



2020

Emotional Closeness within Romantic Relationships: Is There Transmission Between Generations?

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Digital Object Identifier: <https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2020.103>

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EMOTIONAL CLOSENESS WITHIN
ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: IS THERE
TRANSMISSION BETWEEN
GENERATIONS?

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Family Sciences in the
College of Agriculture, Food and Environment
at the University of Kentucky

By

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Lexington, Kentucky

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2020

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

EMOTIONAL CLOSENESS WITHIN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: IS THERE TRANSMISSION BETWEEN GENERATIONS?

This study tested the existence of intergenerational transmission of romantic emotional closeness using Galovan and Schramm's (2018) model of relationship flourishing as a theoretical backbone. Romantic emotional closeness in the present study included intimacy (i.e., self-disclosure), admiration (i.e., appreciation expression), and dyadic coping. Couples among three generations from the Panel of Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (Brüderl et al., 2013) were examined to test whether romantic emotional closeness in the first generation predicted romantic emotional closeness in the second generation, and whether that of the second generation predicted that of the third. Regressions within a partial latent model showed that intergenerational transmission existed between the first and second generation but not between the second and third generation. One possible explanation for this finding is a small sample size within the third generation, which limited the data used. Implications for future research, clinicians, and theorists are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Intergenerational Transmission, Emotional Closeness, Intimacy, Appreciation, Support, Romantic Relationships

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EMOTIONAL CLOSENESS WITHIN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS:
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was made possible through the support and insight of some scholarly models. Nathan Wood, my thesis chair, provided much needed patience and support as I tried attempt after attempt of analyses with the dataset used. He maintained hope and confidence in me as I began losing hope on the analysis. In addition, Bruce Ross provided helpful and timely insight especially into the written portion of the thesis. Diana Haleman, as well, provided encouraging support through my thesis process and helpful edits to my thesis paper.

I also received support from others outside my Thesis Committee. My husband, Jason Fey, stood by my side through both the encouraging and discouraging days of the thesis process and reminded me of the bigger picture through it all. I also want to acknowledge the creators of the German Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics, as well as those that carried out the interviews: I would not have been able to conduct the study I wanted without them.

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CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 Introduction

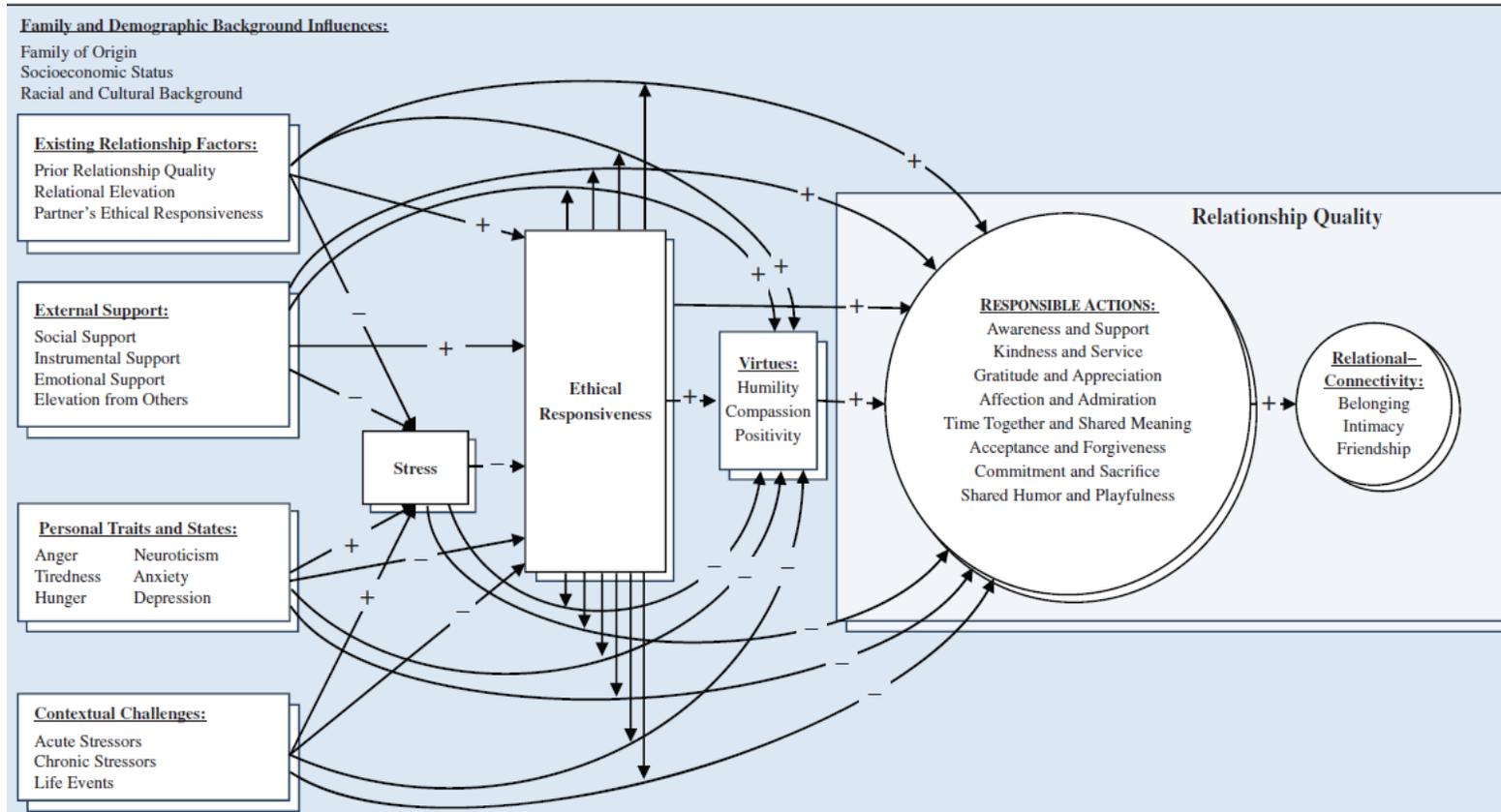
Expressing emotions is essential for romantic relationships, as it has been associated with high sexual satisfaction and dyadic adjustment, as well as low depression scores (Awada, Bergeron, Steben, Hainault, & McDuff, 2014). The level of emotional closeness between partners seems to be influenced by the partners' family of origin (Ehrensaft, Knous-Westfall, & Cohen, 2011; Seiffge-Krenke, Overbeek, & Vermulst, 2010; Walper & Wendt, 2015). It may be that emotional closeness in romantic relationships is passed down between generations. The present study used Galovan and Schramm's (2018) model of relationship flourishing as support for assessing whether emotional closeness is transmitted across generations from a longitudinal secondary dataset.

1.2 Theoretical Model

Galovan and Schramm (2018) created a model of relationship flourishing that includes many factors that influence a couple's relationship quality (see Figure 1). Their model posits that contextual factors (e.g., family of origin background, external support from others, personality traits, stressors) influence one's ethical responsiveness to their partner (described more below), which influences overall relationship quality.

Ethical responsiveness in their model refers to the need for partners to see one another as unique and complex individuals and to respond to one another in a way that meets their partner's needs and desires. In fact, the authors state that the way one responds to their partner is evidence of the way one views their partner. Galovan and Schramm (2018) draw from Buber's (1958) idea of *I-Thou* versus *I-It* relationships. In *I-*

Figure 1.1 Galovan and Schramm's (2018) Model of Relationship Flourishing



Thou relationships, partners are “not known as an abstraction or reduction to categories of identity... Rather, the [partner] is experienced in the here and now as a person in his or her entirety” (Fife, 2015, p. 213). Thus, in I-Thou relationships partners express not only responsive behaviors toward one another but also responsive hearts. Having a responsive heart, according to Galovan and Schramm (2018), means truly and authentically seeing one’s partner as a unique individual, rather than solely treating them like one. The authors of the relationship flourishing model say that true connection is developed out of a genuine responsive heart toward one’s partner.

Ethical responsiveness is also a catalyst through which various individual and dyadic contextual factors influence relationship quality. Some of the contextual factors Galovan and Schramm (2018) discuss as influencing ethical responsiveness and relationship quality include prior state of relationship, personality factors, external support, stressors, and others. One such contextual factor is family-of-origin experience. This may include parental influence on children, as well as the parents’ own romantic relationships and ethical responsiveness.

The present study uses Galovan and Schramm’s (2018) relationship flourishing model to understand emotional closeness in romantic relationships from an intergenerational perspective. Family-of-origin experience—specifically, parents’ romantic emotional closeness—was observed as a contextual factor that may influence partners’ ethical responsiveness to one another. In romantic relationships, ethical responsiveness may be present in a number of different ways: for example, in partners listening to shared feelings or expressing appreciation. Ultimately, according to the relationship flourishing model, these things influence partners’ relationship quality.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Romantic Emotional Closeness

In the present study emotional closeness encompasses self-disclosure (referred to in this study as *intimacy*), appreciation expression (referred to as *admiration*), and responsive support (i.e., *dyadic coping*). Each of these factors has been associated with relationship quality and individual well-being. Partners who self-disclose their personal thoughts and feelings to their romantic partner reported higher relationship quality across time (Tan, Overall, & Taylor, 2012). Self-disclosure to a partner has also been associated with higher relationship well-being, daily affect (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004), sleep quality and efficiency (Kane, Slatcher, Reynolds, Repetti, & Robles, 2014), and lower physiological stress responses (Kane, McCall, Collins, & Blascovich, 2012; Slatcher, Robles, Repetti, & Fellows, 2010). Disclosure about sexual problems was related to higher relationship satisfaction and closeness (Coffelt & Hess, 2014; Merwin, O'Sullivan, & Rosen, 2017), greater sexual functioning, and lower depressive symptoms (Merwin et al., 2017). Self-concealment, on the other hand, was negatively related to relationship satisfaction, commitment, and healthy conflict (Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012).

Expression of appreciation has also been linked to positive personal and relationship outcomes. Perceived partner's appreciation predicted higher levels of sexual functioning and relationship quality (Algoe, Fredrickson, & Gable, 2013; Walters, Lykins, & Graham, 2019). Individuals whose partner validated who they are as a person experienced increased relationship quality and higher likelihood of responding constructively to their partner's negative behaviors (Gordon & Chen, 2010). Those who

expressed gratitude toward their partner felt more comfortable voicing relationship concerns and had more positive perceptions of their partner three months later (Lambert & Fincham, 2011). Each additional day partners engaged in an exercise of expressing gratitude toward one another was related to increased relationship satisfaction, intimacy, and positive emotion in female partners (Parnell, Wood, & Scheel, *in review*). Each of these findings suggests expressing appreciation benefits both the receiver and the expresser in a romantic relationship.

Responsive support is another factor of emotional closeness that seems to influence relationship quality and well-being. Listening attentively to one's partner has been related to higher relationship satisfaction (Kuhn, Bradbury, Nussbeck, & Bodenmann, 2018). Dyadic coping, a term used to reflect empathic understanding, comforting words, and practical support, was found to have many beneficial outcomes for couples. Dyadic coping was associated with higher marital satisfaction (Brown, Whiting, Kahumoku-Fessler, Witting, & Jensen, 2018; Pankrath et al., 2016; Sim, Cordier, Vaz, Parsons, & Falkmer, 2017) and better marital adjustment (Costa-Ramalho, Marques-Pinto, & Ribeiro, 2017; Molgora, Acquati, Fenaroli, & Saita, 2019). Dyadic coping has also been found to buffer the impact of stressful events, such as infertility, loss of a child, or financial strain, on dyadic adjustment (Albuquerque, Narciso, & Pereira, 2018; Chaves, Canavarro, Moura-Ramos, 2019) and relationship satisfaction (Karademas & Roussi, 2017). Evidently, self-disclosure, expression of appreciation, and supportive coping were each associated with individual and romantic relationship well-being.

1.3.2 Parental Influence on Children's Romantic Relationships

Evidence suggests parents influence their adult children's romantic relationships, either positively or negatively. Increases in parent-child intimacy predicted similar increases in children's romantic relationships (Johnson, Galovan, Horne, Min, & Walper, 2017). Similarly, both adolescents' and parents' reports of parent-child relationship quality predicted adult children's intimate relationship quality 13 years later (Johnson & Galambos, 2014). Additionally, parental warmth, with family cohesion present, was related to higher levels of children's romantic relationship quality (Parade, Supple, & Helms, 2012). High support and low conflict in both mother-child and father-child relationships were associated with high connectedness in children's romantic relationships (Seiffge-Krenke, et al., 2010). Similarly, high support from parents predicted psychological and couple adjustment in survivors of child abuse (Godbout, Briere, Sabourin, & Lussier, 2014). Perceived helpfulness from talking to fathers about the future, personal thoughts, and worries has been related to higher romantic relationship satisfaction in adult children (Lee, 2018). Evidently, healthy parent-child relationships seem to have a positive influence on children's romantic relationships.

Parent-child relationships may also impact children's romantic relationships negatively. Low mother-adolescent relationship quality was associated with low romantic quality among adolescents (Goldberg, Tienda, Eilers, & McLanahan, 2019). Increases in conflict among parents and children were associated with increased conflict among children and their partners (Johnson et al., 2017). On the other hand, distant father-adolescent relationships have been linked to more anxious love, emotional extremes, intense preoccupation, and jealousy in romantic relationships during young

adulthood several years later (Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2010). Additionally, a child's emotional insecurity with their mother was linked to poor relatedness, negative conflict, emotional insecurity, and autonomy in their romantic relationship (Walper & Wendt, 2015). Harsh parenting has also been related to poorer romantic relationship satisfaction among children (Parade et al., 2012). As these findings suggest, parents seem to impact their children's romantic relationships.

1.3.3 Romantic Relationships in Parents and Children

Parents' romantic relationships also seem to impact the romantic relationships of their children. Specifically, conflict between parents has been related to poorer communication, insecure attachment, and more favorable attitudes toward divorce in adult children (Braithwaite, Doxey, Dowdle, & Fincham, 2016). Similarly, children of conflictual, low committed parents were more likely to experience lower satisfaction and stability in their own romantic relationships (Braithwaite et al., 2016). Instability in maternal romantic relationships was associated with low romantic relationship quality and more romantic partners in adolescence (Goldberg et al., 2019). Parental emotional involvement and closeness to one another has been associated with their adolescents' romantic quality three years later (Ehrensaft et al., 2011). The findings from these studies support the existence of influence between parental romantic relationships and children's romantic relationships.

1.3.4 Intergenerational Transmission

The behaviors and patterns of one's parents undoubtedly influence the patterns of their children and grandchildren. Intergenerational transmission (Pope & Mueller, 1976) is a term used to describe how patterns transfer from parents to children across multiple

generations. Parents transmit certain characteristics (e.g., emotional closeness) to their children, who transmit those to their children, and so on. Examples of family patterns that transfer from parents to children are violence and abuse (Delsol & Margolin, 2003; Maxwell, Callahan, Ruggero, & Janis, 2016; Skuja & Halford, 2004). Anxiety and stress have also been found to transmit between generations (Aktar, Bockstaele, Perez-Edgar, Wiers, & Bogels, 2018; Bowers & Yehuda, 2016).

Some factors related to emotional closeness have also been shown to transfer from parents to children. Both maternal and paternal emotion dysregulation were uniquely linked to children's emotion dysregulation (Li, Li, Wu, & Wang, 2019). Emotional variables within a parent-child relationship seem to pass on to other generations, as well. Mothers' perceptions of the level of emotional warmth in their relationship with their children were predictive of the child's perception of emotional warmth with their own children 28 years later (Goldberg et al., 2019; Savelieva et al., 2016). Additionally, children's reports of emotional closeness, conflict, and ambivalence with their parents have been associated with the parents' reports of emotional closeness, conflict, and ambivalence with their own parents (Hank, Salzburger, & Silverstein, 2017). Similarly, individuals who reported more positive and less negative ties with their parents also reported similar ties with their children (Birditt, Tighe, Fingerman, & Zarit, 2012).

Aspects of romantic relationship health seem to be transmitted across generations. For example, adolescents of mothers with low romantic relationship quality (i.e., instability, low general quality, and intimate partner violence) also reported low relationship quality in their own romantic relationships (Goldberg et al., 2019). A similar association has been tested longitudinally: parents' emotional involvement with their

romantic partners directly predicted female offspring's romantic relationship quality several years later (Ehrensaft et al., 2011). As can be seen in previous literature, emotional closeness within romantic relationships is associated with relationship health and may be passed on from previous generations.

CHAPTER 2. THE PRESENT STUDY

2.1 Hypotheses

While several studies have looked at intergenerational transmission of intimate partner violence, relational quality, and other factors, very few studies have investigated the existence of intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness in romantic relationships. In the present study, I tested the intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness—including intimacy (i.e., self-disclosure), admiration (i.e., expression of appreciation), and supportive dyadic coping—across three generations. I hypothesized that emotional closeness between grandparents (Generation 1) would be positively associated with emotional closeness in their adult children (i.e., “anchors”) and children’s partners (i.e., “anchor’s partners”; G2) four years later. I also hypothesized that emotional closeness between anchors and their partners (G2) would be positively associated with emotional closeness between their children and children’s partners (G3) one year later.

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 Sample Characteristics

A total of 14,325 participants were included in the present study. The sample consisted of three generations: grandparents, anchors and partners, and children and their partners. Grandparents ($n = 3020$) consisted of mostly female (58.5%) participants, ranging in age from 37 to 90 years old with a mean age of 55.95 years old. The grandmothers ranged in age from 37 to 81, with a mean age of 54.78 years old. The grandfathers were between 38 and 90 years old, with a mean age of 57.45 years old. The anchors the second generation consisted of mostly female (57.4%) participants born in

West Germany (67.8%) or East Germany (24.2%). Their ages ranged from 22 to 46, with a mean of 34.6 years old. Partners ($n = 3805$) in the second generation were mostly male (56.8%) and ranged in age from 18 to 107 with a mean of 36.59 years old. The third generation also consisted of mostly West German participants (97.2%). The adult children ($n = 93$) were mostly female (54.1%), ranging in age from 18 to 23, with a mean age of 19.58 years old. The adult children's partners were mostly male (62%) between ages 18 to 53 with a mean age of 21.39 years old.

2.2.2 Procedures

I used the Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (i.e., Pairfam; Brüderl et al., 2013), a longitudinal German dataset that takes a life course approach to collect information from individuals, their partners, their parents, and their children. Pairfam follows participants from three birth cohorts: adolescents born between 1991 and 1993 (age 15 to 17 at baseline), young adults born between 1981 and 1983 (age 25 to 27 at baseline), and middle age adults born between 1971 and 1973 (age 35 to 37 at baseline; Huinink et al., 2011). The original sample was gathered through stratified random sampling based on the federal states of Germany, and city administrations used population registers to select the sample. A total of over 12,000 individuals (i.e., “anchors”) were interviewed annually starting in 2008 and ending (anticipating) in 2022 and are compensated €10. Anchors' partners, parents, and children are interviewed annually starting in the second wave and are compensated €5. Each interview lasts about one hour and involves computer-based assistance.

The Pairfam dataset was chosen for the present study because it captures personal, intimate, and intergenerational relationship experiences and includes a national random

sample. An advantage to using this dataset is that partners from the same relationships are asked the same questions, which allows for dyadic analysis. Additionally, anchors are matched to their parents and their children. This is helpful because it allows for examination of entire families, rather than assessing parents and children across relationships. I analyzed data from Waves 5, 9, and 10 which were taken in 2014, 2018, and 2019, respectively. For the present study, inclusion criteria were anchors who had a partner at the time of the interview and whose parents and children were also interviewed. Participants who were younger than 18 years were excluded from the analyses of the present study.

Scales of intimacy and admiration were taken from three generations: the anchors' parents (both parents and their parents' partners), the anchor and partner, and the anchor's children and children's partners. Additionally, scales for dyadic coping were taken for the anchors and their partners, as well as the children and children's partners. Dyadic coping would have been included for all romantic relationship pairs across generations, but anchors' parents and parents' partners were not asked questions regarding dyadic coping. Pairfam has been assessed and upheld for external validity through comparison to the German census, the German Family Survey, and the German Socioeconomic Panel (Brüderl et al., 2015).

2.2.3 Measures

2.2.3.1 Intimacy

Romantic relationship intimacy in each romantic pair was assessed using the intimacy subscale of the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 2010). The intimacy subscale includes two questions: "How often do you tell [name of

current partner] what you're thinking?" and "How often do you share your secrets and private feelings with [name of current partner]?" Participants gave responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *never* (scored as 1) to *always* (5). In the sample used for the present study, the intimacy scale shows good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.776$ for the first generation, $\alpha = 0.748$ for the second generation, and $\alpha = 0.809$ for the third generation in the present sample used.

2.2.3.2 Admiration

Both partners in each romantic pair were asked two questions from the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 2009) to assess for admiration: "How often does [name of current partner] show recognition for the things you do?" and "How often does [name of current partner] show that he/she appreciates you?" Participants answered on a 5-point Likert scale was ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5). In the sample used in the present study, the admiration scale showed good internal reliability: $\alpha = 0.854$ for the first generation, $\alpha = 0.812$ for the second generation, and $\alpha = 0.718$ for the third generation.

2.2.3.3 Dyadic Coping

Supportive dyadic coping was assessed in anchor-partner relationships and child-partner relationships using two questions, with three subscales each, from the Dyadic Coping Questionnaire (Bodenmann, Arista, Walsh, & Randall, 2018). Each partner was asked "When your partner is stressed out, how often do you react in the following ways?" Sub questions consisted of letting your partner know you understand them, listening and giving them the chance to express themselves, and supporting them in concrete ways. Each partner was also asked "When you are stressed out, how often does your partner

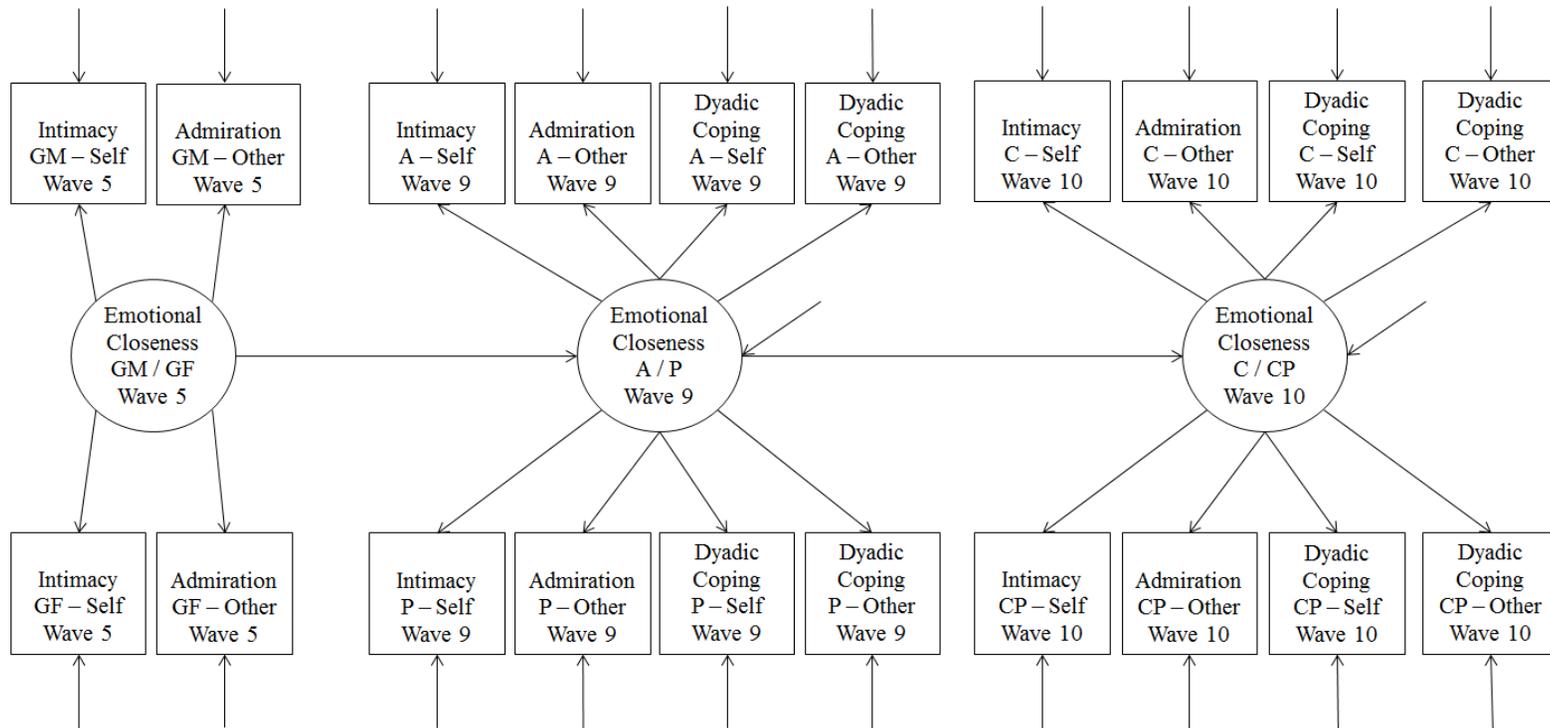
react in the following ways?” with the same sub questions, but worded to reflect what their partner does. Following this format allows for actor and partner effects to more accurately assess dyadic coping in the relationship. All items are answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5). The mean of each item is used as the total score for the dyadic coping scale. The Cronbach’s alphas represented good internal consistency in the present sample for actor and partner effects: Actor effects showed $\alpha = 0.786$ for the second generation and $\alpha = 0.718$ for the third generation, while partner effects showed $\alpha = 0.860$ for the second generation and $\alpha = 0.799$ for the third generation.

2.3 Analytic Procedures

Common fate modeling was used in the present study (see Figure 2.1). For each variable, both partner’s answers in each romantic pair were combined into a single, latent variable that was used in the analyses. A common fate model was used because the partners were reporting on the same variables that exist on the couple level (Galovan et al., 2017). “The two partners do not influence each other; rather, the same variable or force influences both partners” (Galovan et al., 2017). As previously stated, literature has focused mostly on one parent’s influence on their children’s romantic relationship. By using a common fate model, the present study extends this literature by examining the conjoint influence of both parents in one latent model.

I used structural equation modeling to test the statistical similarity between emotional closeness of romantic relationships within three generations: parents’ romantic relationship, anchor and partner relationship, and children’s romantic relationship. SPSS and Amos was used to analyze all data. Goodness of fit was used to assess the similarity of emotional closeness between the three generations, in order to assess whether

Figure 2.1 Original Proposed Intergenerational Latent Model



Note. GM = grandmother, GF = grandfather, A = anchor, P = partner, C = child, CP = child's partner, – Self = self-reported, – Other = partner-reported

intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness exists. A model is regarded as a good fit if includes these characteristics: χ^2 is nonsignificant, CFI >.95, RMSEA <.06 (Hu & Bentler, 1998; 1999).

2.4 Results

Correlations were analyzed on all variables used in the final model (see Table 2.1). Several correlations were found between various emotional closeness variables within one generation. In the second generation, both self- and partner-reports of the anchor's and partner's dyadic coping were each related to both partners' admiration scales. Among the third generation, the child's self-reported dyadic coping was related to their own intimacy ($r(63) = .63, p < .001$), while partner-reports of their dyadic coping were related to their admiration ($r(24) = .78, p < .001$). Additionally, the child's partner's admiration was positively related to self- ($r(24) = .39, p = .047$) and partner-reports of their own dyadic coping ($r(63) = .61, p < .001$).

2.4.1 Partner Variables

Many of the variables proposed were positively related to the same variables in one's partner. Grandmother's reports on the intimacy in their romantic relationship are positively related to grandfather's intimacy reports ($r(1240) = .38, p < .001$). Additionally, grandmother's and grandfather's intimacy are positively correlated to their own (respectively, $r(1235) = .39, p < .001$; $r(1241) = .38, p < .001$) and each other's admiration (respectively, $r(1693) = .63, p < .001$; $r(1363) = .61, p < .001$).

Anchor's intimacy is positively related to their partner's intimacy ($r(1150) = .25, p < .001$). Similarly, anchor's admiration is positively related to their partner's admiration ($r(1147) = .32, p < .001$). Anchor's intimacy is correlated with their own ($r(1148) = .32,$

Table 2.1 Summary of intercorrelations, sample means, and standard deviations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age (G1)	1													
2. GM Intimacy	-.094**	1												
3. GF Intimacy	0.02	.386**	1											
4. GM Admiration	.065**	.627**	.379**	1										
5. GF Admiration	0.048	.392**	.605**	.478**	1									
6. Age (G2)	.795**	-.071*	0.02	0.069	0.04	1								
7. A. Degree	0.051	.078**	-0.006	-0.041	0.047	-.070**	1							
8. A. Intimacy	-.125**	.128*	0.11	0.081	.107*	-.113**	.072**	1						
9. P. Intimacy	-0.021	-0.019	0.022	-.136*	0.017	-.105**	.063*	.250**	1					
10. A. Admiration	-61	0.029	0.017	0.035	0.046	0.026	0.033	.323**	.496**	1				
11. P. Admiration	-.182**	.063	0.103	0.099	0.09	-.65**	0.036	.517**	.330**	.383**	1			
12. C. Age (G3)	0.053	-0.118	-0.197	-0.207	-0.152	.201*	0.011	0.053	0.033	.223*	0.157	1		
13. C. degree	0.484	-0.095	-0.024	0.396	0.136	-0.004	0.052	0.117	0.155	.239*	0.014	.243**	1	
14. C. Intimacy	0.215	0.192	0.87	0.522	0.102	-0.233	0.182	0.153	0.426	-0.266	0.202	-0.317	.317*	1
<i>M</i>	55.95	3.523	3.439	3.352	3.513	36.12	-	3.657	3.588	3.448	3.639	19.58	-	4.086
<i>SD</i>	8.023	0.841	0.815	0.868	0.768	8.278	-	0.747	0.808	0.792	0.735	1.478	-	0.75

$p < .001$) and their partner's admiration ($r(1940) = .52, p < .001$). Self- and partner-reports on anchor's dyadic coping is related to self- (respectively, $r(1156) = .25, p < .001$; $r(1159) = .63, p < .001$) and partner-reports (respectively, $r(1943) = .65, p < .001$; $r(1157) = .32, p < .001$) of their partner's dyadic coping. Finally, in the second generation, both partner's intimacy and admiration are each positively related to self- and partner-reports of their own and their partner's dyadic coping.

In the third generation, the child's self-reported dyadic coping is related to their reports of their partner's dyadic coping ($r(63) = .70, p < .001$). Additionally, partner-reports of the child's dyadic coping are related to the partner's reports of their own dyadic coping ($r(24) = .53, p < .001$). The child's intimacy is related to their partner's admiration ($r(65) = .61, p < .001$) and partner-reported dyadic coping ($r(63) = .50, p < .001$). Similarly, the child's partner's admiration is related to their self-reported dyadic coping ($r(16) = .47, p = .05$).

2.4.2 Parent–Child Variables

In addition to correlations between partners of the same generation, there were also significant correlations between generations. Specifically, grandmother's intimacy is related to the anchor's intimacy four years later ($r(373) = .13, p = .013$); grandmother's admiration is negatively related to anchor's partner's intimacy ($r(217) = -.14, p = .044$). Similarly, grandfather's admiration was related to anchor's intimacy ($r(374) = .11, p = .038$), and grandfather's intimacy is related to partner-reports of anchor's dyadic coping ($r(219) = .14, p = .036$).

Among the second and third generation, partner-reports of anchor's dyadic coping are related to their child's reports of the child's partner's dyadic coping two years later

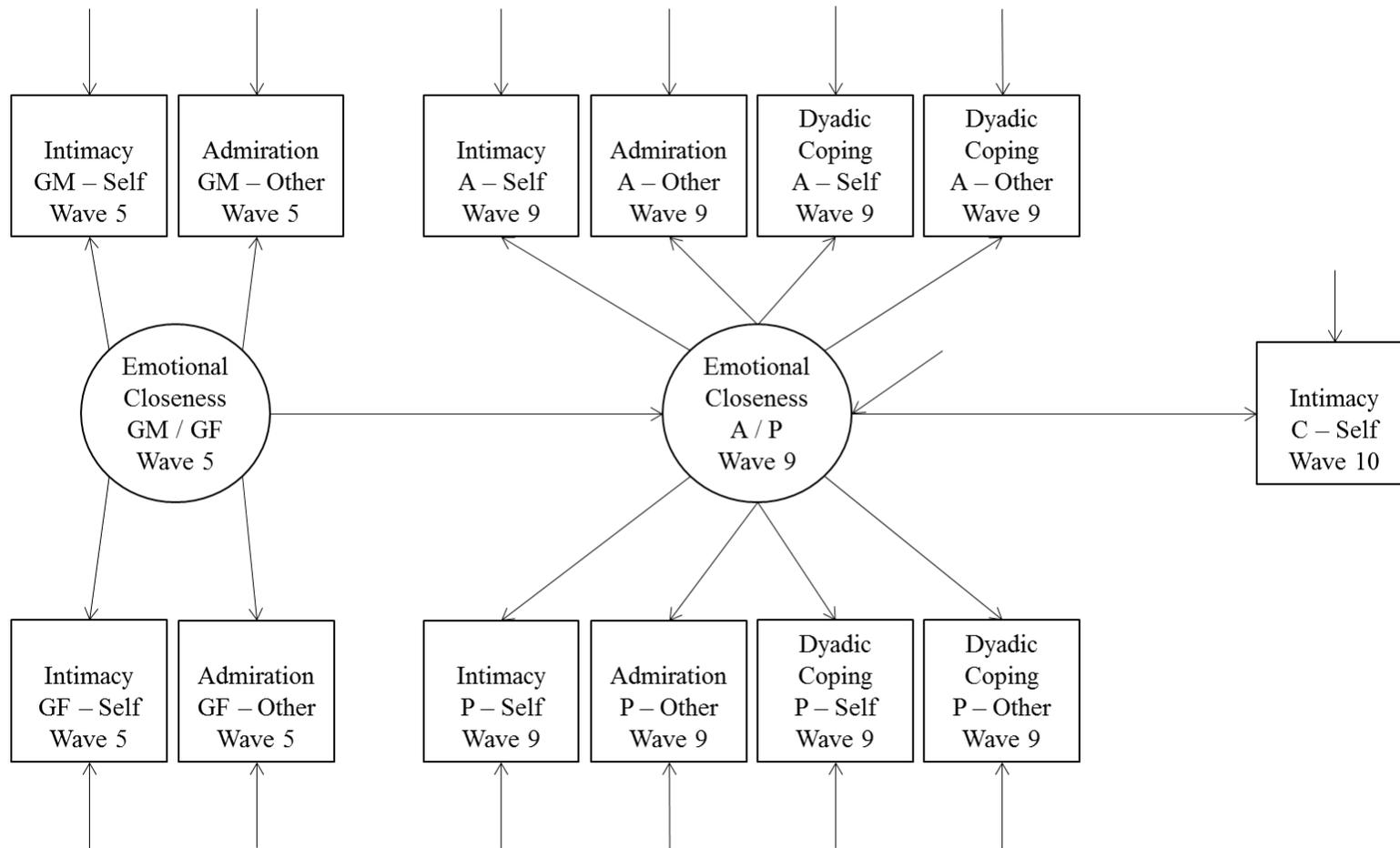
($r(16) = .48, p = .042$). Anchor's partner's dyadic coping (self-reports) are related to the child's intimacy ($r(16) = .57, p = .013$) and the child's partner's admiration ($r(16) = .47, p = .05$).

2.4.3 Initial Analyses

I originally planned to execute a full latent model among three generations (see Figure 2.1). However, it became clear that a latent model would not work for all three generations, as many of the proposed variables for the third generation did not have enough responses. More specifically, only 18 of the children's partners responded to items regarding intimacy, admiration, and dyadic coping. The models would not run, likely due to the need of the analysis to fill in over 14,000 missing responses. Because the variables of admiration and dyadic coping involved partner-reports, these items were removed. The only remaining variable for the third generation's emotional closeness was the children's self-reported intimacy.

Therefore, latent variables were used in the first two generations, and a single variable was used in the third generation. Within this new model (see Figure 2.2), eight variables were used to create the latent variable in the second generation: intimacy (a self-reported measure), admiration (a partner-reported measure), and dyadic coping (including both self- and partner-reported measures) for both partners. In the original data collection, the four dyadic coping variables were not given to the grandparent's generation; therefore, four variables were used in the latent model for the first generation: intimacy and admiration of both grandmother and grandfather. However, this model ended up being a poor fit ($\chi^2 = 1510.848, p < .001, CFI = .787, RMSEA = .041$).

Figure 2.2 An example of a subsequent attempt



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Note. GM = grandmother, GF = grandfather, A = anchor, P = partner, C = child, - Self = self-reported, - Other = partner-reported

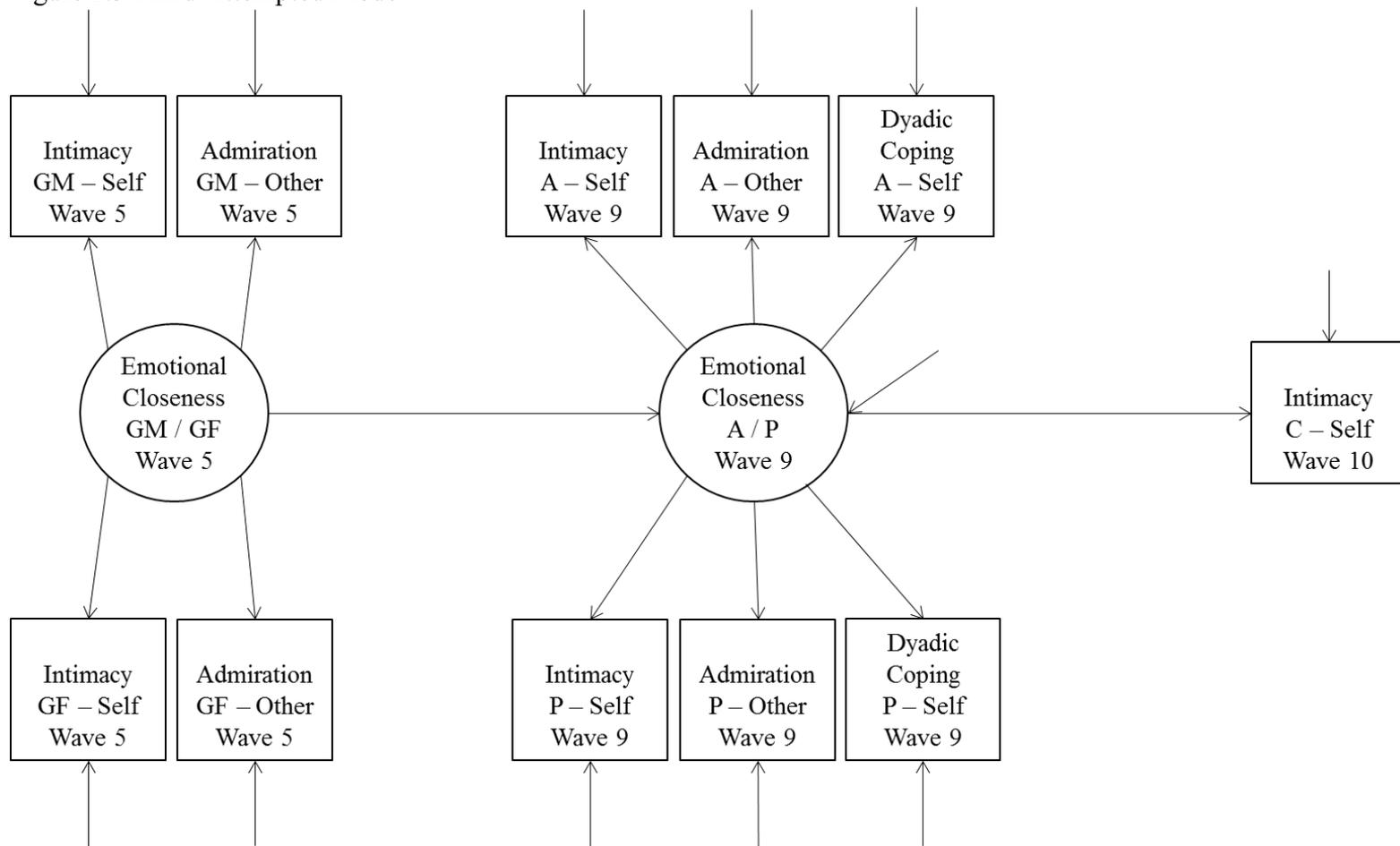
In an attempt to create a better fit, the two partner-reported dyadic coping variables were removed from the model for the second generation couples, leaving the self-reported measures (see Figure 2.3). This model proved to be a slightly better fit ($\chi^2 = 719.502, p < .001, CFI = .837, RMSEA = .034$), yet remained inadequate. Finally, all dyadic coping variables were removed from the second generation latent variable so that the latent variables in the first and second generation were made up of the same observed variables of intimacy and admiration (see Figure 2.4).

2.4.4 Final Model

The overall final model was an adequate fit ($\chi^2 = 70.293, p < .001, CFI = 0.986, RMSEA = 0.010$). Waves 5, 9, and 10 were used for the three generations, respectively. Data was collected from grandparents in the year 2014 (Wave 5), anchors and their partners in the year 2017 (Wave 9), and adult grandchildren the year 2018 (Wave 10). These waves were chosen for their sample size. Specifically, the largest number of grandparents in the dataset participated in the first 5 waves of the Parifam study. The last wave was chosen for the grandchildren because it had the largest amount of participants who were 18 years or older. The final model displayed a significant relation between the first generation's emotional closeness and the second generation's emotional closeness. The relation between emotional closeness in the second generation and the third generation was not significant.

After controlling for age of child and the average age of anchor and partner, the path between the first and second generation emotional closeness remained significant, and the path between the second and third generation emotional closeness remained nonsignificant (see Figure 2.5). Additionally, when controlling for anchor's and child's

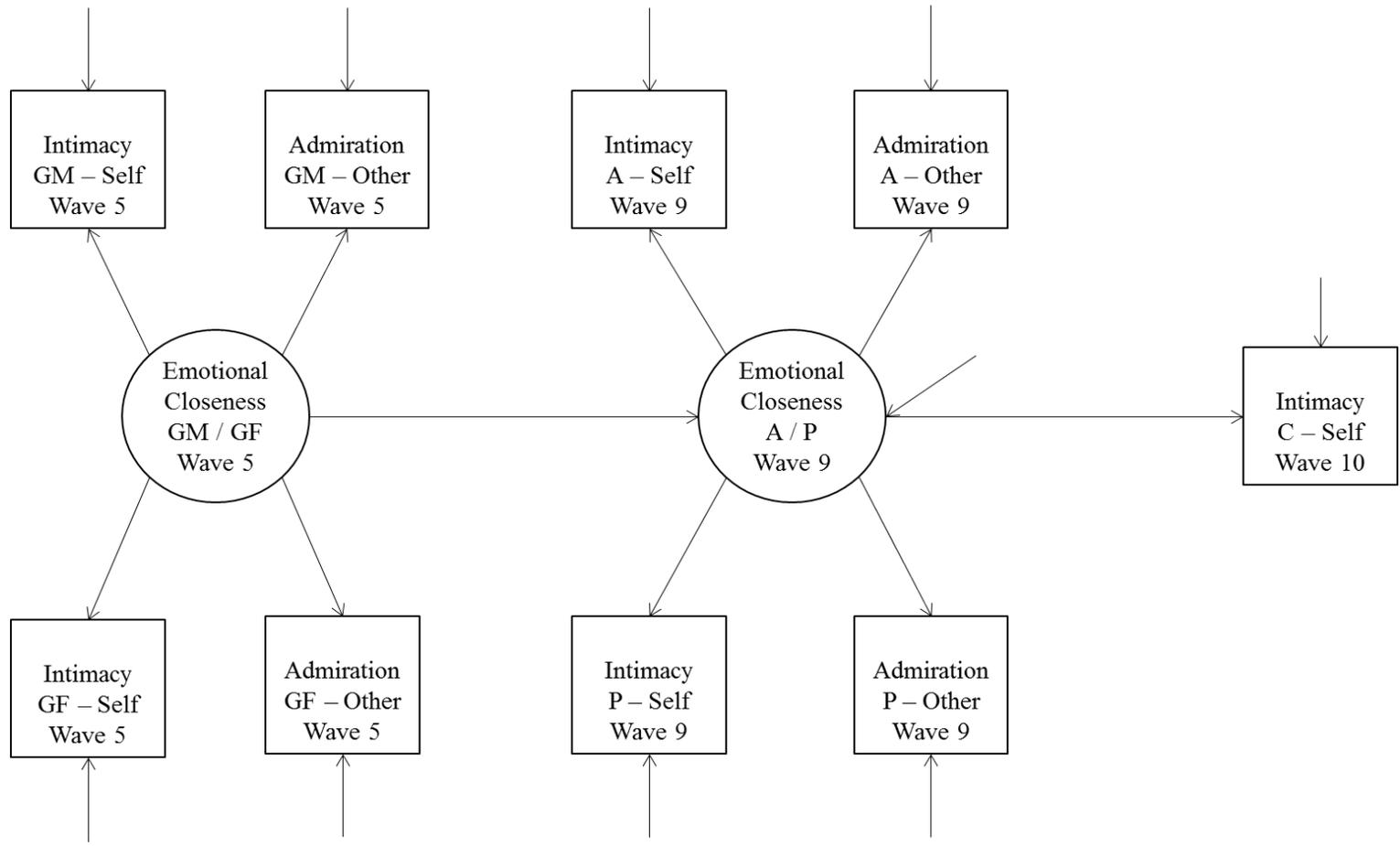
Figure 2.3 Third Attempted Model



22

Note. GM = grandmother, GF = grandfather, A = anchor, P = partner, C = child, – Self = self-reported, – Other = partner-reported

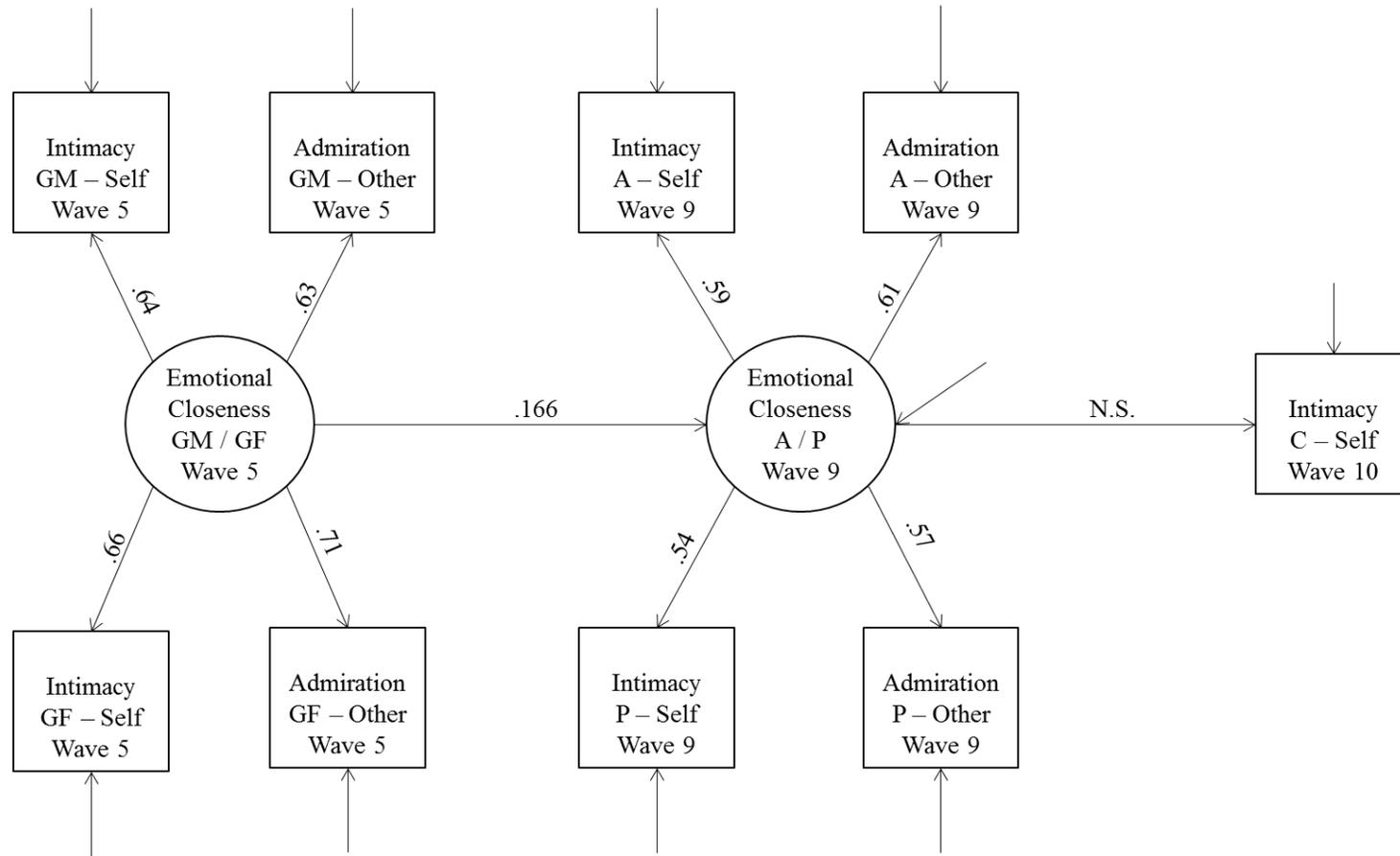
Figure 2.4 Final intergenerational model



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Note. GM = grandmother, GF = grandfather, A = anchor, P = partner, C = child, - Self = self-reported, - Other = partner-reported

Figure 2.5 Final Model Results



Note. GM = grandmother, GF = grandfather, A = anchor, P = partner, C = child, – Self = self-reported, – Other = partner-reported

highest school degree, the results were consistent with the overall model. Interestingly, some differences occurred when controlling for relationship type. For example, when the model was restricted to include only anchors and partners who were married and cohabiting ($N = 2099$), the path between the first and second generation became nonsignificant, and the path between second and third generation remained nonsignificant. Then, when including only anchors and partners who were non-married and cohabiting ($N = 866$), the full model would not run, likely because of sample size of the third generation. Upon removing the third generation from this model, emotional closeness among first and second generation became significant again.

CHAPTER 3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

3.1 Overview of Results

This study examined the intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness (i.e., intimacy, admiration, and dyadic coping) in romantic relationships. It was hypothesized that emotional closeness between grandparents would be related to emotional closeness between their children and their children's partners. Additionally, it was hypothesized that emotional closeness between the second generation and their partners would be related to emotional closeness between adult grandchildren and grandchildren's partners.

Consistent with the first hypothesis, emotional closeness among grandparents was significantly and positively related to emotional closeness of their children's romantic relationships. However, emotional closeness between anchors and their partners were not significantly related to the emotional closeness among the adult grandchildren's relationships. This means that intergenerational transmission of romantic emotional closeness was found between the first and second generation but not between the second and third generation.

3.2 Support for Previous Findings

The results of this study support previous findings of intergenerational transmission of romantic relationship health. Specifically, parental emotional closeness in their romantic relationship directly predicted their children's romantic relationship quality several years later (Ehrensaft et al., 2011). Additionally, Goldberg and her colleagues (2019) found that low relationship quality between adolescents' parents was related to low relationship quality in the adolescents' own romantic relationships.

This study was one of the first to examine the intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness. Other research on intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness has looked only at emotional closeness between parent and child (e.g., Danielsbacka, Tanskanen, & Rotkirch, 2015; Sklar, Pak, & Eltiti, 2016); no known research has looked at the intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness between romantic partners. For example, Hank and her colleagues (2017) found that emotional closeness reported by individuals toward their parents was related to their parents' reports of emotional closeness with their own parents. Similarly, positive and negative ties between individuals and their parents are related to the ties between the individuals and their children (Birditt et al., 2012). Other studies found that mothers' reports of emotional warmth with their children were related to the children's reports of emotional warmth with their own children almost three decades later (Goldberg et al., 2019; Savelieva et al., 2016). The present study, however, was one of the first to examine intergenerational transmission of romantic emotional closeness.

Previous research has provided evidence for the support of intergenerational transmission of various variables. Emotion dysregulation of parents was associated with emotion dysregulation of their children (Li et al., 2019). Additionally, anxiety and stress of parents has been related to anxiety and stress of children (Aktar et al., 2018; Bowers & Yehuda, 2016). Finally, violence and abuse were found to transmit between generations (Delsol & Margolin, 2003; Maxwell et al., 2016; Skuja & Halford, 2004).

As laid out in previous literature, there appears to be gender influences in the transmission of romantic emotional closeness (Goldberg et al., 2019; Lee, 2018; Savelieva et al., 2016; Walper & Wendt, 2015). However, there is not much literature on

how the environment of one's parents' romantic relationship influences their own; most research on intergenerational transmission of romantic relationships has focused on the influence of one parent's perspective (Birditt et al., 2012; Goldberg et al., 2019; Li et al., 2019). This study contributes to previous literature by providing insight into how the environment of both parents influences one's romantic relationship. More specifically, it is likely that one's romantic relationship is not affected solely by one parent's intimacy and admiration, but by the emotional closeness that exists between both parents, or between a parent and their romantic partner.

Previous research has examined the impact of romantic emotional closeness, and the results of the present study support those previous findings. Specifically, self-disclosure to one's romantic partner was associated with higher relationship quality (Tan et al., 2012), relational well-being (Gable et al., 2004), sexual satisfaction (Coffelt & Hess, 2014; Merwin et al., 2017), sleep quality (Kane et al., 2014), and lower depressive symptoms (Merwin et al., 2017). Additionally, expressing appreciation was also related to higher relationship quality (Gordon & Chen, 2010), sexual satisfaction (Algoe et al., 2013; Walters, et al., 2019), and positive emotion (Parnell, Wood, & Scheel, *in review*). Previous work (Ehrensaft et al., 2011) found that age, education, and type of relationship impact emotional closeness in relationships. Importantly, in the present study, the influence of emotional closeness in one's parents relationships on their own romantic relationship remained significant after accounting for age and education. The finding that these control variables do not influence the results supports the existence of intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness.

Though a couple's emotional closeness may change with age, the relation between parents' emotional closeness and anchors' (their children's) emotional closeness would hypothetically stay significant because intergenerational transmission exists, no matter the age. Intergenerational transmission is about similarities among generations, possibly due to socialization of parent to child, observation, or genetic/biological influence; age would not influence the similarities being transferred.

3.3 Explanation for Nonsignificant Result

There are multiple possibilities as to why intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness was not found between the second and third generations. Limitations in sample size may be a reason our second hypothesis was not supported. Though the Pairfam dataset includes thousands of participants, only 93 adult grandchildren provided an answer to the questions on intimacy in wave 10. It is possible that with a larger sample size, a significant relation would exist between emotional closeness of the second generation and intimacy of the third generation.

Another reason my second hypothesis was not supported may be because the third generation was missing the partner's perspective. The latent variables in the first two generations included the partners' perspectives, and those relationships suggest the existence of intergenerational transmission between the first two generations. However, due to an issue in sample size among the grandchildren's partners, the partner's perspective was not considered.

Galovan and Schramm (2018) argued that "a true strong relationality view of relationships necessarily requires that both partners' experiences be considered" (p. 205). Using dyadic data, rather than data from a single partner, is the best way to examine what

exists within a relationship. By only including one partner's perspective without the other, the data may not have included an accurate picture of the emotional closeness of the third generation. Preliminary correlations (see Table 1) suggest there may be similarities among emotional closeness in the second generation and emotional closeness in the third generation. Therefore, it may be that if the children's partner's reports of intimacy were able to be included, intergenerational transmission between the second and third generation may have existed.

Intimacy as operationalized in the dataset may be another reason intergenerational transmission does not exist between the second and third generation. The Pairfam dataset operationalizes intimacy as frequency of self-disclosure of thoughts, secrets, and private feelings (see Appendix A). Other researchers who have looked at intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness defined intimacy as attentiveness to partner (Kane et al., 2012), validating and understanding responses (Horne & Johnson, 2018), and close communication or desire for warmth (Nosko, Tieu, Lawford, & Pratt, 2011). Other research on self-disclosure, in particular, has looked at the type of information self-disclosed, rather than the *frequency* of self-disclosure (Coffelt & Hess, 2014; Gable, et al., 2004; Kane et al., 2014; Slatcher, et al., 2010; Tan et al., 2012). Therefore, asking about the frequency of self-disclosures may not be the most accurate way to measure intimacy within romantic relationships.

The same may be true about the admiration variable. Admiration is operationalized in Pairfam as frequency of recognition and appreciation expression. In previous research, admiration and appreciation expression have been operationalized as verbal validation of character (Gordon & Chen, 2010), expressions of gratitude (Lambert

& Fincham, 2011; Parnell, et al., 2019), or response to expressions of gratitude (Algoe et al., 2013). In other words, previous literature does not seem to use *frequency* of appreciation expression to operationalize admiration as Pairfam does. Therefore, it may be that the definitions used in the Pairfam dataset for intimacy and admiration are one reason intergenerational transmission was not found among all three generations.

3.4 Implications

3.4.1 Implications for Future Research

Future research should replicate several components used in this study and expand on others. The longitudinal design of this study should be replicated in future research to continue supporting that intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness lasts across time. Future research should also model after this study's multigenerational design. Looking at three or more generations allows for a more complete understanding of intergenerational transmission by examining multiple intergenerational relationships. Ideally, future research should examine romantic emotional closeness among three or more generations of the same family to gather a more accurate understanding of intergenerational transmission within families.

Dyadic data, like that used in the first two generations in this study, provides a better picture of the environment of emotional closeness within romantic relationships, because it takes into account both partner's perspectives, rather than relying only on one person's perspective. Future research should continue using dyadic data from both partners in a romantic relationship across all generations.

This study used a latent model for two of the three generations, which allowed emotional closeness between partners to be assessed as an unobservable variable. Latent

models of romantic emotional closeness should be used in future research to best gather information on the *environment* of emotional closeness between couples. Within research on intergenerational transmission, latent models also allow for exploring how one's parents' environment of emotional closeness influences one's own relationship. Previous research has explored individual parents' influences on children, but few studies have explored an unobserved variable of the environment of both parents' influence on the children. The present study was limited in that a latent model was not created for the third generation. Future research should use latent models of romantic emotional closeness for all generations.

3.4.2 Clinical Implications

The results of the present study have important clinical implications. As previously stated, this study renders support to intergenerational transmission of romantic emotional closeness. This means that each partner in a romantic relationship seems to be influenced by their parents' romantic relationship. The results from this study—namely, the presence of intergenerational transmission of emotional closeness—suggest that when helping couples, clinicians should develop a good understanding of each partners' parents' relationships. Assessing parents' emotional closeness could provide understanding into the couples' emotional closeness.

Since the 1970s, many clinicians have included family of origin assessment in their assessment of individuals and clients, recognizing that clients are influenced in some ways by their families of origin (Roberto-Forman, 2008). Bowen family systems therapy was built on clinicians investigating the types of relationships present between family members in order to better understand the client and their presenting problem

(Nichols & Davis, 2017). Similarly, the main assumptions of strategic and structural family therapies are that clients are influenced by the boundaries, rules, and roles that exist within their families of origin (Nichols & Davis, 2017).

The present study's findings on intergenerational transmission of romantic emotional closeness are also beneficial for experiential therapists. Experiential family therapists hope to promote emotional expression within their clients (Nichols & Davis, 2017). Some experiential therapies, as is the case with emotionally-focused family therapy, seek to understand how one's ideas of the world and of themselves were formed from childhood experiences. An assumption of emotionally-focused therapy is that clients' beliefs about themselves and their partners are formed from childhood experiences with their families of origin (Johnson, 2004). Therefore, assessing clients' parents' romantic relationships gives meaningful insight into clients' own romantic relationships, especially in terms of emotional closeness and expression. Much of the work of emotionally-focused couple therapists is in attempt to increase self-disclosure among partners (Johnson, 2004). If therapists have an understanding of what self-disclosure (i.e., emotional closeness) looked like in the clients' parents' relationships, they can develop a better understanding of the clients' own romantic relationship.

Family of origin influence is more implicit in many modern therapy models, and family of origin assessment is not required or widely practiced. However, the present study gives support that understanding family relationships—specifically, parents' romantic relationships—provides context with which to understand clients. Narrative therapy is built on the assumption that one's "narrative" or "story" shapes who they become and what they do (Nichols & Davis, 2017). Some narrative therapist may assess

experiences one feels from their families of origin to understand where one develops their perspectives. Similarly, feminist family therapists are interested in understanding the social contexts that surround the clients (Nichols & Davis, 2017). They often focus on gender, race, and other sociocultural factors that put one at a disadvantage. Some feminist family therapists, however, examine clients' families of origin in order to understand where some of the ideas of power and stereotypes come from. These therapists would also benefit from assessing clients' parents' romantic relationships, because it provides a context for what clients' romantic relationships are like.

3.4.3 Theoretical Implications

The present study provides additional support for Galovan and Schramm's (2018) model of relationship flourishing. Family-of-origin influence—specifically, parents' romantic emotional closeness—influences the way partners view and respond to one another (i.e., their ethical responsiveness), as seen through their intimacy and admiration. According to the model, partners in *I-Thou* relationships would likely report higher intimacy and admiration scores, as they communicate and regard one another as a unique individual. The intimacy and admiration within a couple seems to be influenced by their family-of-origin and seems to affect their own family of procreation. Therefore, the present study provides support for the model set forth by Galovan and Schramm (2018).

3.5 Conclusion

Abundant evidence exists in support of the argument that parents have a positive or negative impact on their children. In fact, Galovan and Schramm (2018) developed a model to conceptualize how contextual factors, such as one's family of origin, influence one's romantic relationship. Parents not only have direct influence on their children's

romantic relationship, but parents' own romantic relationships also seem to affect their children's romantic relationships. Specifically, the intimacy and admiration that exists within parents' romantic relationships seems to pass down to their children. The present study provides support for the presence of intergenerational transmission of romantic emotional closeness. The results of the present study have important implications for clinicians, theorists, and researchers.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Intimacy Scale

Presented to anchors, partners, parent, and children in Waves 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

“How often do the following things happen in your partnership?”

- “How often do you tell [name of current partner] what you’re thinking?”
 - 1: Never
 - 5: Always
- How often do you share your secrets and private feelings with [name of current partner]?”
 - 1: Never
 - 5: Always

Appendix 2. Admiration Scale

Presented to anchors, partners, parents, and children in Waves 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

“How often do the following things happen in your partnerships?”

- “How often does [name of current partner] express recognition for what you’ve done?”
 - 1: Never
 - 5: Always
- “How often does [name of current partner] express show that he/she appreciates you?”
 - 1: Never
 - 5: Always

Appendix 3. Dyadic Coping

Presented to anchors and partners in Waves 1, 3, 5, 7, 9

“When your partner is stressed out, how often do you react in the following ways?”

- “I let [name of current partner] know that I understand him/her.”
 - 1: Never
 - 5: Always
- “I listen to [name of current partner] and give him/her the chance to express himself/herself.”
 - 1: Never
 - 5: Always
- “I support [name of partner] in concrete ways when he/she has a problem”
 - 1: Never
 - 5: Always

“When you are stressed out, how does [name of current partner] react in the following ways?”

- “[Name of partner] lets me know that he/she understands me”
 - 1: Never
 - 5: Always
- “[Name of partner] listens to me and gives me the chance to express myself”
 - 1: Never
 - 5: Always
- “[Name of partner] supports me in concrete ways when I have a problem”
 - 1: Never

- 5: Always

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McKenna Diane Fey

EDUCATION

M.S., University of Kentucky (UK), Family Sciences Expected May 2020
Emphasis: Couple and Family Therapy Current GPA: 4.0

B.S., Oklahoma State University (OSU), Human Development and Family Sciences
Emphasis: Child and Family Services May 2018
Minor: Psychology GPA: 3.88
Honors Degree

RESEARCH

Projects

Masters Thesis: **Fey, M.**, Wood, N., Ross, D. B., Halem, D. (2020). Emotional closeness in romantic relationships: Is there transmission between generations?

Undergraduate Honors Thesis: **Bradley, M.**, Gardner, B., & Bishop, A. (2018). Dynamic affective synchrony in marital dyads: Associations with satisfaction and attachment.

Undergraduate Honors Contract Project: **Bradley, M.**, & Broadbent, C. (2018). Couples' physiological and emotional reactions during conversations.

Research Assistant

UK, Program Director, Nathan Wood Fall 2019–Spring 2020

- Project: Organizing data and running analyses from the German Family Panel

UK, Director of Graduate Studies, Hyungsoo Kim Fall 2018–Spring 2019

- Project: Literature Review of parents' spending behaviors and children's debt

OSU, Assistant Professor, Nathan Hardy Spring 2017–Spring 2018

- Project: Create daily diary study on dyadic autonomy and sexuality

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND ATTENDANCE

Volunteer at American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, Austin, TX, 2019

Volunteer American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, Louisville, KY, 2018

Poster presentation, National Council on Family Relations, San Diego, CA, Fall 2018

Poster presentation, Oklahoma Council on Family Relations, OKC, OK, Spring 2018

TEACHING ASSISTANT EXPERIENCE

Adolescent Development, UK	Summer 2019
Intro to Family Finances, UK	Fall 2018
Intro to Psychology, OSU	Fall 2017 – Spring 2018

AWARDS AND CERTIFICATIONS

Certification in Technology Assisted Therapy Services	Spring 2020
Top Ten Senior of Human Development and Family Sciences, OSU	Spring 2018
Best Undergraduate Poster Award, Oklahoma Council of Family Relations	Spring 2018
President's Honor Roll, OSU	Fall 2014, 2015, 2016, Spring 2017, 2018
Dean's Honor Roll, OSU	Spring 2015, 2016
Non-Resident Achievement Scholarship, OSU	2014–2018
Brighter Orange Scholarship, OSU	Fall 2014

THERAPY EXPERIENCES

Intern Therapist at the UK Family Center	Spring 2019–present
Therapy at Leestown Middle School, Lexington KY	Spring 2019–present
Intern at the OSU Center for Family Services	Spring 2018