

University of Richmond

UR Scholarship Repository

Honors Theses

Student Research

2015

Is positive affect a mediator of the association between emerging adults' relationship quality with mothers and friendship quality?

Nil Horoz

University of Richmond

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Horoz, Nil, "Is positive affect a mediator of the association between emerging adults' relationship quality with mothers and friendship quality?" (2015). *Honors Theses*. 809.

<https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/809>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

Is Positive Affect a Mediator of the Association Between Emerging Adults' Relationship
Quality with Mothers and Friendship Quality?

By

Nil Horoz

Honors Thesis

Submitted to

Department of Psychology
University of Richmond
Richmond, VA

May 1, 2015

Advisor: Dr. Karen Kochel

Abstract

The present study aimed to examine positive affect, an index of psychological well-being, as a mediator of the association between relationship with mothers and same-sex friendship quality among emerging adults. Participants (N=394) were recruited from two small liberal arts colleges on the east coast of the United States. To be included in the study, participants needed to be the same sex, attend the same university and have been friends for at least four months. I hypothesized that positive affect was one possible pathway through which relationship with mothers predict same-sex friendship quality among emerging adults. Results replicated previous research and suggested that there was an association between relationship with mothers and friendship quality. Findings also extended the literature by suggesting that positive affect is one possible pathway through which relationships with mothers predict same-sex friendship quality among emerging adults. Results highlighted the significance of having positive relationships with mothers in order to enhance and maintain positive psychological well-being as well as same-sex friendship quality.

Is Positive Affect a Mediator of the Association Between Emerging Adults' Relationship Quality with Mothers and Friendship Quality?

Research suggests that relationship with mothers serves as a model and influences concurrent and future relationships. From their relationships with parents, children learn important lessons about how to interact with other adults and peers in relationships. Attachment theory suggests that adolescents form mental representations from their relationships with their parents to understand and construct relationships with friends (Furman, Simon, Shaffer & Bouchey, 2002). Securely attached children learn and develop a responsive interaction style which carry into friendship relationships. For instance, positive parental attachment, parental support, and family connectedness were correlated with positive friendship quality (Zimmermann, 2004). Secure attachment relationships were significantly associated with close friendships, friendship concept, integration in a peer group, and emotion regulation within close friendships (Zimmermann, 2004). Furthermore, children who perceived secure relationships with their mothers were more accepted by peers, had reciprocated relationships and were less lonely than children who perceived less secure attachments with mothers (Kerns, Klepac & Cole, 1996). Previous studies indicated that warm supportive parenting predicted satisfactory peer relations (Deković & Meeus, 1997) and that the perceptions of security in mother-child relationships were linked to peer relationships (Kerns et al., 1996).

The nature of relationship with mothers makes the lifelong difference by influencing and having impacts on developing and maintaining friendships. Children learn to trust others, value oneself, resolve conflicts and be responsive to others from their relationships with their parents (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow & King, 1979). They

learn to use set of social skills that can be used in social relationships, explore independently, communicate effectively, negotiate, self-regulate, and cooperate beyond boundaries of the family.

Therefore, the association between relationship with mothers and friendship quality has been studied extensively, however; the processes that account for the link have not been very clear among emerging adults. One possible explanation for the link between relationship with mothers and friendship quality is positive affect, an index of psychological well.

Relationship with Mothers and Psychological Well-Being

Research suggests that relationship with mothers predict psychological well-being. Şimşek and Demir (2013) emphasized the role parents play in contributing to the happiness of the adolescents by indicating that supportive environment provided by parents for the basic psychological needs has enormous effects on adolescents' mental health outcomes. For example, research suggests that a positive parenting style characterized by high warmth, responsiveness, and demandingness, is linked to psychologically better adjusted and competent adolescents as well as linked with positive indicators of psychological such as life satisfaction (Raboteg-Saric & Sakic, 2014), optimism (Hasan & Power, 2002), hope, self-esteem, and internal locus of control (Ciarroci, Heaven & Davies, 2007). Similarly, securely attached children with positive parent-child relationships display greater enthusiasm, compliance, and positive affect (Thompson, 2000). Therefore, by receiving sensitive, repetitive, positive, supportive, and responsive care from their parents, securely attached children develop supportive, helpful, and positive mental representations of others and view themselves as competent

and worthy of respect. Moreover, they hold a more positive view of self and others that generates well-being and resistance to life stressors (Malekpour, 2007). Further studies reveal that lower perceived attachments to parents are linked to lower scores on measures of well-being (Raja, Mcgee & Stanton, 1992). Thus, it is crucial to recognize the importance of parenting practices on psychological well-being.

Psychological Well Being and Friendship Quality

Previous research has demonstrated that positive affect leads to desirable outcomes in work life, social relationships, marriage, positive perceptions of self and others and cognitive functioning (Lyubomirsky, King & Deiner, 2005). Researchers have also found evidence for the link between psychological well-being and friendship quality. Characteristics associated with positive affect include “ confidence, optimism, and self-efficacy; likability and positive construals of others; sociability, activity, and energy; prosocial behavior; immunity and physical well-being; effective coping with challenge and stress; and originality and flexibility” (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Similarly, positive affect can be defined as the extent to which an individual experiences emotional states such as joy, interest, confidence, and alertness. People who experience positive affect are likely to have positive perceptions, undertake and accomplish goals, cope with challenge and stress, and socialize. They also are likely to grow their friendships and display and develop close relationships with friends. Hence, happiest college students are more likely to have higher quality social relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

Further studies found a positive association between positive affect and social activity. Watson (1998a) concluded that people with positive affect were positively correlated with the mean of hours of daily social contact. Berry and Hanson (1996)

proposed that individuals who reported high positive affect were more likely to engage in more interactions, spend more total time involved in social activities, experience high interaction quality and perceive their interactions as more enjoyable, comfortable and pleasant than individuals who reported lower positive affect. If previous research suggests an association between psychological well-being and friendship quality, it is likely to assume that positive affect will predict positive same-sex friendship quality.

Present Study

The present study aimed to extend the literature by examining one process through which relationship with mothers leads to same-sex friendship quality among emerging adults. In particular, the purpose of this study was to examine positive affect, an index of psychological well being, as a mediator of the association between relationship with mothers and same-sex friendship quality among emerging adults. We expected positive affect to be the mediator of the link between relationships with mothers and same-sex friendship quality. Refer to *Figure 1*.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from two small liberal arts universities on the east coast of the United States. There were 394 participants (197 dyads). Of the 197 dyads, 92 dyads were male (46.4%) and 105 dyads (53.3%) were female, ranging from first-year students to fourth-year students. There were 101 (25.6%) first-year students, 129 (32.7%) second-year students, 50 (12.7%) third-year students, and 112 (28.4%) fourth-year students. To be included in the study, participants needed to be the same sex, attend the same university and have been friends for at least four months. Participants ranged in age

from 18-23 years ($M = 19.76$, $SD = 1.28$). Six point three percent of participants identified as Hispanic/Latino, and 90.9% of participants identified as non-Hispanic. Out of all participants, 12.2% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 6.1% were Black/African American, 4.1% were Hispanic/Latino, 72.8% were White/Caucasian, and 4.6% identified as Other/Multi-ethnic.

Procedure

Participants were recruited for the study via email, campus announcements and flyers. Announcements were also made to students enrolled in Introduction to Psychology courses. Students interested in participating contacted the researchers by email to set up a time to participate. Participants were instructed to bring a close, same-sex friend with them to the lab. Each member of the friend dyad was directed to a different room in the lab where he or she completed the online survey independently. Consent was obtained by all participants prior to their beginning of the study and participants were aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time. It took participants approximately 30-45 minutes to complete the survey. After completing the study, participants were debriefed by the researchers and handed a list of both on-campus and off-campus resources that students could access should they experience distress as a result of the study. Participants either received \$10 or class credit as compensation for their time. The study was approved by the IRB at both universities.

Measures

Relationship Quality with Mothers and Same-Sex Friendship Quality.

Relationship quality with mothers and same-sex friend was measured using the Network of Relationship Inventory (NRI) (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). The NRI consists of 30

items, measuring 10 relationship qualities. These qualities include reliable alliance, companionship, affection, intimacy, relative power, conflict, nurturance, admiration, instrumental aid, and antagonism (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). The NRI employs a 5-point Likert Scale (1 =little or none, 2 =somewhat, 3=very much, 4=extremely much and 5=the most). Participants were asked to choose the degree to which the questions reflected their relationship quality. Subscale scores are then derived by calculating the mean of each subscale. In previous research, Cronbach alphas were found to be satisfactory with a mean of .80 (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). For the purpose of the present study, I examined the positive subscales of relationship quality with mothers and same-sex friendship quality by calculating the mean of the following subscales: companionship, instrumental aid, intimacy, nurturance, affection, admiration, and reliable alliance. Higher scores indicate higher levels of quality in the specific relationship.

Positive Affect. I used the Positive And Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) to measure positive affect, which includes 10 items: attentive, interested, alert, enthusiastic, inspired, proud, determined, strong, and active. It employs a 5-point Likert scale (1=very slightly, 2= a little, 3=moderately, 4= quite a bit, and 5= very much). Respondents rated the extent to which they feel and experience each emotion within the past few weeks. A positive affect score was obtained by calculating the scores of the 10 positive items. Higher scores represented higher levels of positive affect. In previous research, the positive affect scale has been found to have moderately good reliability and validity. Watson and Tellegen (1988) found the Cronbach alpha coefficient to be .86 to .90 and the test-retest correlations to be .47 to .68 over an 8-week period. Further research revealed

that a sample population would have a mean positive affect score of 29.7 with a standard deviation of 7.9 (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics included means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations. The mean score on emerging adults' reports of relationship quality with their mother was 3.78 with a standard deviation of .61. Further, the mean score on positive affect among emerging adults was 3.45 with a standard deviation of .64. The mean score on same-sex friendship quality among emerging adults was 3.34 with a standard deviation of .76. The correlation between relationship with mothers and positive affect was .16. The correlation between relationship with mothers and same-sex friendship quality was .21 and the correlation between positive affect and same-sex friendship quality was .17. Results indicated that correlations between all variables were positive, small, and significant.

Regression Analysis

A series of regression analyses was run to examine whether positive affect mediates the association between relationship with mother and friendship quality. First, relationship with mother was significantly related to friendship quality ($c = .27$, $s = .06$, $t = 4.32$) providing evidence that there is a statistically significant relation between the independent and dependent variable. Second, there was a statistically significant effect of relationship with mother on positive affect ($a = .16$, $s = .05$, $t = 3.12$). Third, the relationship between positive affect and friendship quality was statistically significant ($b = .17$, $s = .06$, $t = 2.85$). Finally, the effect of relationship with mother on same-sex friendship when

adjusting for positive affect decreased in magnitude but was still significant providing evidence for partial mediation ($c' = .24$, $s = .06$, $t = 3.86$). We examined confidence intervals based on the distribution of the product method MacKinnon (2008). Zero did not fall within the lower (.006) and upper (.058) confidence limit which suggests a significant partially mediated effect. Refer to *Figure 1*.

Discussion

This study examined the association between relationship with mothers, positive affect, and same-sex friendship quality. Results indicated that all variables were positively and significantly correlated with each other. Findings were consistent with previous research that suggested in late adolescents close relationships with parents were linked to more satisfactory peer relationships and that parent-child attachments influenced children's peer relationships (Bell, Avery, Jenkins, Feld & Schoenrock, 1985; Schneider, Atkinson & Tardif, 2001). Armsden and Greenberg (1987) reported that perceived quality of attachment with parents predicted psychological well-being and that mother-child relationship quality was linked to happiness (Demir, 2010). These results supported the present study's findings by suggesting an association between relationship with mothers and psychological well-being. The link between positive affect and friendship quality also replicated the findings of Schimmack, Oishi, Furr and Funder (2004) proposed that happy individuals were more likely to be friendly.

Therefore, our findings reinforced previous research that showed there were associations between relationship with mothers, positive affect and friendship quality. However, the aim of the study was to extend literature by examining one process through which relationship with mothers leads to same-sex friendship quality among emerging

adults. Results supported the hypothesis in which positive affect was found to be a mediator of the association between relationship with mothers and same-sex friendship quality. Thus, results extended what was known by suggesting that positive affect was one possible pathway through which relationship with mothers predict same-sex friendship quality among emerging adults. Findings revealed that positive relationships with mothers demonstrated higher levels of positive affect, an index of psychological well-being, which in turn predicted higher same-sex friendship quality among emerging adults.

Results highlighted the significance of having positive relationships with mothers in order to enhance and maintain positive psychological well-being as well as same-sex friendship quality. This study also signified the influential and crucial role that positive relationship with mothers play on social and emotional development as well as psychological well being. Berk (2012) suggested that children develop attachments to their parents or primary caregivers even if the relationships are harsh or abusive. Hence, it is crucial for parents to acknowledge their role as parents over the course of development because it is likely that the relationships with mothers set the stage for all aspects of development and that nature and the quality of relationship with mothers make the lifelong difference, including social and emotional development as well as psychological well-being.

Limitations and Future Direction

Several limitations of the present study should be addressed. First, there were some limitations for generalizability due to the homogeneity of the sample population. It is important to note that not all emerging adults attend college and emerging adults who

are enrolled in college not always attend to liberal arts colleges. Future research can examine a more heterogeneous sample of emerging adults with diverse demographics, including race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and maternal education level.

Second, given the complexity of the dyadic data, I was not able to perform dyadic data analysis. However, I believe that dyadic data analysis would be a great future direction because it investigates homogeneity and interdependence in data. Interdependence and homogeneity would aid in answering questions such as how do dyad friends influence each other and how is an individual friend similar to or different from their friends in thought, behavior, and positive affect?

Third, data were based on self-reports of emerging adults. Consequently, data only reflected emerging adults' perceptions of relationships with their mothers and friends. It is likely that perceptions of emerging adults' relationships with mothers do not match the perceptions of mothers' relationships with emerging adults. It is also possible that various biases can effect results and that participants over exaggerate their reports on all measures in order to present better images of themselves.

Lastly, in the current study, we did not account for personality. Personality could have accounted for part of the variance in positive affect and friendship quality. For instance, neuroticism was found to be the strongest predictor of negative affect and extraversion and agreeableness were considered as predictors of positive affect (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Further studies can examine the effects of relationship with mothers on psychological well-being and friendship quality when accounting for personality.

Future research can benefit from a longitudinal design of our study. It would be valuable for future researchers to not only investigate early parent child relationships to

see how those relationships contribute as well as compare and contrast to psychological well-being and friendship in emerging adulthood but also to see how those relationship patterns either stay similar or change over the course of development. Moreover, it has been proposed that influence of parents decrease in early and middle adolescents while the influence of friends increase. However, by late adolescents the parents and friends are considered as equally important and that the perceptions of relationships with parents and friends change in the same direction (De Goede, Branje, Delsing, & Meeus, 2009). Thus, it would also be interesting to examine the developmental consequences of different parent-child relationship patterns on friendship quality as well as psychological well being since research has also revealed that parental practices during adolescent years influence the well-being of children as they move from adolescent years into adulthood (Aquilino & Supple, 2001).

The current study investigated positive affect as a mediator of the association between emerging adults' relationships with mothers and same-sex friendship. Future studies can examine relationship with fathers on psychological well-being and same-sex friendship quality. Paternal parenting practices can provide further information on the effects of both parents on same-sex friendship as well as family dynamics of the emerging adult.

Likewise, future research can extend the literature by investigating other aspects of psychological well-being such as satisfaction with life and happiness. For instance, previous research suggested that perceived paternal style had a stronger effect on adolescents on life satisfaction than perceived maternal style (Raboteg-Saric & Sakic, 2014). Thus, it would be valuable to examine impacts of both relationships with fathers

and mothers on different aspects of psychological well-being and friendship quality among emerging adults.

Additionally, it would be fascinating for researchers to compare and contrast gender differences in same-sex as well as opposite-sex friendship qualities among emerging adults. Thomas and Daubman (2001) displayed that girls rate their same-sex relationships stronger but more stressful than boys and that boys perceive their opposite-sex relationships more interpersonally rewarding than that of same-sex relationships. Future research can examine how relationships with parents predict and influence perceived gender differences in same-sex as well as opposite-sex friendship quality.

Conclusion

By conducting this particular study, we aimed to increase awareness and knowledge about the importance of relationships with parents. In conclusion, the present study displayed that positive affect was one possible pathway through which relationship with mothers predict same-sex friendship quality among emerging adults. It is important to note that parental influence seems to remain among emerging adults. Positive relationships with mothers signify positive psychological well-being as well as same-sex relationship quality. Thus, findings of this study suggest that parental influence on psychological well-being and friendship quality does not change with age and that relationship with parents is a significant indicator of well being and friendship quality among emerging adults.

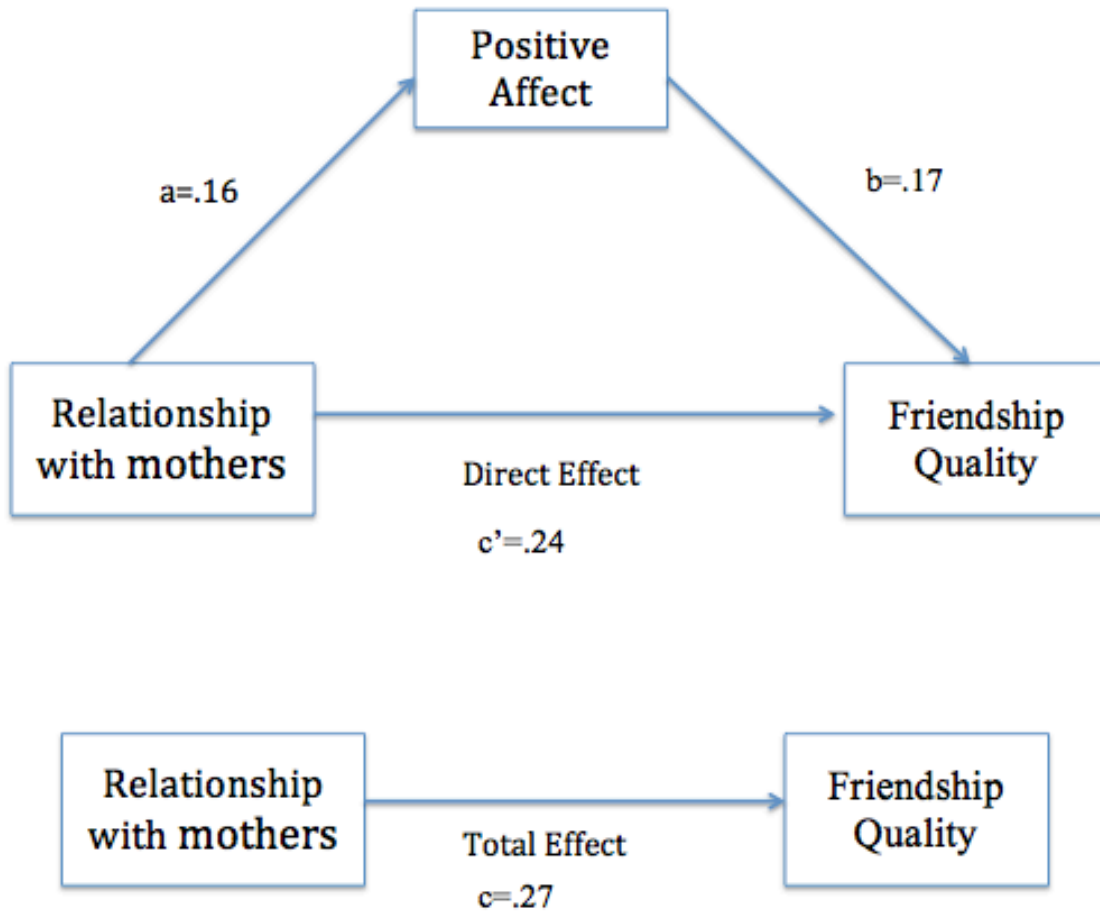
References

- Aquilino, W. S., & Supple, A. J. (2001). Long-term effects of parenting practices during adolescence on well-being outcomes in young adulthood. *Journal of Family Issues, 22*(3), 289-308.
- Armsden, G. C., & Greenberg, M. T. (1987). The inventory of parent and peer attachment: Individual differences and their relationship to psychological well being in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 16*(5), 427-454.
- Bell, N. J., Avery, A. W., Jenkins, D., Feld, J. & Schoenrock, C. J. (1985). Family relationships and social competence during late adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 14*, 109–119.
- Berk, L. E. (2012). *Child development* (9th ed.).
- Berry, D. S., & Hansen, J. S. (1996). Positive affect, negative affect, and social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*(4), 796-809.
- Ciarrochi, J., Heaven, P., & Davies, F. (2007). The impact of hope, self-esteem, and attributional style on adolescents' school grades and emotional well-being: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Research in Personality, 41*(6), 1161-1178.
- De Goede, I. H., Branje, S. J., Delsing, M. J., & Meeus, W. H. (2009). Linkages over time between adolescents' relationships with parents and friends. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*(10), 1304-1315.
- Deković, M., & Meeus, W. (1997). Peer relations in adolescence: Effects of parenting and adolescents' self-concept. *Journal of Adolescence, 20*(2), 163-176.
- Demir, M. (2010). Close Relationships and Happiness Among Emerging Adults. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 11*(3), 293-313.

- DeNeve, K. M., & Cooper, H. (1998). The happy personality: A meta-analysis of 137 personality traits and subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, *124*(2), 197-229.
- Diener, E., & Seligman, M. E. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science*, *13*(1), 81-84.
- Furman, W. & Buhrmester, D. (1985). Children's perception of the personal relationships in their social networks. *Developmental Psychology*, *21* (6), 1016-1024
- Furman, W. & Buhrmester, D. (1992) Age and sex differences in perceptions of networks of personal relationships. *Child Development*, *63*, 103-115.
- Furman, W., Simon, V. A., Shaffer, L., & Bouchev, H. A. (2002). Adolescents' working models and styles for relationships with parents, friends, and romantic partners. *Child Development*, *73*(1), 241-255.
- Hasan, N., & Power, T. G. (2002). Optimism and pessimism in children: A study of parenting correlates. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *26*(2), 185-191.
- Kerns, K. A., Klepac, L., & Cole, A. (1996). Peer relationships and preadolescents' perceptions of security in the child-mother relationship. *Developmental Psychology*, *32*(3), 457-466.
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 803-855.
- MacKinnon, D. P. (2008). *Introduction to statistical mediation analysis*. Mahwah, NJ; Erlbaum.

- Malekpour, M. (2007). Effects of attachment on early and later development. *The British Journal of Development Disabilities*, 53(105), 81-95.
- Raboteg-Saric, Z., & Sakic, M. (2014). Relations of parenting styles and friendship quality to self-Esteem, life satisfaction and happiness in adolescents. *Applied Research Quality Life*, 9, 749–765-749–765.
- Raja, S. N., Mcgee, R., & Stanton, W. R. (1992). Perceived attachments to parents and peers and psychological well-being in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 21(4), 471-485.
- Schimmack, U., Oishi, S., Furr, R. M., & Funder, D. C. (2004). Personality and Life Satisfaction: A Facet-Level Analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30(8), 1062-1075.
- Schneider, B. H., Atkinson, L., & Tardif, C. (2001). Child–parent attachment and children's peer relations: A quantitative review. *Developmental Psychology*, 37(1), 86-100.
- Şimşek, Ö F., & Demir, M. (2013). A cross-cultural investigation into the relationships among parental support for basic psychological needs, sense of uniqueness, and happiness. *The Journal of Psychology*, 148(4), 387-411.
- Thomas, J. J., & Daubman, A. (2001). The relationship between friendship quality and self-esteem in adolescent girls and boys. *Sex Roles*, 45(1/2), 53-65.
- Thompson, R.A. (2000). New directions for child development in the twenty-first century: *The legacy of early attachments*. *Child Development*, 71, 145-152.

- Watson, D. (1988a). Intraindividual and interindividual analyses of positive and negative affect: Their relations to health complaints, perceived stress, and daily activities. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54*, 1020–1030.
- Watson, D., Clark, L. A. & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54(6)*, 1063-1070.
- Watson, D., & Tellegen, A. (1985). Toward a consensual structure of mood. *Psychological Bulletin, 98(2)*, 219-235.
- Zahn-Waxler, C., Radke-Yarrow, M., & King, R. A. (1979). Child rearing and children's prosocial initiations toward victims of distress. *Child Development, 50(2)*, 319.
- Zimmermann, P. (2004). Attachment representations and characteristics of friendship relations during adolescence. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 88(1)*, 83-101.

Figure 1.*Mediator Model.*

Note. All paths were significant at $p < .05$.

