gender.

On the other hand, the Chicago School of symbolic interaction claimed that one's self-concept is often altered or changed by experiences later in life (Herbert Blumer 1969; Powers 2010:200-01). According to this premise, people's more recent experiences with social interactions will be more predictive of their social self than childhood experiences. This reasoning led to the hypothesis that adult relationships, both romantic and family, will have a stronger impact on a positive adult self-concept, net of economic resources, drug use, and gender.

It is not only true that all socialization events, be they in childhood or in later life, do not mean the same for all, the effects can differ depending on when in the life course those events were experienced. As per the life course concept, earlier and later life experiences can impact individuals and their life course differently (Fugita and Fernandez 2004:11), depending on the contexts in which critical events happen. For example, childhood family experiences can have different consequences over the life course of adults, contingent on whether they grew up in traditional or non-traditional families. The life course perspective offered a theoretical tool to specify the "boundary conditions" (Powers 2010:76) in the effects of family relationships.

For example, George Murdock (as cited in Morgan 1975:20-2), in his evaluation of the family unit, identified the nuclear or traditional family as a universal social unit because it is an essential aspect for a functioning society. He defined the nuclear family as "a social group characterized by common residence, economic co-operation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults" (Morgan 1975:20). In other words, the nuclear family was the normative locus for not only meeting the sexual and reproductive needs of individuals and society at large, but also their economic and educational needs. If we accept Murdock's reasoning, those raised in nuclear or traditional families may be more privileged in having more resources from societal institutions, making it easier to meet their needs; in turn these privileges can result in a more positive self-concept. Recast in a life course paradigm, the structure of early upbringing, whether traditional or non-traditional, can place boundary limits on the effects of socializing experiences. That is, early and adult relationships can be expected to mold the self-concept of adults differently, depending on their childhood family structure. For example, since, according to Murdock, nuclear families have more resources, these families might be protected from familial tensions, that usually arise when trying to acquire much needed resources

and to balance allocations, bringing family members closer to each other. Therefore, it was hypothesized that family relationships will have a stronger impact on the adult self-concept of those who grew up in traditional families than in non-traditional families, net of economic resources, drug use, and gender. On the other hand, romantic relationships will have a stronger effect on adult self-concept in non-traditional than traditional families, net of economic resources, drug use, and gender.

METHODS AND DATA

Mixed methods were used to test these research hypotheses. The quantitative secondary data were drawn from the 2012 New Family Structures survey (Regnerus 2012). To supplement the quantitative analysis, primary qualitative interviews were conducted with 8 professionals knowledgeable about family and romantic relationships.

Quantitative Survey Data

The 2012 New Family Structures survey looked at a variety of relational, emotional, and social outcomes of young adults raised in different family structures in the United States. Survey researchers (Regnerus 2012) used participants from a web panel designed to approximate the United States population. A weighted sample of 15,058 young adults ranging in age from 18 to 39 completed an online survey. Response rate was 61.6% for active panelists and 21.6% for withdrawn panelists.

Of the total Regnerus sample, a sub-sample of 2,957 respondents who had complete information on the variables relevant to these analyses was selected for this paper. Since familial structures can affect family members differently, the sub-sample was split into non-traditional (634) and traditional (1,161) families. Traditional families were classified as families where the biologically related parents were married. Non-traditional families were defined as families where the parents were of the same sex or biologically unrelated parents adopted the respondent, or parents who were unmarried but co-habiting, or biological mother had a romantic relationship with another man, or biological mother who did not have a romantic relationship with another man.

Overall (see Appendix A. Table), adult respondents from traditional families were more likely to be in a higher income bracket (=$30K to $39,999) and to have never tried drugs (68.7%), in contrast to non-traditional families (bracket =$20K to $29,999) (55.9%). In terms of gender, the non-traditional family group had more women (70.1%), relative to men (29.9%); the traditional family group was made up of 66.5% women and 33.5% men. Since economic resources, drug use, and gender have been shown in the literature review to affect one's relationship quality, well-being and emotional state, a proxy for self-concept, they will be controlled for in the multivariate analyses.

Qualitative Interview Data

In addition, interviews were conducted, for this study, with eight helping professionals, all who were located through networking. Three of the interviewees were professors from the psychology department at a local university (Interviewees #1, #5, and #7), four were female therapists (Interviewees #2, #3, #6, and #8), and one was a psychiatrist who primarily works with adolescents and adults (Interviewee #4). The interviewees were asked a series of questions (Appendix B) via email, on the phone, or in person, inquiring about their opinion on how adult self-concept and emotional well-being are impacted by childhood family relations, adult romantic relationships, adult child-parent relationships, economic resources, drug use, and gender.

DATA ANALYSES

Responses from the 2012 New Family Structures survey were analyzed at three different levels: univariate, bivariate, and multivariate. Descriptive and bivariate analyses set the stage for discovering the net effects of early family relationships, grown child-parent relationships, and adult romantic relationships on the adult self-concept.

Operationalization and Descriptive Analyses

Adult Self-Concept

The Adult Self-Concept was indicated by the emotional state of respondents at the time of the survey in 2011 and 2012. In keeping with the research design, the responses were disaggregated into two different family structures in which the adults were raised, whether traditional or non-traditional (Table 1.A.).

On balance, participants from both family structures had a relatively positive adult self-concept; traditional upbringing or mean = 35.4, non-traditional =36.7, on the index ranging from 11-48. However, there were a few notable differences between the two groups. For instance, 36.2% of adults who grew up in traditional[9] families were very happy with their current lives, compared to only 30.1% from non-traditional families. Additionally, those from conventional[10] families reported enjoying their lives (68.8%) somewhat more than those from nonconventional families (60.4%)[11]. In short, respondents from traditional families had a slightly more positive self-concept than those from non-traditional families.

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[9] Conventional and traditional families were used interchangeably.
[10] Non-conventional was used interchangeably with non-traditional families.
[11] Percentages were calculated by combing the "most of the time" and "a lot of the time."

Table 1.A. Descriptive Statistics for Adult Self Concept: Emotional State by Childhood Family Upbringing; New Family Structures Study, 2011- 2012

Variables (Questions)	Values/Response	Statistics[1]	
		Traditional Family (n=1763)	**Non-Traditional Family (n=1002)**
Q79. How happy are you with your life these days?	3=Somewhat happy	42.3	43.0**
	4=Very happy	36.2	30.1
Q76[2] A. Were bothered by things that usually don't bother you.	2=Sometimes	41.5	43.5*
	3=Never or rarely	45.5	40.5
B. Could not shake off the blues, even with help	2=Sometimes	28.1	30.4**
	3=Never or rarely	55.9	49.5
C. Felt you were just as good as other people.	2=Sometimes	25.3	30.7***
	3=A lot of the time	37.8	30.3
	4=Most of the time	26.8	27.8
D. Had trouble keeping your mind on what you were doing.	2=Sometimes	45.8	44.5*
	3=Never or rarely	32.5	28.9
E. Felt depressed	2=Sometimes	31.9	34.4***
	3=Never or rarely	51.5	44.2
F. Felt that you were too tired to do things	1=A lot of the time	18.5	20.6*
	2=Sometimes	46.5	45.6
	3=Never or rarely	25.0	21.4
G. Felt happy	2=Sometimes	27.6	33.4**
	3=A lot of the time	38.1	35.7
	4=Most of the time	29.9	25.8
H. Enjoyed life	2=Sometimes	26.8	33.8***
	3=A lot of the time	36.4	33.3
	4=Most of the time	32.4	27.1
I. Felt sad	2=Sometimes	50.3	51.1
	3=Never or rarely	34.9	31.7
J. Felt that difficulties were piling up so high that you couldn't overcome them.	2=Sometimes	35.2	34.3*
	3=Never or rarely	44.1	40.6
K. Felt confident in your ability to handle your personal problems.	2=Sometimes	32.7	35.0
	3=A lot of the time	34.8	32.2
	4=Most of the time	25.8	24.7
Index of Adult Self Concept[3]	Mean/$\bar{x}$ (SD)	36.7(7.6)	35.4(7.6)***
	Min-Max	11-48	11-48

*** p <=.001; ** p <=.01; * p <=.05

[1]. In the interest of brevity, responses that accounted for less than 20% of the sample were omitted from the table;

[2]. Q76=Now, think about the past seven days. How often was each of the following things true about you? Please use scale by selecting an option between "never or rarely" and "most or all of the time" for each statement;

[3]. The indicators were positively correlated at the .01 level (r= .181 to .855) and so they were combined into Index of Adult Self-Concept= RecodedQ76A + RecodedQ76B + Q76C + RecodedQ76D + RecodedQ76F + QG + Q76H + RecodedQ76I + RecodedQ76J + Q76K + RecodedQ79.

Childhood Family Relations

Childhood family relations were indicated using the participant's relationship with parent one, parent two, and the family. Considering that parent 1 was primarily a female family member (90.4%) and parent 2 was mainly male (87.1%), parent one was treated as a maternal figure and parent two was a paternal figure. As seen in the table in Appendix C, regardless of family structure, participants had a better relationship with their

maternal parent than with their paternal parent. However, respondents raised in traditional families had a better relationship with both parental figures, compared to those raised in non-traditional families. For instance, participants from a traditional structure had a slightly higher quality relationship with their maternal parent ($\bar{x}$=36.9) than those from a non-traditional structure ($\bar{x}$=34.4, range of 9-49). Additionally, those from conventional families had a fairly positive relationship with their paternal figure ($\bar{x}$=26.2) while participants from non-conventional families had a somewhat negative relationship with their parental parent ($\bar{x}$=17.1, on a range of 9-49).

TABLE 1.B Descriptive Statistics for Childhood Family Relations: Family; New Family Structures Study, 2011- 2012

Variables (Questions)	Values/Response	Statistics[1]	
		Traditional (Family Upbringing) (n=1619-1763)	Non-Traditional (Family Upbringing) (n=854-1002)
Q28.[2]A. My family relationships were safe, secure, and source of comfort. B. Had a loving atmosphere in our family	4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree	43.6 34.4 44.8 30.4	39.6... 18.1 40.0*** 17.5
C. All things considered, my childhood years were happy.	4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree	44.0 32.8	41.9... 16.5
D. There are matters from my family experience that I'm still having trouble with or coming to terms with	1=Agree 3=Disagree 4=Strongly Disagree	23.4 26.2 24.6	33.1... 22.9 11.2
E. There are matters from my family experience that negatively affect my ability to form close relationships.	1=Agree 3=Disagree 4=Strongly Disagree	20.9 26.1 29.7	28.1... 22.0 16.4
G. My family relationships were confusing, inconsistent, & unpredictable	1=Agree 3=Disagree 4=Strongly Disagree	15.5 27.7 40.3	22.3... 24.9 22.8
H. I don't feel like I can depend on my family.	3=Disagree 4=Strongly Disagree	22.3 52.4	22.6... 34.2
Index of Childhood Family[3]	Mean/$\bar{x}$ (SD) Min-Max	22.9(4.8) 4-32	20.16(5.5)*** 4-32

*** p <=.001; ** p <=.01; * p <=.05

[1]. For brevity, responses that accounted for less than 20% of the sample were omitted from the table;

[2]. Q28. How much do you agree with the following statements about your family, based on your years growing up? Please use the scale below to answer the questions;

[3]. The indicators were positively correlated at .01 level (r = .413 to .849); so they were combined into Index of Childhood Family = Q28_A+ Q28_B+ Q28_C+Recoded_ Q28_D+Recoded_ Q28_E+Recoded_ Q28_G+ Recoded_Q28_H.

Although both groups had a relatively positive relationship with their family growing up ($\bar{x}$=22.9 and $\bar{x}$=20.1 respectively, on a range of 4-32), as seen in Table 1.B, almost half

of non-traditional (49.1%, 42.5%)[12] and over a quarter of traditional (32.8%, 27.9%)[4] reported that childhood family problems still affected them as adults or at least have negatively affected their ability to form close relationships. That is, negative family experiences were more likely to affect those raised in non-conventional families later in life than those raised in conventional families. In sum, those from traditional families had a healthier relationship with their family than those coming from non-traditional families.

Since the quality of childhood family relations was based on memory from two or more decades before the survey, participants were more likely to accurately depict the quality of their relationship with their family as a whole than to correctly remember details about their separate relationships with their maternal or paternal figures. Therefore, for the purpose of accuracy, only the index of family relationships was used to represent childhood family relations in the multivariate analyses.

Current Child-Parent Relationships

The third predictor of adult self-concept, current child-parent relationships, had two dimensions: maternal (parent 1) and paternal (parent 2). Since this independent concept measures the quality of current child-parent relationships, missing values (indicative of not having a living parent) were included to represent no relationship. If they do not have a parent, it can be assumed that they do not have a relationship with that parent (Table 1.C).

On balance, participants from traditional and non-traditional families reported having a negative relationship with their maternal figure, mean= 17.1 and 15.2, range of 7-35. However, both groups reported having a worse relationship with their paternal figure compared to their relationship with their maternal parent. In particular, those from non-conventional families claimed to have a lower quality relationship with their paternal parent ($\bar{x}$=9.9, range of 7-35) than those from conventional families ($\bar{x}$=14.0, range 7-35). Overall, those from traditional families had slightly less negative relationships with their parents as adults ($\bar{x}$=31.1), as compared to those from non-traditional families ($\bar{x}$=25.1, range of 14-70).

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[12] Percentage was calculated by combing the percentages of "agree" and "strongly agreed."

TABLE 1.C. Descriptive Statistics for Current Child-Parent Relationships;
New Family Structures Study, 2011- 2012

Variables (Questions)	Values/Responses	Statistics[1]			
		Traditional (Family Upbringing) (n=1763)		Non-Traditional (Family Upbringing) (n= 1002)	
		Parent 1 (Maternal)	Parent 2 (Paternal)	Parent 1 (Maternal)	Parent 2 (Paternal)
Q27.[2] A. Openly talk to parent about things that are important to you.	3=Sometimes		31.2		21.9***
	4=Most of the time	34.1	27.6	26.3***	21.1
	5=Always	32.8		31.4	
B. Frequency that your parent really listens to you when you want to talk.	4=Most of the time	27.2	28.9	23.9***	18.4***
	5=Always	49.6	35.6	41.2	32.4
C. How often does your [parent] explicitly express affection or love for you?	5=Always	50.9	33.5	43.5***	27.7***
D. Would your [parent] help you if you had a problem?	5=Always	71.1	59.3	61.0***	39.1***
E. If you needed money, would you ask your [parent] for it?	1=Never		15.5		34.2***
	5=Always	34.4	33.0	33.5***	22.2
F. How often is your [parent] interested in the things you do?	4=Most of the time	25.6	28.1	25.0***	20.3***
	5=Always	53.4	38.5	42.2	28.3
G. Does your [parent] show interest in your own children and family?	5=Always	72.3	61.7	63.0***	46.0***
Index of Current Child-Parent Relationships Parent 1[3] and Parent 2[4]	Mean/ $\bar{x}$ (SD) Min-Max	17.1(11.6) 7-35	14.0(10.3) 7-35	15.2(10.9)*** 7-35	9.9(7.4)*** 7-35
Index of Adult Child-Parent Relationships[5]	Mean/ $\bar{x}$ (SD) Min-Max	31.1(20.0) 14-70		25.1(15.4)*** 14-70	

*** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$; test of differences between Parent 1 or Parent 2 in traditional versus non-Traditional Families;

1. Responses that accounted for less than 20% of the sample were omitted from the table;

2. Q27. Using the same 5-point scale spanning from "never" to "always," please answer the following questions about your current relationship with your [parent];

3. The indicators were positively correlated at .01 level (r = .413 to .753), so they were combined into Index of Current Child-Parent Relationships Parent 1 = Q27_Parent1_A + Q27_Parent1_B + Q27_Parent1_C + Q27_Parent1_D + Q27_Parent1_E + Q27_Parent1_F + Q27_Parent1_G;

4. The indicators were positively correlated at the .01 level (r = .535 to .828), so they were combined into Index of Current Child-Parent Relationships Parent 2 = Q27_Parent2_A + Q27_Parent2_B + Q27_Parent2_C + Q27_Parent2_D + Q27_Parent2_E + Q27_Parent2_F + Q27_Parent2_G;

5. The Parent 1 and Parent 2 indices were positively correlated at the .01 (r = .588) level; so they were combined into Index of Adult Child-Parent Relationships= Index of Current Child-Parent Relationships Parent 1 + Index of Current Child-Parent Relationships Parent 2.

Adult Romantic Relationships

The indicators of <u>Adult Romantic Relationships</u> (presented in Table 1.D.) aimed to capture the quality of respondents' romantic relationships.

Table 1.D. Descriptive Statistics for Adult Romantic Relationships: Quality of Relationships; New Family Structures Study, 2011- 2012

Variables (Questions)	Values/Responses	Statistics[1]	
		Traditional Family Upbringing (n=1314)	Non-Traditional Family Upbringing (n=741)
Q106. Current relationship A. How often have you thought your relationship might be in trouble?	1=Several Times 2=Once or Twice 3=Never Once	18.8 44.5 25.9	23.5** 42.1 20.7
B. How often have you and your partner discussed ending your relationship?	2=Once or Twice 3=Never Once	30.1 53.8	34.9*** 41.6
C. How often you broke up or separated and then gotten back together?	2=Once or Twice 3=Never Once	16.7 74.3	25.9*** 61.1
Q107.[2] A. We have a good relationship.	3=Agree 4=Strongly Agree	34.7 49.1	37.8 43.1
B. Healthy relationship with my partner.	3=Agree 4=Strongly Agree	35.5 42.2	32.7** 37.4
C. Our relationship is strong.	3=Agree 4=Strongly Agree	32.0 47.0	35.1 42.3
D. My relationship with my partner makes me happy.	3=Agree 4=Strongly Agree	33.1 49.6	35.6* 44.2
E. I really feel part of a team with my partner.	3=Agree 4=Strongly Agree	32.1 45.2	33.9 39.2
F. Relationship is pretty much perfect.	3=Agree 4=Strongly Agree	32.1 22.3	30.2** 19.2
Index of Adult Romantic Relationships[3]	Mean/ $\bar{x}$ (SD) Min-Max	25.0(7.2) 0-33	23.7(7.5)** 0-33

*** p <=.001; ** p <=.01; * p <=.05

[1.] Responses that accounted for 20% or less of the sample were omitted from the table;

[2.] Q107= Please read each statement through carefully and decide how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about your current relationship.

[3.] The indicators were positively correlated at the .01 level (r= .351 to .888); so they were combined into Index of Adult Romantic Relationships = Recoded_Q106A + Recoded_Q106B + Recoded_Q106C + Recoded_Q107A + Recoded_Q107B + Recoded_Q107C + Recoded_Q107D + Recoded_Q107E + Recoded_Q107F.

While adults in both groups generally reported healthy romantic relationships, those from traditional families claimed to have better quality relationships than those from non-traditional families. Adults from conventional families were more likely to be in a healthy romantic relationship (77.7%)[13] than those from non-conventional families (70.1%)[5]. In short, participants from both groups reported having strong relationships; however, those who grew up in traditional family structures indicated having somewhat better

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[13] Percentage was calculated by combing the percentages of "agree" and "strongly agreed."

romantic relationships than those from non-traditional families ($\bar{x}$=23.7, 25.0, range 0-33).

Summary

In general, the survey participants were emotionally healthy (healthy self-concept), reported high quality family relations during their childhoods, and positive romantic relationships in adulthood. But, the quality of their adult relationships with their parents was not as high. Respondents raised in traditional families had a more positive emotional well-being and better quality relationships (both in their childhood and with romantic partners) than those raised in non-traditional families.

Bivariate Associations

In the second analytical step, bivariate correlations offered preliminary glimpses into the association of early (family) and later (family and romantic) relationships with the self-concept of those who had been raised in traditional families compared to those raised in non-traditional (Appendix D). Irrespective of the family structure in which respondents were raised, the more supportive early family relations (traditional r=.39***; non-traditional r=.31***) and adult romantic relationships (traditional r=.46***; non-traditional r=.44***) were, the better the emotional well-being of adults. Yet, participants who had satisfying adult romantic relationships were more likely to be emotionally healthier (traditional r= .46***; non-traditional r= .44***) than if they had strong family relations as children (traditional r= .39***; non-traditional r= .31***). However, these associations were clearer if they were raised in traditional families than in non-traditional families. On the other hand, the emotional consequences of economic resources were distinctly different depending on early family structure and even relationships. For instance, only adults who grew up in a conventional household with more economic resources (specifically homeownership and household income), had higher quality relationships with both parental figures (homeownership r=.32***; income r=.19*** respectively).

Furthermore, regardless of family structure, women were more inclined to have better relationships with their parents as adults (traditional: -.11***; non-traditional -.11***). Men were more likely to have a higher self-concept (traditional r=.06*; non-traditional r=.11***) and used drugs (traditional r=.07**; non-traditional r=.10**). Additionally, low engagement in drug use resulted in a healthier emotional well-being (traditional r= -.21***; non-traditional r= -.23***), better childhood family relations (traditional r= -.17***; non-traditional r= -.10***), and higher quality adult romantic relationships (traditional r= -.14***; non-traditional r= -.20***). Participants were also more likely to have more economic resources if they did not use drugs (traditional: income r=-.20***; homeownership r=-.12***) (non-traditional: income r=-.30***; homeownership r= -.14**).

In the next analytic stage, the robustness of the relevance of childhood family relations, adult child-parent relationships, adult romantic relationships for adult self-concept will be tested, net of economic resources, drug use, and gender. In keeping with the research

design, separate multivariate regression analyses will be run for those raised in traditional and non-traditional families.

Multivariate Analyses

The linear regression presented in Table 2 estimated the impact of family (in childhood and adulthood) and romantic relationships on adult self-concept, net of economic resources, drug use, and gender. The analyses were disaggregated by conventional and non-conventional early family structures. Professional opinions of interviewees were used to illustrate and elaborate on the quantitative findings.

Three clear patterns about the adult self-concept emerged from the regression evidence presented in Table 2. For one, irrespective of the childhood family structure in which respondents were raised, participants who had quality romantic relationships (Traditional Family Beta= .36***; Non-traditional Beta= .34***) and supportive early family relations (Traditional Family Beta= .29***; Non-traditional Beta= .22***) were more likely, than not, to have a positive self-concept. However, confirming the second hypothesis, which was based on the Chicago School of symbolic interaction, it was adult romantic relationships that were more relevant to a positive or healthy adult self-concept (Conventional Family Beta=.36***; Non-conventional Family Beta=.34***), compared to childhood family relationships. A psychology professor from a local university, who was interviewed for this study, affirmed this finding. He noted, "there is no question that the here and now matters and there's no question that the earlier experience also matters" (Interviewee #1).

Table 2. Impacts of Childhood Family Relations, Adult Child-Parent Relationships, and Romantic Relationships on Self-Concept among adults raised in traditional or nontraditional families [1]: Beta Effects (β)

	Traditional Family Upbringing Beta (β)	Non-Traditional Family Upbringing Beta (β)
Childhood Family Relations	.29***	.22***
Adult Child-Parent Relationships	.04	-.02
Adult Romantic Relationships	.36***	.34***
Income	.14***	.15***
Drug Use	-.07**	-.07
Gender (Male)	.07**	.13***
(Constant)	18.213***	22.004***
Adjusted R^2	.36***	.31***
DF 1 & 2	6 & 1161	6 & 634

*** p <=.001; ** p <=.01; * p <=.05

[1] Index of Adult Self-Concept = Emotional State (11-48) (Positive = 48);
   Index of Childhood Family Relations = Index of Childhood Family Relations (4-32) (High Quality = 32);
   Index of Adult Child-Parent Relationships = Index of Current Child-Parent Relationships with Parent 1 + Index of Current Child-Parent Relationships with Parent 2 (14-70) (High Quality = 70);
   Index of Adult Romantic Relationships = Quality of Adult Romantic Relationships (0-33) (High Quality = 33);
   Household Income ranged from 1 (less than $5,000) to 13 (more than $200,000);
   Index of Drug Use = Marijuana + Other Illegal Drugs + Cigarettes (3-18);
   Gender: Male=1, Female=0.

Moreover, as predicted by the third hypothesis based on boundary limiting conditions, family relationships had a stronger impact on the adult self-concept of those who grew up in traditional families (Beta=.29***) than in non-traditional families (Beta=.22***). Providing a possible explanation for this boundary condition, a male psychiatrist (Interviewee #4) stressed the importance for children of having both a paternal and maternal role model. For example, a girl who grew up in a non-traditional family, specifically in a single-father household, could have struggled with identity issues because she most likely lacked a mother figure who could have guided her through important female milestones, such as puberty. Since conventional families include both a mother and father, children living in these situations are more likely to have a positive role model that can help them get through gender specific situations and turning points.

These regression results were diagrammed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Net (of economic resources, drug use, and gender) Impacts of Childhood Family, Current Child-Parent, and Adult Romantic Relationships 2014 New Family Structures Survey (Beta Effects)[1]
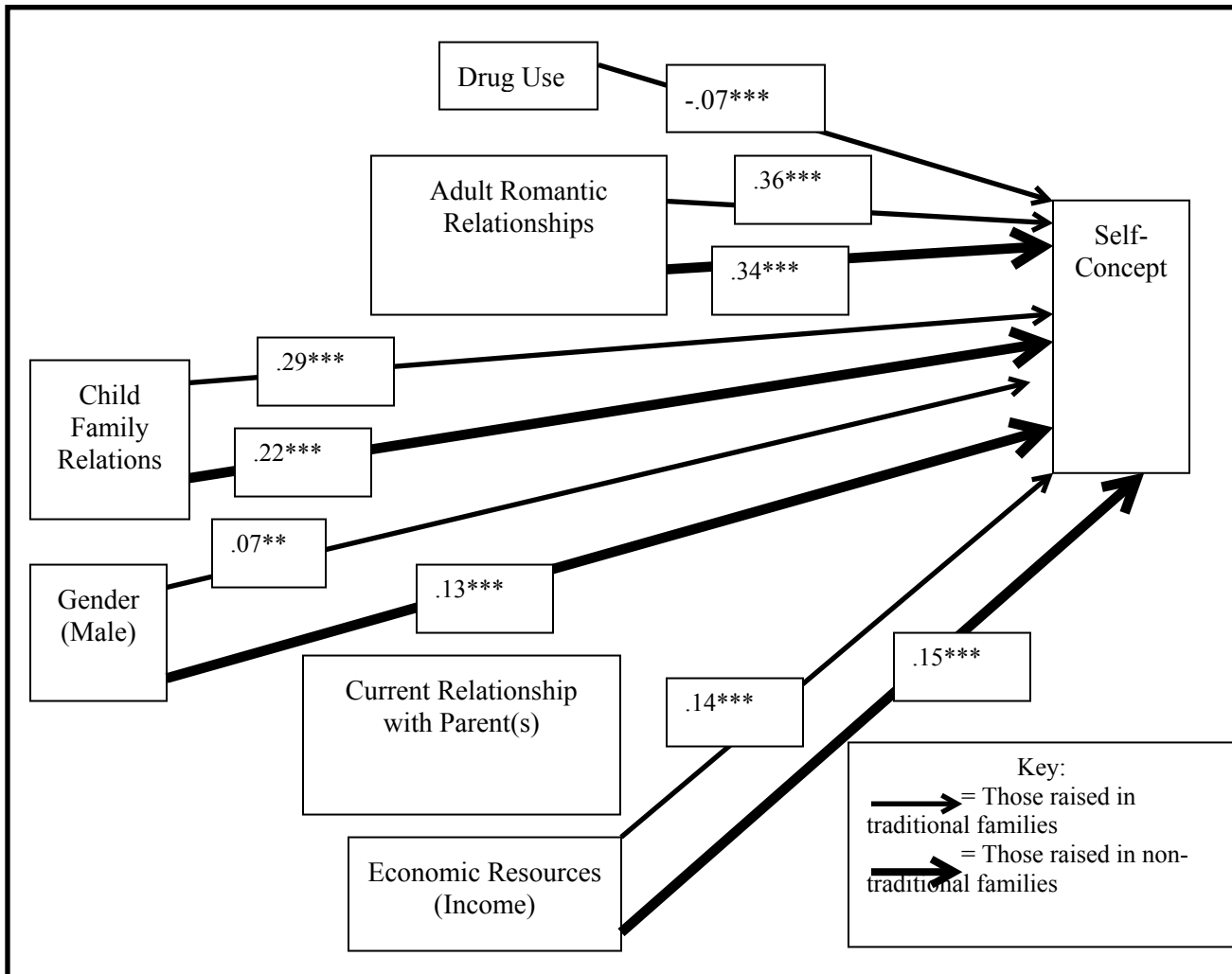
1. See Table 2 for variable coding and index construction.

113

Apart from the parent and romantic relationships, economic resources, sex, and drug use of the respondent were also important for adult self-concept. Those with more household economic resources, specifically income, had a more net positive self-concept in both groups (Traditional Family Beta= .14***; Non-traditional Beta=.15***). Additionally, male respondents were more likely to have a positive self-concept than females were, particularly if the men had grown up in a non-traditional family setting (Beta=.13***) than in traditional families (Beta=.07***).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Empirical Implications

Through survey analyses and qualitative interviews, this study revealed several interesting findings about relationships and self-concept. For one, irrespective of whether one was raised in a traditional or non-traditional family, both romantic relationships and early child relations shaped self-concept as an adult. But, secondly, romantic relationships proved to hold more weight for adult self-concept than early child relations. That is, those with quality romantic relationships were more likely to be emotionally healthy than those with quality early childhood relationships. However, more interesting, early family relations and romantic relationships were more influential on the self-concept of those raised in traditional families, compared to participants raised in non-traditional families. Additionally, regardless of family structure, higher household income or males reported better emotional well-being than lower income households and females, respectively. In contrast, for those raised in conventional families and who used drugs had a weaker self-concept.

Theoretical Implications

At a theoretical level, this finding supported the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism. Adult self-concept was shaped more by romantic connections made later in life than familial bonds in early childhood. Stated differently, adults who maintain high quality romantic relationships were more likely to be positive in their self-concept than adults who had high quality childhood family relations.

But, the findings also offered the opportunity to specify some of the boundary conditions, or limits, for the effects of early family and romantic relationships. While positive childhood family and romantic relations were relevant for healthy adult self-concept, regardless of family structure, the effects were slightly stronger if they were raised in traditional families than in non-traditional family settings. It is worth noting that several interviewees opined that the quality of family relationships was more important than the type of family structure. For instance, a marriage and family therapist commented that the type of "family is less relevant than the consistency and love the

parent(s) provide" (interviewee #8). Perhaps, these professional opinions might explain why the family structure differences were not stronger than they were. In the final analyses, by separating the quality of relationships during childhood from those formed in one's adulthood, layered across childhood family structures, a richer model of relational impacts on the adult self-concept was developed.

Future Directions

Like most social science research, this study was not without limitations. As evidenced by the adjusted R^2 of .36 for respondents raised in traditional families and .31 for those who grew up in non-traditional families, less than 40 percent of the variability in adult self-concept was explained by early childhood relations, current child-parent relationships, and adult romantic relationships. For one, this research examined just two of the many different types of relationships people develop and cultivate throughout their lifetime. As noted by the psychiatrist, every relationship or interaction can have an impact on one's emotional well-being or self-concept (Interviewee #4). Therefore, future research should consider additional relationships, such as friendships and work relationships that could add to the shaping of an adult's self-concept. Further, while this research looked at adult and childhood relationships separately, six of the eight interviewees noted the cumulative effects of childhood experiences on all future relationships (Interviewees #1 and #3 to #7). Thus, longitudinal analysis of how adult relationships mediate the impacts of early childhood experiences as an adult molds his or her self-concept is warranted.

APPENDICES

Appendix A Table: Control Variables

Concepts	Dimensions	Variables (Questions)	Values/Responses	Statistics	
				Traditional Family Upbringing (n=1726)	Non-Traditional Family Upbringing (n=987)
Economic Resources	Household Income[1]	Q43.[2]	1=Less than $5,000	5.4%	11.9%***
			7=$30,000 to $39,999	10.4	9.2
			8=$40,000 to $49,999	11.2	8.2
			9=$50,000 to $74,999	18.5	14.6
			10=$75,000 to $99,999	10.8	8.7
	Homeownership	Q38. Is your house, apartment, or residence owned or being bought by you?	0=No 1=Yes	51.2% 48.8	61.1%*** 38.9
Drug Use[3]	Marijuana	Q82. Answer these questions using the answer scale below. E. Use marijuana?	1=Never 2=Once a month or less 6=Every day or almost every day	83.8% 6.6 2.9	74.9%*** 8.1 7.4
	Other Illegal Drugs	F. Use other illegal drugs (e.g., cocaine, heroin, crystal meth, mushrooms, etc.)?	1=Never	95.5%	92.9%**
	Cigarettes	G. Smoke cigarettes?	1=Never 2=Once a month or less 6=Every day or almost every day	75.4 5.0 12.9	63.6*** 5.7 21.3
	Index of Drug Use[4]		Mean (SD) Min-Max	4.4(2.6) 3-18	5.3(3.3)*** 3-18
Gender			0=Female 1=Male	66.5% 33.5	70.1%*** 29.8

*** p <=.001; ** p <=.01; * p <=.05

[1.] Q43. Thinking about your income and the income of everyone who lives in your household and contributes to the household budget, what was your total household income before taxes and deductions last year (that is, in 2010)? Include all sources of income, including child support payments, and untaxed sources, if applicable. Don't count roommates or anyone who does not contribute to your household income.

[2.] Responses that accounted for less than 10% of sample were not presented in Economic Resources;

[3.] Responses that accounted for less than 5% of the sample were not presented in Drug Use;

[4.] The indicators are significantly correlated at the .01 level (r^1 and r^2=.429; r^1 and r^3=.214; r^2 and r^3= .321), so they were combined into Index of Drug Use = Q82_E+Q82_F+Q82_G.

Appendix B
Letter of Consent and Interview Protocol

Letter of Consent

Dear _____:

I am a Sociology Senior working on my Research Capstone Paper under the direction of Professor Marilyn Fernandez in the Department of Sociology at Santa Clara University.

You were selected for this interview, because of your knowledge of and experience working in the area of <u>family and romantic relationships.</u>

I am requesting your participation, which will involve responding to questions about <u>family and romantic relationships and their consequences (positive and negative) for an adult's self concept</u> and will last about 20 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose to not participate or to withdraw from the interview at any time. The results of the research study may be presented at SCU's Annual Anthropology/Sociology Undergraduate Research Conference and published (in a Sociology department publication). Pseudonyms will be used in lieu of your name and the name of your organization in the written paper. You will also not be asked (nor recorded) questions about your specific characteristics, such as age, race, sex, religion.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call/email me at ___ or Dr. Fernandez at ___

Sincerely,

Danae Dickson

By signing below you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

_____   _____   _____
Signature   Printed Name   Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, through Office of Research Compliance and Integrity at (408) 554-5591.

Interview Protocol

Interview Date and Time: _____
Respondent ID#: __ (1-8)

17. What is the TYPE Agency/Organization/Association/Institution where you learned about (and/or worked) with this issue: _____
18. What is your position in this organization? _____
19. How long have you been in this position and in this organization? _____
20. Based on your expertise in family and romantic relationships, how do these relationships affect adult self-concept and/or emotional well-being?

21. In your opinion, which of the two have more of an effect (or are more relevant) on the adult self-concept, or emotional well-being? Early or later relationships?

   a. Could you expand a bit more?

22. [If the respondent does not bring up your independent concepts as potential causes), PROBE:
   a. How about early childhood family relationships?
   b. How about adult romantic relationships?
   c. How about current parent relationships?

23. Do you think the type of family structure a child grows up in affects his or her self-concept or emotional well-being?
24. Do you believe children's relationships with their mom or dad impact them differently? Does the gender of the parent matter?
25. Is there anything else about this issue/topic I should know more about?

Thank you very much for your time. If you wish to see a copy of my final paper, I would be glad to share it with you at the end of the winter quarter. If you have any further questions or comments for me, I can be contacted at _____. Or if you wish to speak to my faculty advisor, Dr. Marilyn Fernandez, she can be reached at _____.

Descriptive Statistics for Childhood Family Relations: Parent 1 and 2;
New Family Structures Study, 2011- 2012

Variables (Questions)	Values/Response	Statistics[1]			
		Parent 1 (Maternal)		Parent 2 (Paternal)	
		Non-Traditional (n=854-1002)	Traditional (n=1619-1763)	Non-Traditional (n=854-1002)	Traditional (n=1619-1763)
Q26.[2] My parent:	3=Sometimes			29.0	30.3***
A. Knew who my friends were.	4=Frequently	36.7	39.4	26.1	31.1
	5=Always	40.5	46.6		
B. Knew what I was doing after school.	3=Sometimes			23.5***	30.6***
	4= Frequently	34.1	39.4	28.9	27.8
	5=Always	34.2	42.0		
C. Knew how I spent my money.	3=Sometimes	25.1	22.4	23.6	31.4***
	4= Frequently	30.5	39.8		
	5=Always	27.2	28.8		
D. Talked with (parent) about my school work.	4= Frequently	23.5	30.4	26.4	31.5***
	5=Always	31.0	34.3	17.4	23.0
E. Asked me about my day at school.	3=Sometimes			24.6	29.4***
	4= Frequently	22.4	27.9	18.7	21.2
	5=Always	35.6	43.8		
F. Kept secrets from (parent) about what I did	2=Sometimes	36.9	36.9	29.9	38.2***
	3=Rarely	23.7	30.7	19.1	24.6
G. When I got home, I told me (parent) what I did with friends.	2=Rarely	20.0	14.6	22.9	11.5***
	3=Sometimes	33.1	35.1	23.8	24.9
	4= Frequently	25.9	32.3	28.8	36.1
H. talked with the parents of my friends.	1=Never			34.7	21.1***
	2=Rarely	22.5	20.8	24.3	30.1
	3=Sometimes	29.5	33.7	21.4	27.8
I. Talked with my friends when they came over	3=Sometimes	22.9	21.3	25.2	33.1***
	4= Frequently	26.5	30.0	20.9	23.7
	5=Always	35.4	38.8		
J. was warm and responsive; relationship was comfortable.	3=Sometimes	20.6	19.2	24.8	26.5***
	4= Frequently	25.2	28.3	21.2	28.1
	5=Always	35.3	42.1	23.4	27.0
Index of Childhood Parent 1[3] and Parent 2[4]	Mean/ $\bar{x}$ (SD)	34.4(8.9)	36.9(7.5)***	17.1(11.6)	26.2(11.9)***
	Min-Max	9-49	9-49	9-49	9-49

*** p <=.001; ** p <=.01; * p <=.05; test of differences between Parent 1 (or Parent 2) in traditional versus non-Traditional Families

[1]. Responses that accounted for less than 25% of the sample were omitted from the table;

[2]. Q26. Decide how often these things occurred in your home while growing up. Select the response that represents how often this happened in your home, using the scale spanning from "never" to "always".

[3]. The indicators are significantly correlated at the .01 (r = .166 - .737), so they were combined into Index of Childhood Family Relations Parent 1 = Q26_Parent1_A + Q26_Parent1_B + Q26_Parent1_C + Q26_Parent1_D + Q26_Parent1_E + Recoded_Q26_Parent1_F + Q26_Parent1_H + Q26_Parent1_I + Q26_Parent1_J

[4]. The indicators are significantly correlated at the .01 level (r = .045 - .794), so they were combined into Index of Childhood Family Relations Parent 2 = Q26_Parent2_A + Q26_Parent2_B + Q26_Parent2_C + Q26_Parent2_D + Q26_Parent2_E + Recoded_Q26_Parent2_F + Q26_Parent2_H + Q26_Parent2_I + Q26_Parent2_J

Appendix D

Correlation Matrix of Indices of Adult Self Concept, Child Family Relations, Current Child Parent Relationships, Adult Romantic Relationships, Economic Resources, Drug Use, and Gender[1]:
New Family Structures Study, 2011- 2012
(Traditional below the 1 diagonal; Non-traditional above the 1 diagonal)

	Adult Self-Concept	Childhood Family	Current Child-Parent	Romantic Relationships	Income	Home-ownership	Drug Use	Gender
Adult Self-Concept	1.0	.31***	.03	.44***	.29***	.07*	-.23***	.11***
Childhood Family	.39***	1.0	.12***	.21***	.18***	.01	-.1***	.06
Current Child-Parent	.15***	.16***	1.0	.02	.04	.05	.05	-.11***
Romantic Relation-ships	.46***	.22***	.05	1.0	.16***	.08*	-.19***	.06
Household Income	.29***	.21***	.19***	.19***	1.0	.35***	-.3***	.12***
Home-ownership	.13***	.05*	.36***	.09**	.36***	1.0	-.14***	.09**
Drug Use	-.21***	-.17***	-.05	-.14***	-.20***	-.12***	1.0	.1**
Gender	.06*	.01	-.11***	.04	.06*	-.01	.07**	1.0

*** p <=.001; ** p <=.01; * p <=.05
[1] Index of Adult Self-Concept = Emotional State (11-48) (Positive = 48)
  Index of Childhood Family Relations = Index of Childhood Family Relations (4-32) (High Quality = 32)
  Index of Adult Child-Parent Relationships = Index of Current Child-Parent Relationships with Parent 1 + Index of
    Current Child-Parent Relationships with Parent 2 (14-70) (High Quality = 70)
  Index of Adult Romantic Relationships = Quality of Adult Romantic Relationships (0-33) (High Quality = 33)
  Household Income ranged from 1 (less than $5,000) to 13 (more than $200,000)
  Index of Drug Use = Marijuana + Other Illegal Drugs + Cigarettes (3-18)
  Gender: Male=1; Female=0

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Interviewee #2. December 4, 2014. Therapist.

Interviewee #3. February 12, 2015. Therapist.

Interviewee #4. February 22, 2015. Psychiatrist.

Interviewee #5. February 24, 2015. Psychology Professor.

Interviewee #6. March 2, 2015. Therapist.

Interviewee #7. March 3, 2015. Psychology Professor.

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