

Multimodal Communication, Idealization, and Relational Quality
in College Students' Parental Relationships

by

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ABSTRACT

This study described the multimodal communication patterns of college students and their parents, and examined how face-to-face and mediated communication frequencies relate to parental idealization and relational quality. Undergraduate students (N = 678) completed an online survey that assessed indicators of idealization (idealistic distortion and positive affect thinking), relational quality (relational/communication satisfaction, and relational closeness), and the frequency of face-to-face and mediated parental communication. Results indicated that average college students communicate with their primary parent 23 times per week, mostly via phone calls, text messaging, and face-to-face interaction. The frequency of mediated communication was positively related to both indicators of idealization and both indicators of relational quality. Moreover, idealization partially mediated the relationship between mediated communication frequency and relational quality. The frequency of face-to-face communication was inversely related to positive affect thinking. Indirect effects were also detected, such that face-to-face communication was negatively related to both indicators of relational quality as a function of positive affect thinking. Finally, this study examined whether students experience different levels of parental idealization and relational quality depending on whether their parent is geographically close or geographically distant, and whether they reside with their parent. Results indicated that students who live geographically distant from their parent experienced greater levels of idealization and relational quality than did student who live geographically close

to yet separate from their parent, who reported greater levels of idealization and relational quality than students who live with their parent. These results were interpreted using concepts from interpersonal, family, and computer-mediated communication. Limitations and directions for future research were discussed.

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Chapter 1: Rationale and Review of Literature

College is an important turning point in the parent-child relationship.

College students generally fall within the developmental period known as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), which has been labeled one of the most important yet least studied periods in the parent-child relationship (Birditt, Fingermann, Lefkowitz, & Dush, 2008; Gitelson & McDermott, 2006; O'Connor et al., 1996; Sherrod, Haggerty & Featherman, 1993). As emerging adults, students attempt to function in the adult world, yet typically rely on their parents for both financial and social support (Arnett, 2000). Whereas adolescence is often a volatile time in the parent-child relationship, emerging adulthood is typically accompanied by increased levels of relational well being (Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 2005). Many college students move out of their parents' home for the first time, which is frequently linked with increased parental closeness and decreased parental conflict (Golish, 2000; Lefkowitz, 2005).

It is intriguing that parent-child relationships tend to improve as children attend college, and presumably engage in less face-to-face (FtF) parental interaction than ever before. This pattern of increased relational well-being bears striking resemblance to partner idealization mechanisms described in computer-mediated communication (CMC) and long-distance romantic relationship research. Partner idealization refers to a behavioral and cognitive process through which individuals come to hold heightened, or overly positive perceptions regarding a partner. The hyperpersonal perspective (Walther, 1996) explains that individuals are able to utilize the lean-cue environment of CMC to engage in

strategic self-presentation, which can ultimately provoke the formation of idealized relationships. Similarly, research regarding long-distance romantic relationships notes that the restriction of FtF communication and reliance on mediated communication can lead partners to forget about each other's faults, and over-estimate each other's positive qualities. Although the concepts of hyperpersonal communication and partner idealization were not created to examine parent-child relationships, this study aims to establish their potential utility within this context.

The present study examines the concept of partner idealization within the context college students' parental relationships. It describes the multimodal communication patterns of college students and their parents, and explores whether these patterns relate to parental idealization and relational quality. Previous research suggests that restricted FtF communication and reliance on mediated communication can produce inflated perceptions of relational quality by enabling partners to engage in high levels of idealization (e.g., Stafford & Merolla, 2007). This study therefore tests whether idealization mediates the relationship between FtF and mediated communication frequencies and perceived relational quality. Finally, geographic distance and living arrangements (i.e., living with parents or separate from parents) are examined as potentially important factors in regard to idealization and relational quality.

In accomplishing these goals, the present study will make important practical and theoretical contributions. First, this study will provide help illuminate the effects that various modes of communication have on the parent-

child relationship. College students and parents are more connected than ever before, yet are often concerned regarding whether high levels of communication are healthy for their relationship (Hofer & Moore, 2010). Parents and children might also worry about whether their relationship will deteriorate if the child moves away from home to attend school, or conversely stays in the parents' home while attending school. The present study will speak towards these concerns and offer information that can be directly applied toward improving parent-child relational quality during college.

Additionally, the present study provides a thorough examination of partner idealization as conceptualized in both the hyperpersonal communication perspective and research regarding long-distance relationships. When examined in combination, these bodies of literature provide a framework for understanding the presence of partner idealization in many contexts. The idealization mechanisms described in these lines of research, however, are rarely assessed within a unified model. The present study constructs and tests an idealization model which integrates the behavioral and cognitive mechanisms that are frequently identified as facilitating idealized partner outcome. While testing a model of idealization, the present study also extends the hyperpersonal perspective to the context of ongoing relationships, which has been identified as an important step toward understanding the role of CMC in multimodal relationships (Tong & Walther, 2011).

In order to achieve these goals, the present study draws upon four disparate areas of literature. First, college students' parental relationships are

conceptualized within the developmental period known as emerging adulthood. The notion of positive illusions and partner idealization are then introduced within a psychological framework. Idealization is then discussed within two separate contexts: computer-mediated communication and the hyperpersonal perspective, and long-distance relationships. Finally, these disparate lines of research are connected to theorize regarding the role of idealization in college student's parental relationships.

Parent-Child Relationships

The parent-child relationship is one of the most enduring and important human social connections (Bowlby, 1980). Like all relationships, the parent-child bond produces both satisfaction and conflict as it changes throughout the lifespan (Golish, 2000). Adolescence and emerging adulthood are particularly important developmental and relational turning points in the parent-child relationship. Understanding college students' parental relationships therefore requires a conceptualization of adolescent development as a precursor to emerging adulthood.

Adolescent development. *Adolescence* describes the period that begins with biological puberty and ends with the acceptance of adult social responsibilities (Dahl, 2004). Although the exact timing can vary, adolescence generally occurs between the ages of 10 and 18 when children begin to physically, sexually, and cognitively resemble adults. The changes that occur during adolescence are profound and occur rapidly across all areas of life; provoking extreme changes in the parent-child dynamic (Kidwell, Fischer, Dunham, &

Baronowski, 1983).

The main developmental task of adolescence involves a process of individuation in which children experiment with their identity outside of the family unit (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2007; O'Connor et al., 1996). As part of the individuation process, adolescents begin to display increased reliance on their peers as sources of influence and social support (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). At the same time, adolescents emotionally withdraw from their parents and establish increased privacy boundaries (Petronio, 2002). Levels of parent-child topic avoidance often peak during mid-adolescence (Guerrero & Afifi, 1995) because information control is one way for children to assert their independence and test their autonomous identity (Fineauer, Engels, & Meeus, 2002; Petronio, 1994).

Middle and late adolescence are commonly a stressful and volatile time in the parent-child relationship. Golish (2000) refers to this phase as the “rebellious teenager” turning point, and notes that is often associated with decreased parent-child closeness. Indeed, when compared to college students, high school students report greater acceptance of, and more frequent use of lies within the parental relationship (Jenson, Arnett, Feldman, & Cauffman, 2004). That said, parent-child conflict tends to peak during mid-adolescence, and decline as children mature into late adolescence and early adulthood (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). Although adolescence can be a volatile time in the parent-child relationship, adolescents who establish a successful balance of autonomy and relatedness with their parents are more likely to display healthy levels of communication during emerging

adulthood (O'Connor et al., 1996). Indeed, late adolescents report looking forward to college and emerging adulthood because they anticipate being treated as an adult, and forming a more close and rewarding relationship with their parents (Holmstrom et al., 2002).

Emerging adulthood. Modern parent-child dynamics have led scholars to reconsider the boundaries between adolescence and adulthood. Historically, individuals were expected to emerge from adolescence ready to accept full adult responsibilities such as finishing school, living on their own, establishing a career, supporting a spouse, and becoming a parent (Arnett, 2000; 2004; Furstenberg, Rumbaut & Settersten, 2005). The achievement of adult responsibilities was once considered to be a normative transition that occurred over a relatively short time period. However, individuals 18 to 25 years old often display a prolonged adolescence (Erikson, 1968) or youth period (Keniston, 1971), during which they display increased autonomy yet fail to function as self-sufficient adults. Although some researchers refer to it as early adulthood (e.g., Furstenberg, Rumbaut, & Settersten, 2005; Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005), Arnett (2000) proposed a new paradigm labeled *emerging adulthood* to describe this stage between adolescence and adulthood.

Emerging adults might experience a delay in the attainment of adult responsibilities for many reasons, such as the changing social norms regarding gender roles, marriage, sexual relationships, and birth control (Arnett, 2000). Widespread social changes appear to have lengthened the transition period now known as emerging adulthood (Furstenberg et al., 2005; Gitelson & McDermott,

2006), and extended the normative number of parenting years (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, Christensen, Evans, & Carroll, 2011). College attendance is one of the most important factors associated with emerging adulthood. As noted by Lefkowitz (2005), “attending college is now the experience for the majority of emerging adults in the United States” (p. 41). In fact, the number of Americans who attend some level of college rose from a mere 14% in 1940, to more than 60% by the 1990s (Arnett, 2000). The United States Department of Education reported that during 2009, approximately 70% of graduating high school seniors immediately transitioned into a two-year or four-year college degree program (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Some students hold full-time jobs while attending college, yet many rely on parental support so they can focus on educational tasks, and still have time to engage in self-discovery and personal enrichment (Semyonov & Lewin-Epstein, 2001). More than 76% of parents provide their children with financial support during the first year in college (Turrentine, Schnure, Ostroth, & Ward-Roof, 2000). According to Schoeni and Ross’s (2005) longitudinal data, an average parent provides their child with \$38,000 of material assistance between the ages of 18 and 34, with the amount of assistance peaking between the ages of 18 and 20 and declining around the age of 25. As such, many college students experience a contradiction in which are no longer adolescents, yet do not consider themselves to be adults because they lack financial independence and have not assumed full personal responsibility (Arnett, 2000; 2006).

Indeed, existing research reveals that less than 25% of college students self-identify as being adults (Blinn-Pike, Worthy, Jonkman, & Smith, 2008; Nelson & Barry, 2005). The majority of college students in these studies indicated that they are an adult in some ways, yet not an adult in other ways. Students who self-identified as adults reported possessing more responsibilities, greater financial independence, a more clear sense of identity, lower depression, and less risk-taking than their peers who did not identify as adults. Emerging adults and their parents also stress that relational maturity (i.e., taking responsibility for one's actions, controlling one's emotions, showing consideration for others, and relating to their parents as peers) is an important sign of adulthood (Nelson et al., 2007). The college experience therefore appears to be diverse. Some students function as adults while they attend college, yet the majority can be classified as emerging adults who are negotiating the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

As emerging adults, college students possess several characteristics that distinguish them from their adolescent and adult counterparts. First, individuals undergo significant cognitive development between the ages of 18 and 25, which allows them to see the world in greater complexity (Labouvie-vief, 2006). Emerging adults also often leave their home environment for the first time, and in doing so, are confronted with a diverse set of opinions and lifestyles. The new experiences and increased cognitive abilities gained during college provoke many students to challenge the assumptions passed down from their parents and develop their own unique world views (Perry, 1999).

Second, emerging adults possess the legal and social autonomy necessary to test the boundaries of their identity with less parental interference (Arnett, 2000). College also provides students with a new set of peers who possess few preconceived notions of their childhood and adolescent identity. As such, college can provide a blank slate for emerging adults to construct a new version of their self. At the same time, emerging adulthood is a relatively unstable life phase because identity exploration provokes transitory goals and frequent change as individuals consider a wide range of future possibilities (Arnett, 2000).

Third, emerging adulthood is a relatively selfish and indulgent stage in which individuals often focus on gratifying their own desires, needs, and goals. Similar to adolescents, emerging adults tend to be sensation-seekers who desire intense and varied experiences (Zuckerman, 1979). The enactment of risky behaviors such as substance abuse, drunk driving, and unprotected sex actually peaks between the ages of 18 and 25 (Arnett, 1992; Bachman, Johnston, O'Malley, & Schulenberg, 1996), likely because emerging adults possess more freedom than adolescents and fewer obligations than adults (Arnett, 2000). Indeed, Heath's (2005) longitudinal study found that awareness of one's self and one's influence on others is a sign of maturity in young men. Responsibilities such as a spouse, children, and career typically provide individuals with an other-focused orientation and sense of purpose that prevents risk-taking, and coincidentally, typically mark the achievement of an adult identity.

Finally, emerging adults are expected to begin developing sense of filial maturity, meaning that they come to view their parents as adults who possess

needs (Fredricksen & Sharlach, 1996), weaknesses (Nydegger, 1991) and a history outside of their parental role (Birditt et al., 2008). The achievement of filial maturity goes beyond becoming an autonomous individual, and requires that children and parents form a more egalitarian peer relationship that can be sustained into adulthood. Indeed, Birditt and colleagues (2008) found that filial maturity is related to comprehension of the parents, as opposed to distancing from the parents. Filial maturity is said to begin developing during early adulthood, and is linked with autonomy, closeness, and relational quality among emerging adults (Nydegger, 1991) as well as relational quality among middle-aged adults and their parents (Birditt et al., 2008). Filial maturity remains important for adult children as they attempt to renegotiate relational dynamics with their aging parents (Fingerman, 2000)

In sum, the characteristics of emerging adulthood help conceptualize the developmental status of college students. Arnett (2000, 2006) summarizes that identity exploration, focusing on the self, instability, feeling in-between, and consideration of possibilities are all distinguishing elements of emerging adulthood. Increased cognitive abilities allow students to think in a more complex manner, yet the onslaught of diverse information can provoke a sense of uncertainty regarding previously accepted beliefs. At the same time, college students are thrown into a new environment where they are free to test their identity and pursue their interests without justifying their decisions to a parent, spouse, or child. While undergoing these changes, emerging adults transform into adults who are capable of surviving on their own, and relating to their parents as

peers. Hence, the important developmental changes that occur in college are likely pertinent to the parent-child relationship as it matures through emerging adulthood.

Parent-child communication during college. The parent-child relationship remains important as children enter emerging adulthood. Whereas adolescence is a stage of parental conflict and volatile emotions, emerging adulthood is typically accompanied by increased levels of parent-child relational well-being (Schulenberg et al., 2005). Emerging adults still look to their parents as a secure base from which they can test their ability to survive in the adult world (Bartle-Haring, Brucker, & Hock, 2002). Emerging adults must attempt to negotiate a balance between closeness and autonomy with their parents (Dubas & Peterson, 1996; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). Many parents of incoming college students actually overestimate the extent to which their child will become autonomous, and underestimate their child's desire to maintain a close relationship during college (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). As such, parents remain important sources of socialization and support as their children enter emerging and young adulthood (Goodnow, 2005; Koesten, 2004; Schrodtt et al., 2009). Perceptions of tangible and social support from parents have even been found to buffer the effects of stress among first year college students (Miczo, Miczo, & Johnson, 2006), and parental involvement can also help emerging adults become well-adjusted and independent adults (Aquilino, 2006).

Many college students move out of their parents' home for the first time. This proverbial leaving of the parental nest is an important turning point in the

parent-child relationship (Golish, 2000) because it symbolically, if not financially, indicates that the child is no longer dependent on their parents (Aquilino, 2006; Dubas & Petersen, 1996). Moving out also reduces parental supervision, and therefore provides students with additional space to experiment with their identity and make their own decisions. Likewise, being away from their family helps students to establish adult social networks, and gain a sense of confidence regarding their ability to survive in the adult world.

There is a growing trend, however, in which many emerging adults remain in their parents' home. Approximately 25% of children live in their parents' home until they are in their early twenties, and as many as 40% (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999) or even 50% (Arnett, 2000) of children who move out end up returning to their parents' home at some point during their early twenties. Students may choose this arrangement, or might be forced to remain in their parents' home due to pressing financial concerns or extended school breaks. Many young adults view their parents' home as a safe space, and might move back when they experience financial or relational struggles that compromise their ability to survive in the adult world (Aquilino, 1996).

Regardless of the reason, parental co-residence can provoke an identity crisis for emerging adults, and may lead to increased conflict when students feel that household rules impinge on their autonomy (White, 2002). Indeed, parents and children commonly report negative views about adult children returning home, and relational outcomes generally improve once the child leaves (Aquilino, 1996). Ryff and Seltzer (1996b) point out that parents' well-being is closely tied

to the success of their young adult children, and may be negatively affected by any occurrences which suggest that their parenting did not prepare their young adult children to succeed.

Parent-child co-residence is associated with many personal and relational outcomes during emerging adulthood. According to Sullivan and Sullivan (1980), individuals who reside on campus report increased levels of personal well-being and more positive parental relationships upon attending college (e.g., more affection, satisfaction, and communication). Students who remain in their parents' home, on the other hand, report no change or even reduced relationship quality upon attending college. Additionally, emerging adults who have left their parents' home report less parental conflict (Golish, 2000; Lefkowitz, 2005) and greater attainment of adulthood (Kins & Beyers, 2010) than reported by peers who live with their parents. Emerging adults who report living closest to, and having the most contact with their parents have also been found to report less self-reliance (Christie & Dinham, 1991), less use of peer support networks (Chisholm, 1999), and worse psychological adjustment (Dubas & Petersen, 1996) than those who reside further from their parents. That said, research is not entirely conclusive regarding how the amount of parental contact influences young adult outcomes. For example, O'Connor and colleagues (1996) found that the amount of contact was positively associated with young adults' satisfaction with their mothers and fathers.

Despite a lack of complete consensus, it is intriguing that emerging adults typically report more positive parental relationships when they have less FtF

parental contact. This finding directly challenges the notion that physical proximity contributes to relational well being by enabling physical affection and increased use of maintenance behaviors such as task sharing and joint activities (e.g., Duck 1994; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Interestingly, similar patterns have been reported regarding both long-distance and mediated relationships; sometimes distance makes the heart grow fonder. As such, the concepts of partner idealization and hyperpersonal relationships should offer useful lenses to understand parent-child communication during college.

Positive Illusions and Partner Idealization

Positive illusions occur when a person's perceptions become inflated in ways that fail to match reality. Much psychological research reveals that self-enhancing positive illusions help individuals experience greater well-being due to an increased sense of optimism, personal control, and self-esteem (e.g., Brown 1986; Taylor & Armor, 1996). Moderate levels of positive self-illusions appear to be a pervasive, systematic, and long-term cognitive adaptive mechanism (Taylor & Brown, 1988) that helps individuals maintain a positive self-concept when presented with negative personal information (Baumeister, 1989; Taylor, Collins, Skokan, & Aspinwall, 1989). However, Frese (1987) warns that positive self-illusions can become detrimental if said optimism is chronically unmet. Positive self-illusions might therefore possess a curvilinear relationship with positive outcomes; moderate levels of positive illusions are beneficial, but extremely high levels might reflect a sense of arrogance that prevents individuals from seeing themselves accurately.

The positive illusion mechanisms that contribute to self positivity biases have also been applied to the study of relationships (e.g., McNulty & Karney, 2002; 2004). In the case of relationships, positive illusions occur when a person views their partner in a more favorable manner than that partner views their self, which contributes to inflated perceptions regarding the relationship (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Rusbult, Drigotas, and Veratte (1994) explain that perceived relationship superiority is a “relationship-enhancing illusion” (p. 129) that helps partners maintain high levels of commitment despite their imperfections (Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000). Positive illusions are most commonly extended to close relational partners who are highly integrated into one’s sense of self (Martz et al., 1998). People, for example, often report possessing positivity biases regarding their spouses (Murray et al, 1996), and underestimate the chance that their marriage will be unsuccessful (Fowers, Lyons, Montel, & Shaked, 2001). Although less explored, positive illusions should also be highly relevant within other close relationships such as the parent-child bond.

Positive partner illusions have been conceptualized as *partner idealization* (e.g., Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford and Reske, 1999) and *idealistic distortion* (e.g., Fowers & Applegate, 1995). These terms acknowledge the degree to which positive illusions represent exaggerated or idealized viewpoints (e.g., Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Debate exists, however, regarding the best way to conceptualize partner idealization and idealistic distortion. Early research by Edmonds (1967) theorized that married partners often subconsciously endorse

overly positive spousal descriptors due to a social desirability bias. Subsequent empirical research by Fowers and colleagues found that idealistic distortion empirically loads as an indicator of marital satisfaction as opposed to social desirability (e.g., Fowers & Applegate, 1995). Hence, the present study conceptualizes idealistic distortion and partner idealization as forms of heightened positive thinking that are akin to satisfaction and other indicators of relational quality. Moreover, this study will follow Stafford and Merolla (2007) by conceptualizing idealistic distortion as being one particular indicator of idealization.

Idealistic distortion can be difficult to empirically distinguish from relational satisfaction and other constructs (e.g., closeness, love, trust, and commitment) that are frequently assessed as indicators of positive relational sentiment. Indeed, Fowers, Veingrad, and Dominicus (2002) acknowledge that, “being satisfied with the relationship is partially constituted by unrealistically positive perceptions” (p. 451). That said, Murray and Holmes (1997) claim that positive partner illusions are “not simply isomorphic with satisfaction” (p. 588). In support of this claim, the authors used relational satisfaction as a covariate and found that positive illusions still predicted trust, love, ambivalence, stability, and conflict. Other researchers have also assessed partner idealization and relationship satisfaction as separate yet correlated constructs (Conley, Roesch, Peplau, & Gold, 2009; Fowers & Applegate, 1995). As a result, it appears that idealistic distortion (i.e., the tendency to view a partner in unrealistically positive ways) taps into a unique aspect of positive relational sentiment.

Partner idealization is one of many factors that can help foster romantic relationship satisfaction and longevity (Miller, Niehuis, & Huston, 2006; Murray, et al., 1996; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). Holding positive partner illusions also helps individuals cope with stressful events, and can produce greater individual well-being (Murray, Bellavia, Rose & Griffin, 2003). Although positive partner illusions are generally healthy, there appears to be a curvilinear component to their association with other relational well-being indicators. McNulty and Karney (2004) found that communication skills moderate the relationship between positive partner expectations and marital satisfaction, such that positive expectations are debilitating when a partner's behavior does not at least reflect a small degree of truth behind the idealized expectation. For example, an individual might benefit from overestimating their partner's kindness, yet will experience dissonance if their partner begins to display particularly cruel behavior. Similarly, positive partner illusions tend to help romantic relationships when partners encounter minor problems, yet actually hinder satisfaction when it leads partners to overlook major relationship issues or ignore severely negative partner traits (McNulty, 2010).

In sum, positive partner illusions are a normal aspect of close relationships, which allow partners to make relationship-enhancing attributions. Indeed, "feelings of satisfaction reflect intimates' ability to see imperfect partners in idealized ways" (Murray et al., 1996, p. 82). Although partner illusions and idealistic distortion are well-noted relational phenomenon, empirical research regarding the topic has been largely limited to the context of romantic

relationships (e.g., Conley et al., 2009; Fowers & Applegate, 1995, McNulty, 2010, Murray et al., 1996). In one exception, Wenger and Fowers (2008) found that parents report positive illusions about their young children, with 90% labeling their child as “above average.” It is unknown, however, whether the same principles would apply to the parent-child relationship from the perspective of an emerging adult child. In particular, it needs to be determined whether the developmental changes (e.g., increased autonomy) and relational changes (e.g., decreased FtF interaction and increased relational well-being) that occur during college can be understood within the context of positive relational illusions.

Fortunately, computer-mediated and long-distance relationships possess similar characteristics as many parent-child relationships during college. High levels of partner idealization have been noted within both of computer-mediated and long-distance relationships, suggesting that these lines of research might help illuminate the topic of parental idealization among college students.

Idealization in computer-mediated relationships. Computer-mediated relationships possess many factors that are conducive toward partner idealization (Walther, 1996), however scholars have not always recognized this connection. CMC was initially thought to filter out the nonverbal and social cues necessary to engage in successful relational communication (e.g., Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). A set of theories, often collectively labeled as the *cues-filtered out* (CFO) perspective (Culnan & Markus, 1987), suggested that the stripping of social cues hindered CMC users’ ability to develop detailed partner impressions, and therefore provoked depersonalized interactions. Within the CFO perspective,

richer channels with more available cues (i.e. FtF) were assumed to enable more personal communication than leaner channels which rely on textual and/or vocal cues (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Trevino, Lengel, & Daft, 1987).

Walther (1992) developed the Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT) as a counter-argument to the CFO perspective. SIPT recognizes that CMC can, indeed, be impersonal (e.g., task-focused and lacking relational content) when previously unknown partners interact for a short time period with no anticipation of future interaction (Walther, 1994; 1996). However, SIPT asserts that CMC users who possess ample time and motivation can adjust their tactics to reduce uncertainty, seek information, and accomplish the same relational tasks that are pursued during FtF communication. For example, the content, style, and timing of messages can be altered to display social cues such as smiling (e.g., emoticons), laughter (e.g., lol), and hesitation (e.g., pausing).

Social information processing theory also suggests that many CMC channels are characterized by asynchronicity (i.e., the ability to intermittently send messages with a time lag), and increased anonymity, which enable users to strategically edit messages that reflect their desired impressions (Walther, 1992). The numerous social cues offered during FtF interaction may actually hinder relationships when the resulting information is perceived in a negative valence (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001; Ramirez & Wang, 2008). As such, people can utilize CMC to control their use of social cues and engage in relationships that approximate the intimacy of FtF relationships (Walther, 1992; 1994).

The *hyperpersonal perspective* (Walther, 1996), an extension of SIPT, was

created to explain why CMC users sometimes developed exaggerated levels of intimacy. Walther noted that CMC places important constraints on the transfer of messages as conceived by traditional communication models, particularly in regard to channel, sender, receiver, and feedback characteristics. First, CMC users must attempt to communicate in a reduced cue environment, which might range from relatively lean text-based channels, to relatively rich channels such as videoconferencing. Whereas CFO perspectives infers that richer channels are inherently more personal, the hyperpersonal perspective points out that CMC users can select the channel that best fits their unique communicative needs. For example, users can utilize rich mediums when they want access to an array of nonverbal information. Likewise, individuals can strategically limit each other's access to vocal and/or visual cues in situations when they wish to censor their emotional communication or conceal negative information. As such, sender characteristics (e.g., needs, goals, personality) will lead CMC users to select channels that can be exploited to create desired impressions and achieve specific interactional goals (Walther, 1996; 2007). As a result of selective self-presentation, CMC partners often receive overly positive information regarding their partners, and might therefore make additional positive generalizations about each other. Finally, feedback loops occur in which partners come to reciprocate and embody the impressions bestowed on each other.

In sum, the hyperpersonal perspective explains that the characteristics of CMC can allow users to form overly positive, or idealized interpersonal perceptions. Impression management is a primary goal of most social and

personal interactions (O'Sullivan, 2000), and CMC enables users to edit messages that maximize use of prosocial and affectionate behaviors (Walther, 2007) and minimizing the presence of annoying and negative messages (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Rabby & Walther, 2002). At the same time, CMC users will utilize whatever information they possess to make social judgments and form impressions of each other (e.g., Tanis & Postmes, 2003; Wang, Walther, & Hancock, 2009). CMC partners can therefore come to hold extremely close and even idealized relationships by enacting behaviors that utilize the characteristics of various channels within their communication repertoire.

Important clarifications must be made, however, regarding the application of SIPT and the hyperpersonal perspective within the present study. First, both perspectives were developed and are most commonly applied to explain the formulation and subsequent development of relationships formed and enacted exclusively via CMC (e.g., Walther 1993; Walther & Burgoon, 1992). For example, Hancock and Dunham (2001) found that CMC partners reported impressions that were more intense yet less broadly developed than FtF partners. Likewise, Ramirez and colleagues have examined the notion of modality switching, in which CMC-based partners shift toward FtF interaction (Ramirez & Wang, 2008; Ramirez & Zhang, 2007). The authors found that switching from CMC to FtF interaction can provide communicators with additional social information that violates their idealized partner impressions. Hence, CMC-based partners who meet FtF actually display less positive relational outcomes than their CMC counterparts who never meet FtF. Partners engaged in long-term CMC

associations were particularly prone to experience negative effects after meeting FtF, which adds significant support to the hyperpersonal perspective's claim that CMC partners establish idealized expectations that are difficult to uphold once partners meet in person.

Another potential limitation of hyperpersonal communication research is that researchers commonly focus on one or two aspects of the model in isolation (Walther et al., 2011). Impressions, for example, are often studied by setting up experimental groups based on the presence or absence of FtF communication, or the timing of a modality switch (e.g., Hancock & Dunham, 2001; Ramirez & Wang, 2008; Ramirez & Zhang, 2007). The depth, breadth and valence of partner impressions are typically assessed as outcomes. The presence of inflated impressions in CMC groups adds substantial support to the hyperpersonal perspective's claims regarding the presence of idealized partner impressions. That said, the actual mechanism through which idealization is thought to occur during CMC still requires systematic examination, ideally by applying the same principles that are utilized to study idealistic distortion and positive partner illusions in offline relationships.

Finally, the majority of modern relationships (e.g., family, friends, and romantic partners) cannot be easily classified as either CMC or FtF, but rather, are multimodal in nature. Existing research has examined CMC as a form of supplemental maintenance for primarily FtF relationships (Johnson, Haigh, Becker, Craig, & Wigley, 2008), yet partner idealization is rarely directly interrogated within multimodal relational contexts (Tong & Walther, 2011).

Limited scholarship (e.g., Human & Lane, 2008) suggests that the basic principles of SIPT and the hyperpersonal perspective should apply to multimodal relationships as they transition from FtF to a primarily mediated nature. The parent-child relationship is an ideal example of a multimodal relationship, and college often marks a transition point in which the relationship shifts toward mediated channels. Even though parents and children already possess detailed impressions of each other, they might utilize the reduced social-cue environment of CMC to avoid the negative messages that are difficult to control when communicating FtF. The censoring of negative cues might therefore provoke similar idealization processes as are noted in purely CMC relationships. This possibility is speculative, however, given the discussed limitations of hyperpersonal communication research.

The present study aims to interrogate the multimodal communication patterns of college student and their parents, with particular focus on understanding whether different communication modalities might contribute to idealized perceptions akin to those described in the hyperpersonal perspective. Additional insight might be gleaned by considering research regarding long-distance romantic relationships, which commonly involve both mediated and FtF interaction.

Idealization in long-distance relationships. Long-distance relational partners have also attracted scholarly attention due to their propensity toward partner idealization. Unlike hyperpersonal communication research, which primarily examines relationships of a computer-mediated nature, research

regarding idealization between long-distance partners often encompasses relationships that began offline.

Long-distance relationships facilitate high levels of idealization through both behavioral and cognitive mechanisms (Miller, Caughlin, & Huston, 2003), which bear striking resemblance to the characteristics of hyperpersonal communication. On a behavioral level, Johnson and colleagues (2008) explain that “by definition, an increase in distance decreases the opportunity for face-to-face contact between individuals” and therefore restricts, or blocks partners’ communication repertoire (p. 384). Although long-distance partners are geographically separated, they can maintain their relationship and uphold a sense of everyday involvement using CMC. Tong and Walther (2011) refer to this sense of connection as *presence*, or the extent to which “partners are at least mildly cognizant of one another and feel as though they are in present or potential interpersonal contact” (p. 112). Long-distance partners report increased reliance on mediated communication (Dellman-Jenkins et al., 1994; Stephen, 1986), yet can maintain a sense of presence while utilizing CMC to maximize self-presentational goals (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Miller et al., 2003; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Walther, 1996). The restriction of FtF communication can also limit long-distance partner’s exposure to the mundane and potentially negative aspects of their partner’s behavior that would be revealed during frequent FtF interactions (Miller et al., 2003). Hence, long-distance partners are prone toward partner idealization because they do not see each other frequently enough to become disenchanted with each other’s annoying and/or negative daily behaviors.

Although long-distance partners typically engage in less overall interaction and perform fewer relational maintenance behaviors, many view this as acceptable because their limited interactions of greater perceived quality (Johnson, 2001; Stafford & Reske, 1999). Geographically close partners may take their interactions for granted, yet long-distance partners often exert substantial effort toward avoiding conflict and maximizing the enjoyment of their highly anticipated FtF interactions (Sahlstein, 2004). As such, long-distance partners might benefit because they maintain a sense of everyday presence via CMC, and then spend high quality time together which strengthens their bond.

Finally, behavioral factors such as restricted FtF interaction, reliance on mediated interaction, and self-presentation can lead long-distance relational partners to engage in idealized forms of cognition such as idealistic distortion and positive affect thinking (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). As previously conceptualized, idealistic distortion refers to a person's tendency to view their partner in an unrealistically positive manner (Fowers et al., 2002). Positive affect thinking is a similar concept, which refers to the combination of relationship enhancing thoughts and reminiscent relational thinking (Cate, Koval, Lloyd, & Wilson, 1995). Whereas idealistic distortion captures a person's overall tendency to view a relationship in impossibly positive ways, positive affect thinking refers to actively engaging in positive ruminations about a relationship. Partners, for example, might engage in positive affect thinking when they reflect upon fond memories of their partner.

Idealistic distortion and positive affect thinking are widespread aspects of all relationships, yet are particularly prominent in long-distance relationships due to restricted communication (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Stafford and Reske (1999) summarize that “Knowledge of one's partner that is unavailable because of blocked communication is simply created in the person's mind based on preconceived, idealistic images of one's partner or images of what a relationship should be” (p. 274). Long-distance partners might miss each other during periods of physical separation, which can provoke them to reminisce about their previous interactions. Positive illusions become heightened as long-distance partners reflect on positive memories, utilize CMC to maintain positive impressions, and simultaneously blame any difficulties on the physical distance that separates them.

Existing research supports the presence and potential importance of partner idealization in regard to long-distance romantic relational quality. Despite their limited FtF interaction, long-distance partners have been found to report similar relational outcomes (Guldner & Swensen, 1995; Van Horn et al., 1997), or more positive relational outcomes than those reported in geographically close relationships. Specifically, Stafford and Reske (1999) found that long-distance romantic couples report fewer interactions and a greater reliance on mediated communication, yet higher levels of idealization, communication quality, relational satisfaction, and love. Likewise, Stafford and Merolla (2007) found that long-distance romantic couples report higher levels of idealistic distortion, reminiscent thinking, perceived agreement, communication quality, and relational

stability than geographically close partners. That said, the authors also found that long-distance partners were more likely to terminate their relationship if it became proximal, particularly if partners revealed high levels of idealization while geographically separated. This finding mirrors CMC research which suggests that switching from mediated to FtF communication can hinder relationships by providing cues that violate the unrealistically positive partner illusions facilitated by CMC (Ramirez & Wang, 2008; Ramirez & Zhang, 2007).

Examining the frequency of FtF and mediated interaction can offer additional insight regarding why some long-distance partners report greater satisfaction than others. Gunn and Gunn (2000) found that greater use of Internet communication was associated with more closeness and love in long-distance relationships, suggesting the CMC helps partners enact relational maintenance. Similarly, Dainton and Aylor (2002) concluded that long-distance partners who reported more frequent FtF interaction also reported greater satisfaction and commitment than did those who saw each other less frequently; implying that some amount of face-to-face interaction helps contribute to relational success. As a whole, these findings suggest that long-distance partners must find ways to engage in ample relational maintenance, ideally through regular CMC and occasional FtF interaction. Indeed, the combination of frequent mediated and restricted FtF communication might provide the perfect conditions for partner idealization.

In sum, long-distance partners are prone to develop idealized partner perceptions and inflated relational outcomes due to both behavioral and cognitive

mechanisms. Research regarding long-distance relationships has almost exclusively focused on understanding romantic partners, with a few studies regarding long-distance friendships. It is unclear whether long-distance idealization mechanisms would apply within the context of family relationships, so the present study will aim to address this gap by applying similar principles within the context of parent-child relationships.

Chapter 2: The Present Study

The present study will examine the dynamics of parent-child relationships during college by accomplishing four goals. First, this study will describe the multimodal communication patterns of college students and their parents, and will seek to determine whether the frequency of FtF and mediated interaction is related to idealization and relational quality from the perspective of students. Second, this study will attempt to determine whether idealization mediates the relationship between FtF interaction and parent-child relational quality. Third, this study will probe whether geographic distance and living arrangements (i.e., living with parents, living geographically close to yet separate from parents, and living geographically distant from parents) are important factors in regard to idealization and relational quality. In doing so, the concept of partner idealization will be examined in a new, yet potentially important multimodal relationship form: parents and emerging adult college students.

Theorizing Idealization in College Students' Parental Relationships

Existing research reveals that emerging adults report increased parental closeness and decreased parental conflict when they move out of their parents' house (Golish, 2000; Lefkowitz, 2005) and presumably begin using more mediated communication and less FtF interaction. Despite these observations, the topic of partner idealization is unexplored within the context of college students' parental relationships. Fortunately, research regarding the developmental status of college students can be combined with findings from the areas of computer-mediated communication and long-distance relationships to offer important

insight about parent-student communication during college.

Emerging adulthood is an important developmental transition for individuals and their families (Golish, 2000; Hofer & Moore, 2010). The transition to college is particularly important because it likely provokes some degree of uncertainty regarding the future of the parent-child bond as it shifts into a more adult relationship. Developmentally, college students are leaving adolescence and becoming emerging adults who can see the world with increased complexity (Labouvie-vief, 2006; Perry, 1999). Most college students do not consider themselves to be adults (Nelson & Barry, 2005), and therefore rely on their parents' support as they negotiate their new environment. That said, an increased sense of personal freedom and reduced parental supervision can help students develop a more positive peer-like relationship than was possible during adolescence (Birditt et al., 2008). Indeed, the formation of a more peer adult relationship is a vital relational turning point that enables emerging adults to maintain an ongoing adult bond with their parents.

Developmental factors aside, parent-child relationships appear to improve at the same time that FtF communication decreases, which suggests that idealization and hyperpersonal communication mechanisms might contribute to the establishment of idealized parental perceptions. Within this context, CMC allows parents and children to selectively self-present in ways that maximize the use of prosocial messages, and minimizes each other's exposure to negative behavioral cues (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Rabby & Walther, 2002). As a result, the restriction of FtF interaction might enable students to forget the things they

dislike about their parents, and instead ruminate regarding positive attributes such as their parents' love and support.

Social information processing theory and the hyperpersonal perspective are generally used to explain the presence of heightened impressions in relationships formed and enacted via CMC. Unfortunately, Tong and Walther (2011) summarize that, "Little research has examined hyperpersonal dynamics within relationships that have their genesis offline, but become geographically dispersed" (p. 102). Walther and Parks (2002) point out that processes of hyperpersonalization and idealization likely occur when relationships formed FtF shift to a primarily mediated nature, such as college students who move away from home. Previously unacquainted CMC users are said to form hyperpersonal impressions because they intensify the limited cues at their disposal (Walther, 1996). Ongoing relational partners, on the other hand, can draw from past experiences to fill in the informational gaps of a reduced-cue environment. Students and parents who rely on mediated communication might still develop hyperpersonal impressions, however, said impressions are likely developed via a slightly different mechanism.

Human and Lane's (2010) examination of offline friendships that shift toward primarily online communication might offer important clues regarding mediated communication in other ongoing relationships, such as parents and college students. The authors suggest that hyperpersonal impressions are still possible within ongoing close relationships that migrate toward CMC, yet said idealization occurs as a function of shared relational memories. The authors point

out that “Lingering memories of physical cues may paint a beneficial visual picture that individuals can latch onto in the CMC-only realm” (Human & Lane, 2008, p. 10). Hence, college students likely draw upon existing knowledge of their parents to fill-in the social cues that CMC might filter out (e.g., by anticipating nonverbal expressions, or recalling a memory of their parent that relates to the current discussion). Human and Lane note that CMC users might be unable to accurately recall said information, which could provoke ongoing relational partners to draw upon “fictive relational memories” that reflect positive relational ruminations. The authors did not draw upon concepts such as positive affect thinking and idealistic distortion, however, their results are parallel to those found regarding idealization among long-distance partners (e.g., Stafford & Merolla, 2007). These potential connections, however, are speculative given that the subject of parent-child idealization remains untested. The present study attempts to fill this gap by utilizing idealization concepts from both relational and computer-mediated communication in regard to college students’ parental relationships.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In order to fully understand the role of idealization in college students’ parental relationships, it is first necessary to establish how frequently students communicate with their parents. Although traditional interpersonal communication research presumed that relational communication occurs in primarily FtF settings (Ayers, 1983; Duck & Pittman, 1994), people have historically adopted mediated communication such as writing letters and making

telephone calls. More recently, CMC channels such as email, text messaging, social networking sites, and video-conferencing have been appropriated as convenient and cost effective relational communication tools (Boneva, Kraut, & Frohlich, 2001). In fact, relational maintenance is the principle motive for email (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Hampton & Wellman 2001, McKenna & Bargh 2000, Stafford, Kline, & Dimmick, 1999) and social networking site use (Bryant & Marmo, 2010; Hargittai, 2007; Joinson, 2008; Walther & Ramirez, 2009). Parents and children have likely begun to utilize many, or even all of these channels within their communication repertoire.

Existing research suggests that college students' communicate with their parents frequently, and are largely satisfied with doing so. Indeed, Hofer and Moore (2010) report that the average college student communicates with their parent 13.5 times per week, and Trice (2002) found that college freshmen engaged in six email exchanges with their parents each week. Many students and parents also own smart phones and other mobile devices which provide to access to a multitude of communication channels while they are on-the-go (Rainie & Keeter, 2006). As a whole, these communication devices serve as an "electronic tether" in which parents and students can retain a near constant presence in each other's daily lives (Hofer & Moore, 2010).

In sum, although some data exists regarding communication patterns between college students and their parents, the constantly changing technological landscape requires in-depth examination of not only the total amount of

communication, but also the way in which said interaction is spread across various channels. The following research question will probe this issue:

RQ1: How frequently do college students communicate with their parents via face-to-face and mediated communication channels during a typical school week?

As previously indicated, idealization is relatively unexplored within the context of parent-child relationships. In one exception, Wenger and Fowers (2008) found most parents display positive illusions regarding their young children. The present study, however, is concerned with whether college students experience greater relational quality as a result of parental idealization. Although this topic has not been directly addressed in published research, important information can be gleaned from the previously presented literature.

First, the characteristics of emerging adults and their parental relationships suggest that idealization might play an important role in college students' parental relationships. Emerging adulthood is an important transitional period in the parent-child relationship. Individuals often begin college when they are 18 years old, which marks the traditional end of adolescence and the beginning of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Adolescents might love and respect their parents, yet can also view parental control and discipline as direct indicators of their parents' negative characteristics (e.g., that the parents are controlling, old-fashioned, or unfair). Hence, the conflict that is a natural component of the adolescent individuation process might prevent adolescents from engaging in high levels of positive relational thinking about their parent. Upon reaching emerging

adulthood, college students typically report reduced conflict and increased relational satisfaction with their parents (Schulenberg et al., 2005), which could indicate that they have begun to engage in parental idealization and other forms of positive relational thinking.

The presence of parental idealization, however, likely depends upon the amount of communication between students and their parents. Moreover, certain communication modes could be more conducive toward idealization than others. Previous research concerning long-distance relationships suggests that the restriction of FtF communication is a better predictor of idealization than the presence of large amounts of mediated communication (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). On the other hand, Gunn and Gunn (2000) found that long-distance partners who implemented frequent Internet communication also reported more positive outcomes than did partners who reported less frequent use of Internet communication. Similarly, Dainton and Aylor (2002) found that telephone use is associated with greater satisfaction, and Internet use is associated with greater trust in long-distance romantic relationships. Likewise partners who saw each other periodically reported using more relational maintenance and experiencing greater satisfaction and commitment than partners who did not see each other FtF. Given these potentially conflicting results, it is difficult to ascertain how the frequency of communication using FtF and mediated channels will influence idealization and relational outcomes college students' parent relationships.

The present study seeks to determine whether the frequency of FtF and mediated communication between parents and college students is related to

student's level of parental idealization such as idealistic distortion, positive affect thinking, and strategic self-presentation. It will also address whether the frequency of FtF is associated with various indicators of relational quality. Relational closeness, relational satisfaction, and communication satisfaction are of particular interest within the context of the present study.

Relational closeness refers to perceived interconnectedness, or the degree to which a person views their sense of self as overlapping with that of another individual (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Close relational partners often report high levels of intimacy, which provoke them to integrate the relationship within their self-concept. Relational closeness is a psychological construct, meaning that a sense of interconnection can be maintained even if partners are physically separated (Cicerelli, 1991). Relational closeness is a particularly important concept in regard to parent-child relationships during emerging adulthood. Existing research reveals that the changes occurring during emerging adulthood (e.g., moving out of the parental home) can influence children's sense of parental closeness (Golish, 2000; Lefkowitz, 2005). Although closeness levels generally increase during college, large amounts of parental contact have actually been found to hinder relational closeness during this time (O'Connor et al., 1996). It is necessary, however, to re-examine these findings within the context of particular communication channels. It is possible that certain forms of communication might facilitate closeness, while other forms of communication might hinder it.

Relational satisfaction is a global indicator of perceived relational quality (Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994). Satisfaction is an important factor in all

close relationships, and scholars often measure relational satisfaction within their studies of mature parent-child relationships (e.g. Floyd & Morman, 2000; Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980). Moreover, research regarding idealization often includes an assessment of relational satisfaction as it relates to partners' idealization levels (e.g., Fowers & Applegate, 1995; Murray et al., 1996). As a result, relational satisfaction is a variable of interest within the present study.

Finally, whereas relational satisfaction is an indicator of global relational contentment, *communication satisfaction* refers specifically to the perceived quality of communication between partners. As described by Hecht (1978), communication satisfaction reflects how well a person's interpersonal communication expectations are met by their interactions with a particular relational partner. CMC research has historically attempted to understand the degree to which channel characteristics might facilitate successful communication (e.g., Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Although it would be erroneous to assume that structural characteristics determine the potential uses of a channel (Walther, 1996), it is still fruitful to consider whether the use of particular communication channels is associated with students' perceptions of communication satisfaction. It is plausible, for example, that students who rely on mediated communication will view their parental communication as being of lesser quality than their peers who frequently see their parents FtF. That said, the principles of hyperpersonal communication and idealization suggest that students who report low levels of FtF parental interaction and high levels of mediated parental interaction should actually report greater communication satisfaction.

In light of the reviewed research, the present study will examine the frequency of college students' parental communication in relation to idealization and relational quality. The following question will be examined:

RQ2: How does the frequency of parent-child communication using face-to-face and mediated channels relate to idealization (i.e., idealistic distortion, positive affect thinking, and selective self-presentation), and relational quality (i.e., closeness, relational satisfaction, and communication satisfaction)?

The present study also seeks to determine whether idealization represents the primary mechanism through which students develop overly positive views of their parents. Restricted FtF communication might enable selective self-presentation, which in turn provokes high levels of idealized cognition such as positive distortion, and positive affect thinking. Indeed, the heightened partner impressions noted in the hyperpersonal communication perspective (Walther, 1996), and notions of long-distance partner idealization (Stafford & Merolla, 2007) are suggested to occur as a result these behavioral and cognitive factors.

Existing research, however, is inconclusive regarding the exact role that both restricted FtF communication and high levels of mediated communication play within the idealization process. Stafford and Merolla (2007) found that long-distance couples reported less FtF interaction than geographically close couples, yet these relationship types did not differ in their amount of mediated interaction. This finding suggests that CMC is the primary form of communication in long-distance relationships, but is also a prevalent form of supplemental

communication in geographically close relationships. Likewise, the authors found that idealization negatively was related to FtF communication frequency, yet unrelated to mediated communication frequency. This finding led them to conclude that idealization is not produced through high levels of CMC use, but rather, “idealization stems from FtF interaction deficits” (Stafford & Merolla, 2007, p. 38). Other research, however, indicates that the frequency of mediation communication is positively related to relational quality (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Gunn & Gunn, 2000).

Given these potentially conflicting results, the present study will examine both FtF and mediated communication levels as they relate to idealization and relational quality. Conceptually, FtF communication should be negatively related to idealization and relational quality, such that individuals who report less FtF interaction are prone toward higher idealization and inflated perceptions of relational quality (e.g., Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Mediated communication, on other hand, should be positively related to idealization and relational quality, such that increased use of CMC provokes hyperpersonal communication processes and increases relational quality.

In sum, existing research suggests that partner idealization can be explained using a model of behavioral and cognitive factors. Behaviorally, a lack of FtF interaction and a reliance on mediated communication enables partners to present themselves in an overly positive manner (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Rabby & Walther, 2002; Walther 1996; 2007). Faced with a lack of negative cues, partners engage in positive affect thinking and idealistic distortion processes

which can increase perceptions of relational quality (e.g., Sahlstein, 2004; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1999). Although much research hints at this model, empirical analysis is necessary to determine if idealization actually mediates the relationship between FtF and mediated communication frequencies and relational quality. As such, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H1: Idealization (i.e., selective self-presentation, positive affect thinking, and idealistic distortion) will mediate the relationship between the frequency of FtF and mediated communication and relational quality.

Physical distance and time spent apart are both important considerations in regard to long-distance relationships (Maguire & Kinney, 2010), as is the potential for FtF interaction (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). Hence, it is essential to not only consider how the frequency of FtF and mediated communication affects idealization and relational quality, but also consider whether distance and the mere potential for FtF parental interaction matters. For the present study, it is probable that idealization levels will vary depending on whether a student lives with his or her parent, lives separate from yet geographically close to the parent, or is geographically separated from the parent.

In order to examine the role of distance and living arrangements on parental idealization and relational quality, it is first necessary to determine whether students who live with their parents, students who live separate from yet geographically close to their parents, and students who live geographically distant from their parents differ in their FtF and mediated communication frequencies.

Existing research suggest that geographic proximity allows for more contact between parents and young adult children (Aquilino, 1994), however this research predates the widespread use of communication technology. Johnson et al. (2008) point out that the increased accessibility of communication technology has led to a situation in which there are “fewer distinctions between geographically close and long-distance relationships than there have been in the past” (p. 395).

In one of the few studies examining geographic distance in family relationships, Johnson et al. (2008) found that 37% of college students sent at least one email to a long-distance family member during a one-week time period, yet only 19% sent at least one email to a geographically close family member. These results suggest that students might use more mediated communication with long-distance family members. However, Johnson and colleagues did not focus specifically on parent-child relationships. Likewise, they focused only on email as opposed to a full range of communication channels, and did not distinguish between students who live at home and student who live geographically near their parents. It is thus necessary to determine whether students report different use of FtF and mediated communication channels with parents who are geographically distant, as opposed to parents who are geographically close to, or even reside with their child.

Stafford and Merolla (2007) found that long-distance romantic partners report significantly less FtF communication than did geographically close partners, yet these groups did not differ in their amount of mediated communication. This finding may seem surprising, yet supports other research suggesting that CMC

supplements FtF communication as opposed to replacing it. Within the context of the present study, students who live with their parents might employ mediated communication to coordinate everyday tasks associated with co-residence. Similarly, student show live geographically close to their parents could use CMC as a primary form of interaction even though their parent is available for FtF interaction.

In sum, it is likely that students will report different amounts of face-to-face communication depending on whether they live with their parents, live geographically close to their parents, or are geographically distant from their parents. It is difficult to predict, however, whether students will report different levels of mediated communication based on their geographic distance and living arrangement. The following question will therefore be tested:

RQ3: Do students who reside with their parents, students who reside separate from yet geographically close to their parents, and students who reside geographically distant from their parents differ in the frequency with which they use face-to-face and mediated communication channels with their parent?

If significant communication channel differences are detected between the three groups of students, it would provide sufficient evidence to support further examination which utilizes living arrangement and geographic distance as important stand-alone variables in college students' parental relationships. It is specifically necessary to determine whether the three groups of student-parent relationships display different levels of idealization and relational quality when

controlling for the amount of mediated and FtF interaction. The detection of significant differences would indicate that geographic distance and sharing of living space matter above and beyond communication channel usage that characterizes each group.

Existing research regarding long-distance relationships often labels partners into two groups: long-distance and geographically close (e.g., Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1999). This body of research suggests that long-distance partners report greater idealization, and more positive relational outcomes than their geographically close partners. In regard to college students' parental relationships, it seems necessary to further distinguish those who live at home from those who live near home. Much research suggests that leaving the parental home is an important developmental marker for emerging adults, which provides the child with increased autonomy and alters the nature of the parental bond (Aquilino, 2006; Golish, 2000). Hence, it is possible that living separate from the parents provides enough space for idealization to occur, even if the student only lives a short distance from their parents.

Golish (2000) found that physical distance was the most commonly cited turning point in parent-child relationships, and often provoked increased closeness and greater relational quality from the perspective of students. Indeed, approximately 80% of the college students in Lefkowitz's (2005) study reported that their parental relationships changed during college, with most reporting more positive outcomes such as increased closeness and greater appreciation. For example, students in this study stated, "I've gotten closer and more honest with

them. I see that they were only trying to help me get on the right path in high school,” and “It has become stronger in the way that I realize how important they are in my life. Also, seeing them once a year makes me realize how much I miss them and how much I need them” (Lefkowitz, 2005, p. 47). Overall, students Lefkowitz’s study suggested that living separate from their parents enabled them to form a more equal and respectful adult relationship.

Although previous parent-child communication research has not utilized concepts of idealization, these studies can be interpreted to suggest that parental idealization occurs during college. Separate residences provide students with the necessary space to fully appreciate their parents, and reduced FtF contact could lead students to reminisce about their childhood and engage in positive affect thinking that heightens a sense of parental closeness and satisfaction. This speculation falls in line with existing research indicating that college students who live separate from their parents also report increased relational well-being (Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980), and less parental conflict as opposed to students who live with their parents (Golish, 2000; Lefkowitz, 2005). Increased autonomy has also been found correlate with increase parent-child closeness during young adulthood (Allen et al., 1994), and students who live away from their parents might be forced to develop increased autonomy. Hence, although the concept of idealization has not been directly applied to parent-child relationships during college, the observed patterns bear enough resemblance to idealization in long-distance and computer-mediated relationships to warrant the following predictions:

H2: Students who reside geographically distant from their parents will report more idealization than students who reside geographically close to yet separate from their parents, who will report more idealization than students who reside with their parents.

H3: Students who reside geographically distant from their parents will report greater relational quality than students who reside geographically close to yet separate from their parents, who will report greater relational quality than students who reside with their parents.

Chapter 3: Methods

Participants and Procedures

The present study utilized a convenience sample of undergraduate students recruited from communication classes at a large Southwestern university.

Emerging adulthood is typically conceptualized as occurring between the ages of 18-25, and ending with the acceptance of adult social responsibilities such as marriage (e.g., Arnett, 2000; Nelson & Barry, 2005). As a result, the study population was limited to unmarried students within this age group. The sample was composed of 678 undergraduate college students (men = 319; women = 356), with an average age of 19.85 years ($SD = 1.74$). Participants described themselves as Caucasian (71%), Hispanic (15%), Asian/Pacific Islander (12%), African-American (6%), Native American (2%), and “other” (5%). The sample consisted of 40% freshmen, 23% sophomores, 24% juniors, and 13% seniors. When asked if they identified as an adult, 27% responded “Yes”, 8% responded “No”, and 65% responded “In some ways yes, and in some ways no.” These percentages are notably similar to previous research, which indicates that approximately 25% of college students self-identify as adults (Blinn-Pike, Worthy, Jonkman, & Smith, 2008; Nelson & Barry, 2005).

Students received extra credit for participating in an online survey (See Appendix A). After completing a consent form, participants were provided with the following instructions: “Please take a moment to think about the parent whom you would consider to be your primary parent, meaning that this person is your main source of parental support.” Given this definition, 66% ($n = 444$) identified

their mother as being their primary parent, with the remaining 34% ($n = 232$) of participants identifying their father. Although biological relation was not required for this study, 97% of participants selected a biological parent.

Participants were instructed to complete the remainder of the questionnaire in response to their relationship with the identified primary parent. After completing the questionnaire, participants were linked to a separate survey where they were asked to provide their name and course information. This procedure allowed students to receive extra credit while ensuring that participants could not be linked to their individual responses. All procedures received approval from the university's institutional review board (See Appendix B).

Instrumentation

Geographical distance and living arrangements. Maguire and Kinney (2010) summarize that physical distance and time spent apart are both important considerations that might distinguish long-distance relationships from geographically close relationships. Geographic distance can be measured based on miles of separation between two partners, however such classification might involve a somewhat arbitrary choice regarding what exact mileage distinguishes between groups. Moreover, many partners live relatively close to each other, yet possess transportation constraints which leave them unable to see each other on a frequent basis. Hence, geographically distant relationships can be best defined as those in which the geographic distance is great enough to prevent partners from engaging in frequent face-to-face interaction (e.g., Dellman-Jenkins et al., 1994; Maguire & Kinney, 2010; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford, Merolla, & Castle,

2006). The present study augmented such measures to the parent-child relationship by asking participants to select from three descriptions of their living situation: 1) I currently live in the same household as this parent; 2) I currently live separate from this parent, but they are geographically close enough that I could see him/her face-to-face on a regular basis if I wanted; or 3) I live separate from this parent, and the distance is great enough that I could not see him/her on a regular basis if I wanted to do so.

In the present study, 20% of participants indicated that they currently reside with their primary parent, 38% reported living separate from yet geographically close to their parent, and 42% reported living geographically distant from their parent. Participants were also asked to identify their high school living arrangements in relation to this parent, with 88% reporting having lived with their parent full-time, 9% reporting having lived with their parent part-time, and 3% reporting having lived separate from this parent during high school.

Communication channel frequencies. A series of items was used to assess the frequency in which participants utilized FtF and mediated communication channels with their primary parents. Specifically, students were asked to report how many times they use FtF communication, email, instant messaging, phone calls, text messaging, social networking sites, and video conferencing to communicate with their parent during a typical school week. The typical week was selected because previous research (e.g., Hofer & Moore, 2010) suggests that college students communicate with their parents 13.5 times per week, which is a small enough number that students should be able to recall their

typical interactions, yet a large enough time period to assess variance.

Cognitive Parental idealization. Similar to previous research (e.g., Stafford & Reske, 1990; Stafford & Merolla, 2007), a series of scales was used to measure the degree to which students engaged in cognitive idealization of their parent.

Idealistic distortion reflects the degree to which participants hold unrealistically positive illusions regarding a partner. The Idealistic Distortion Scale (IDS) is a five-item subscale of the Enriching and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication, and Happiness scale (ENRICH: Olson et al., 1985; Olson, 1999), which has been amended and utilized as a reliable indicator of idealistic distortion in marital and other romantic relationships (e.g., Fowers et al., 2002; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990). The IDS was used as a conceptual basis to create a *Parental Idealistic Distortion* scale for the present study. The exact items were amended so as to best capture the parent-child dynamic. For example, the IDS item “Every new thing I have learned about my partner has pleased me” was removed because it reflects notions of romantic relationship development. Wenger and Fowers (2008) successfully implemented similar contextual adaptations to the IDS for their study of parents’ idealization of their young children.

The *Parental Idealistic Distortion scale*, developed for the present study, consisted of six items measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Items included: “My parent completely understands me;” “I could not ask for a better parent;” “My parent always has my best

interests at heart;” “My parent always does whatever they can to provide for me;” “My parent and I get along perfectly;” and “My parent possesses all the qualities of an ideal parent.” These items represent unrealistically positive ideals regarding positive parental qualities.

Positive affect thinking was also assessed as a component of parental idealization. Positive affect thinking refers to a student’s tendency to reflect upon times spent with their parent, and engage in ruminations that enhance the relationship. In order to assess positive affect thinking, Cate et al.’s (1995) 5-item Positive Affect Thinking scale was adapted by replacing the term “partner” with the term “parent.” Items included: “I think about all of the fun my parent and I have had together;” “I think about the memories I have of our relationship;” “I reflect on how much I love my parent;” “I think about all of the experiences that my parent and I have shared together;” and “I reflect on how much my parent loves me.” Using the phrasing suggested by Cate et al. (1995), participants were directed to “Mark your answer to indicate how characteristic you think the statement is of how you behave” (p. 79). Although the original measure was tested on a 6-point scale (0 = extremely uncharacteristic, 5 = extremely characteristic), this scale was adapted to a 7-point scale (1 = extremely uncharacteristic, 7 = extremely characteristic), so it would align with the other idealization measures used in the present study. Stafford and Merolla (2007) made a similar adjustment when measuring the reminiscent thinking component of positive affect thinking, and their results retained strong internal reliability.

Finally, existing research suggests that long-distance relational partners utilize mediated channels to engage in selective self-presentation by avoiding communication that might produce negative impressions, or otherwise hinder their relationship (e.g., Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Walther, 1996). Moreover, long-distance romantic partners often anticipate their limited FtF interactions, and their interactions are of greater reported quality than geographically close relationships. Long-distance partners often engage in careful planning, and devote attention toward ensuring that limited FtF interactions are enjoyable and memorable (e.g., Sahlstein, 2004; Stafford et al., 2006). Previous research regarding long-distance relationships notes the importance of strategic self-presentation, yet rarely measures it in an empirical manner.

Self-presentation is often examined within the CMC contexts such as online dating (e.g., Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006) and social networking sites (DeAndrea & Walther, 2011), yet these studies are generally concerned with the amount and truthfulness of online disclosures. For example, Gibbs and colleagues (2006) measured self-presentation as a general orientation toward disclosure in online dating. Moreover, DeAndrea and Walther (2011) experimentally manipulated inconsistencies between online Facebook disclosures and offline impressions, and Walther (2007) examined the timing and linguistic cues associated with online presentation. Unfortunately, none of these approaches are well suited to examine self-presentation within established relationships, such as college students and their parents.

Given a dearth of appropriate validated scales, the present study developed two Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) to assess the degree to which students attempt to create positive impressions upon their parents. *Face-to-Face Presentation* was measured with three items: "I always devote my full attention to my parent when we are together;" "I am always on my best behavior when I am around my parent;" and "I try to find ways to ensure that face-to-face time with my parent is special." *Mediated Presentation* was assessed via three items: "I take advantage of mediated communication to censor the information my parent receives about me;" "I use mediated communication to avoid unpleasant interactions with my parent;" and "I edit the mediated messages I send my parent to make sure that I come across in a positive manner." Conceptually, both self-presentation constructs should positively relate with other measures of idealization.

Relational satisfaction. The present study conceptualizes *relational satisfaction* as an indicator of global contentment or overall satisfaction with the parental relationship. Relational satisfaction was measured using Canary and Spitzberg's (1989) Relational Satisfaction scale, which is a three-item assessment demonstrated to possess high reliability and construct validity. The scale uses open language, so it is directly applicable to the parent-child relationship without any amendments. Items included: "I am satisfied in this relationship;" "This relationship is rewarding;" and "I would not want to do anything that would hurt this relationship." These items were assessed using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

Communication satisfaction. An amended version of Hecht's (1978) 19-item Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory (Com-Sat) was utilized as a measure of *communication satisfaction*. The Com-Sat has been subsequently utilized with high validity (e.g., Rubin & Rubin, 1989). Punyanunt-Carter (2008) translated the Com-Sat to apply to the father-daughter relationship, and her scale demonstrated high levels of reliability from the perspective of daughters ($\alpha = .94$). In order to avoid participant fatigue, six items were selected from Punyanunt-Carter's scale based on face validity within the present study. The selected items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree), and included the following: "I am very satisfied with our typical conversations;" "I am very dissatisfied with our typical conversations (R);" "My parent expresses a lot of interest in what I have to say;" "My parent genuinely wants to get to know me;" "During our typical conversations, I am able to present myself as I want my parent to view me," and "I feel like I could talk about anything with my parent." Additionally, one item was created to assess whether the amount of communication is seen as being sufficient: "I am very satisfied with the amount of communication between me and my parent."

Relational Closeness. Aron, Aron, and Smolan's (1992) Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) measure was used as an indicator of *relational closeness*. The IOS is a pictorial measure consisting of 7 Venn diagrams in which two overarching circles (one circle labeled "self" and a second circle labeled "other") are changed to display an increasing amount of interpersonal overlap. Participants were asked to indicate which diagram best reflects their relationship with the

selected parent, with a lower score signaling less relational closeness and a higher score reflecting greater relational closeness. Aron and colleagues conducted extensive experimental and correlational research to validate this one-item measure, which has been subsequently applied in other studies of parent-child relationships (e.g., Floyd & Morman, 2000).

Preliminary Measure Analyses

The present study attempted to employ existing measures of partner idealization and relational quality within the context of parent-child communication. As previously discussed, the exact phrasing of items was amended to fit the parent-child relational context. Additionally, items were created to assess the extent to which students engage in selective self-presentation in both FtF and mediated parental communication. Given that measures were either created or extended to a new context (i.e., parent-child relationships), preliminary analyses were necessary to establish psychometric properties of measures within the present study.

Cognitive parental idealization measures. A principal components exploratory factor analysis with Oblimin rotation was used to explore the underlying empirical factor structure of the 17 items that assessed different aspects of parental idealization (i.e., idealistic distortion, positive affect thinking, FtF presentation, and mediated presentation). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were significant, $KMO = .91$, $\chi^2(136) = 9465.38$, $p < .001$. The initial analysis suggested a 3-factor solution with eigenvalues of 1 or greater, and Cattell's scree test confirmed a significant "drop-

off” of eigenvalues after 3 factors. A 60/40 selection criterion was used to retain items with primary loadings of .60 or above, and secondary loadings of .40 or less. Items that did not fit this criterion were dropped and the analysis was rerun to reveal the final 3-factor solution that was empirically and conceptually sound, and accounted for 73.50% of the variance in the overall sample (see Table 1). The final solution was identical to the proposed scales with one exception: the 3 FtF presentation items revealed complex loadings and were dropped from the solution. The first factor included the 6 items designed to measure *idealistic distortion* ($\alpha = .92$). The second factor retained the 3 items that assessed *mediated presentation* ($\alpha = .87$). The third factor included the 5 items used to measure *positive affect thinking* ($\alpha = .95$). Standardized factor scores were calculated for each idealization factor and were used in all subsequent analyses.

Relational and communication satisfaction measures. A principal components exploratory factor analysis with Oblimin rotation was also used to explore the underlying empirical factor structure of the 9 items that assessed relational satisfaction and communication satisfaction. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett’s test of sphericity were significant, $KMO = .94$, $\chi^2(36) = 4693.64$, $p < .001$. The analysis revealed a single factor solution in which all 9 items loaded at .60 or above (see Table 2). The resulting *Relational/Communication Satisfaction* factor ($\alpha = .94$) accounted for 67.10% of the variance and represented participants’ satisfaction with parental communication and the overall state of their parental relationship. Standardized factor scores were calculated for use in subsequent analyses.

Correlations between idealization and relational quality. Existing research suggests that measures of idealization and relational quality are significantly correlated, yet offer enough conceptual and empirical distinction for analysis (e.g., Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Pearson correlations were therefore computed to examine the nature of the relationship between idealization measures and relational quality measures (see Table 3). The correlation indices largely confirmed the expected relationships. However, the mediated presentation measure created for the present study did not reveal the expected correlations with other idealization and relational quality measures. The lack of conceptually expected correlations raised concerns regarding the validity of the mediated presentation measure, particularly given an absence of previous measurement validation. The mediated presentation measure was therefore excluded from any further analysis in the present study.

Chapter 4: Results

The first research question asked how frequently college students interact with their parents using face-to-face and mediated communication channels during a typical school week. In response to this question, participants were asked to describe how frequently they use FtF interaction, email, instant messaging, phone calls, text messaging, social networking sites, and video-conferencing. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for each communication channel. On average, students reported 22.76 ($SD = 29.89$) total interactions with their primary parents in a typical school week. Approximately 70% of the students fell at or below this statistical average. That said 20% of the sample reported more than 30 parental interactions per week, and 10% indicated engaging in more than 50 parental interactions per week. More specifically, students reported an average of 4.61 ($SD = 13.47$) FtF interactions, and 18.69 ($SD = 24.81$) mediated interactions during a typical week. Phone calls were the most common form of parental communication, followed by text messaging and FtF interaction.

Analysis of P-Plots and distribution statistics revealed a substantial degree of positive skew for each communication channel. Log_{10} transformations were thus computed and compared to the untransformed data (see Table 5). The transformation helped improve normality across all items, so the transformed data were utilized for all subsequent analyses regarding communication channel usage.

The second research question asked how the frequency of parent-child communication via FtF and mediated channels relates to parental idealization (i.e., idealistic distortion and positive affect thinking) and relational quality

(relational/communication satisfaction and relational closeness). The restriction of FtF communication and reliance on mediated communication are both theoretically expected to facilitate high levels of idealization and relational quality. Existing research (e.g., Stafford & Merolla, 2007), however, suggests that the amount of mediated interaction is not associated with idealization and relational quality in long-distance romantic relationships. Hence, the present analyses conducted initial analysis to examine mediated communication frequency in aggregate form (i.e., the total number of email, instant messaging, phone calls, text messaging, social networking site, and video-conferencing interactions). This procedure helped maximize power by preserving degrees of freedom during the initial analysis, while allowing for follow-up analysis if warranted.

Hence, the second research question was initially tested using a series of multiple hierarchical linear regression models with the aggregate amount of mediated communication and the amount of FtF communication as predictors. Idealistic distortion, positive affect thinking, relational/communication satisfaction, and relational closeness served as criterion variables. Parent biological sex (dummy coded as 0 = male, 1 = female), participant biological sex (dummy coded as 0 = male, 1 = female), participant age, and number of siblings were all considered as possible control variables; however, participant age and number of siblings were excluded due to a lack of significant correlations with the criterion variables. The enter method of entry was used for each model, with parent sex and participant sex entered as control variables in step 1, and FtF

communication frequency and aggregate mediated communication frequency entered in step 2. Multicollinearity diagnostics were unremarkable for all regression models.

The first regression model used idealistic distortion as the criterion variable (see Table 6). The final model significantly predicted and accounted for 3% of the variance in idealistic distortion; total $R^2 = .04$; adjusted $R^2 = .03$, $F(4, 656) = 6.61$; $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\Delta F(2, 652) = 7.74$, $p < .001$. In response to RQ2, results revealed that participants' biological sex was significantly and negatively associated with idealistic distortion, $\beta = -.12$, $p = .002$; indicating that male participants reported greater idealistic distortion. Additionally, the total amount of mediated communication was positively related to idealistic distortion, $\beta = .16$, $p < .001$.

The second regression model used positive affect thinking as the criterion variable (see Table 7). The final model significantly predicted and accounted for 7% of the variance in positive affect thinking; total $R^2 = .08$; adjusted $R^2 = .07$, $F(4, 656) = 13.37$, $p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .07$, $\Delta F(2, 652) = 24.41$, $p < .001$. In response to RQ2, results revealed that FtF communication had a significant inverse relationship with positive affect thinking ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .001$) and total mediated communication had a significant positive relationship with positive affect thinking ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$).

The third regression model was conducted with relational/communication satisfaction as the criterion variable (see Table 8). The final model significantly predicted and accounted for 5% of the variance in relational/communication

satisfaction; $R^2 = .06$; adjusted $R^2 = .05$, $F(4, 657) = 9.80$, $p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .04$, $\Delta F(2, 653) = 14.94$, $p < .001$. In response to RQ2, parent biological sex shared a significant positive relationship with relational/communication satisfaction, $\beta = .12$, $p = .003$, indicating that participants reported greater satisfaction with their mothers. The frequency of FtF communication possessed a significant inverse relationship with relational/communication satisfaction, $\beta = -.09$, $p = .03$. In addition, the total amount of mediated communication was positively related to relational/communication satisfaction, $\beta = .21$, $p < .001$.

The fourth regression model was conducted with relational closeness as the criterion variable (see Table 9). The final model significantly predicted and accounted for 5% of the variance in relational closeness; total $R^2 = .06$, adjusted $R^2 = .05$, $F(4, 671) = 69.71$, $p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $\Delta F(2, 667) = 19.15$, $p < .001$. In response to RQ2, the total frequency of mediated communication was positively related to relational closeness, $\beta = .24$, $p < .001$.

In response to RQ2, the frequency of FtF communication shared a significant inverse relationship with positive affect thinking and relational/communication satisfaction. Additionally, the total amount of mediated communication was a significant predictor in all four models, and was positively associated with idealistic distortion, positive affect thinking, relational/communication satisfaction, and relational closeness. In light of this significant relationship, subsequent analyses were conducted to determine which individual mediated channels (i.e., email, instant messaging, phone calls, text

messaging, social networking sites, and video-conferencing) were responsible for the detected relationships.

The fifth regression model was conducted with idealistic distortion as the criterion variable, the expanded set of communication channels as predictors, and parent and participant sex as control variables (see Table 10). The final model was significant and accounted for 3% of the variance in idealistic distortion; total $R^2 = .04$; adjusted $R^2 = .03$, $F(9, 656) = 3.23$, $p = .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $\Delta F(7, 647) = 2.59$, $p = .01$. In response to RQ2, results revealed that participants' biological sex was significantly and negatively associated with idealistic distortion, $\beta = -.12$, $p < .001$; indicating that male participants reported greater idealistic distortion. Additionally, the amount of phone calls was positive associated with idealistic distortion, $\beta = .14$, $p = .002$.

The sixth regression model used positive affect thinking as the criterion variable, the expanded set of communication channels as predictors, and parent and participant sex as control variables (see Table 11). The final model was significant and accounted for 8% of the variance in positive affect thinking; total $R^2 = .09$, adjusted $R^2 = .08$, $F(9, 656) = 6.93$, $p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $\Delta F(7, 647) = 8.24$, $p < .001$. In response to RQ2, results revealed that FtF communication ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .001$) and instant messaging ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .04$) were significantly and negatively related to positive affect thinking. Phone calls ($\beta = .15$, $p < .001$) and social networking site communication ($\beta = .11$, $p = .01$) were significantly and positively related to positive affect thinking.

The seventh regression model included relational/communication satisfaction as the criterion variable, the expanded set of communication channels as predictors, and parent and participant sex as control variables (see Table 12). The final model was significant and accounted for 6% of the variance in relational/communication satisfaction; total $R^2 = .07$, adjusted $R^2 = .06$, $F(9, 657) = 5.21$, $p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $\Delta F(7, 648) = 5.38$, $p < .001$. In response to RQ2, parent biological sex shared a significant positive relationship with relational/communication satisfaction, $\beta = .12$, $p = .003$; indicating that participants reported greater satisfaction with their mothers. The frequency of FtF communication possessed a significant inverse relationship with relational/communication satisfaction, $\beta = -.11$, $p = .009$. In addition, the number of phone calls was positively related to relational/communication satisfaction, $\beta = .22$, $p < .001$.

The eighth regression model was conducted with relational closeness as the criterion variable, the expanded set of communication channels as predictors, and parent and participant sex as control variables (see Table 13). The final model was significant and accounted for 7% of the variance in relational closeness; total $R^2 = .08$, adjusted $R^2 = .07$, $F(9, 671) = 6.52$, $p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $\Delta F(7, 662) = 7.97$, $p < .001$. In response to RQ2, phone calls ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$), and video-conferencing ($\beta = .09$, $p = .04$) were positively related to relational closeness.

Hypothesis one predicted that parental idealization would mediate the relationship between the frequency of face-to-face and mediated communication and relational quality. Before testing for mediation, it was necessary to determine

whether the present study's data fit the proposed model (see Figure 1). Path analysis conducted using Mplus revealed that the data showed excellent fit with the proposed model (see Figure 2), $\chi^2(1) = .51$, $p = .47$, $\chi^2/df = 1.09$, CFI = 1.00, RSMEA < .001 (.00-.09), SRMR = .007. Mediated communication frequency displayed significant effects on both idealization indicators (idealistic distortion and positive affect thinking) and both relational quality indicators (relational/communication satisfaction and relational closeness). Conversely, FtF communication frequency was only significantly related to positive affect thinking.

Given the presence of a sound empirical model, hypothesis one was tested using the PRODCLIN program (distribution of the PRODUct Confidence Limits for INdirect effects: MacKinnon, Fritz, Williams, & Lockwood, 2007). PRODCLIN examines indirect effects by computing product confidence limits based on unstandardized path coefficients and standard errors of the two paths involved in the indirect effect. Confidence limits that do not contain zero are interpreted to indicate the presence of a significant mediation effect. The distribution of the product method was selected for the present study because existing research indicates that it provides more power and more accurate Type I error rates than other forms of mediation analysis (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002; MacKinnon et al., 2007; Pituch, Whittaker, & Stapleton, 2005).

Hypothesis one was supported. Analysis revealed the presence of six significant indirect effects (see Table 14). The relations between total mediated

communication frequency and relational/communication satisfaction were partially mediated by both idealistic distortion and positive affect thinking. Similarly, the relations between mediated communication frequency and relational closeness were partially mediated by both idealistic distortion and positive affect thinking. Finally, significant indirect effects were detected, such that positive affect thinking mediated the relations between FtF communication frequency and both relational/communication satisfaction and relational closeness. Face-to-face communication frequency did not display a significant direct effect on relational/communication satisfaction or relational closeness. Consequently the presence of significant indirect effects signals that positive affect thinking fully mediates the relationship between FtF communication frequency and relational quality. Idealistic distortion was not examined as a potential mediator between FtF communication frequency and relational quality because it did not possess a significant relationship with FtF communication frequency and was therefore set to zero within the model.

The third research question asked whether students who reside with their parents, students who geographically close to yet separate from their parents, and students who reside geographically distant from their parents differ in the frequency with which they use face-to-face and mediated communication channels with their parents. This question was examined using a MANOVA with living arrangements (co-residence, geographically close, and geographically distant) serving as the between-subjects factor. The log-transformed frequencies of FtF communication and total mediated communication served as a set of

dependent variables that share conceptual linkage as forms of parent-child interaction. The dependent variables were significantly correlated, Bartlett's test of sphericity: $\chi^2(2) = 75.34, p < .001$.

The MANOVA produced a significant multivariate effect for living arrangement on communication channel frequency, Wilks' $\Lambda = .37, F(4, 1346) = 220.03, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.40$. However, multivariate results should be read with caution because a significant Box's M test indicated that homoscedasticity could not be assumed; Box's $M = 567.84, F(6, 2461801.78) = 94.19, p < .001$.

At the univariate level, a significant main effect was found for FtF communication frequency, $F(2, 677) = 573.43, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.63$. Scheffé's post hoc tests revealed that differences were significant across levels of the factor in regard to FtF communication frequency; students who lived with their parent ($M = 19.44, SD = 24.41$) reported more FtF interaction than did students who lived geographically close to yet separate from their parent ($M = 1.57, SD = 2.48$), who reported more FtF interaction than did students who lived geographically distant from their parent ($M = .07, SD = .66$). A significant univariate effect was not detected for mediated communication frequency, $F(2, 677) = 1.30, p = .27$, observed power = .28. Hence, in regard to total mediated communication frequency, no differences emerged between students who lived with their parent ($M = 23.02, SD = 31.48$), students who lived separate yet geographically close to their parent ($M = 16.70, SD = 18.22$), and students who lived geographically distant from their parent ($M = 18.35, SD = 26.04$). Levene's tests were unremarkable for both univariate tests.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that students who reside geographically distant from their parents would report more idealization than students who reside geographically close to yet separate from their parents, who would report more idealization than students who reside with their parents. This hypothesis was tested using a MANCOVA with living arrangements (co-residence, geographically close yet separate, and geographically distant) as the between-subjects factor, and idealistic distortion and positive affect thinking as dependent variables that share conceptual linkage as forms of idealization. In order to isolate the variance explained by living arrangements, it was necessary to control for communication channel effects. The frequency of FtF communication and the frequency of mediated communication were thus included as potential covariates. Participant biological sex (dummy-coded) was also included as a potential covariate due to its relationship with idealistic distortion, which surfaced during analysis of RQ2. The dependent variables were significantly correlated, Bartlett's test of sphericity: $\chi^2(2) = 161.49, p < .001$.

The MANCOVA produced a significant multivariate effect for living arrangement on idealization, Wilks' $\Lambda = .97, F(4, 1304) = 5.59, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$. Participant biological sex was retained as a significant covariate, Wilks' $\Lambda = .98, F(2, 652) = 7.68, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. The amount of FtF communication was also retained as a significant covariate, Wilks' $\Lambda = .98, F(2, 652) = 5.26, p = .005$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. The aggregate amount of mediated communication was also retained, Wilks' $\Lambda = .98, F(2, 652) = 5.20, p = .006$,

partial $\eta^2 = .02$. Box's M test was nonsignificant, indicating that the assumption of homoscedasticity was met.

Univariate analysis revealed a significant main effect for living arrangements on idealistic distortion, $F(2, 658) = 8.72, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. The Levene's test was unremarkable for idealistic distortion, indicating that the assumption of homoscedasticity was upheld. This main effect was further examined using planned contrast tests reflecting the hypothesized directionality of group differences (coefficients: -3 = lives with the parent; 1 = lives geographically close to yet separate from the parent; 2 = lives geographically distant from the parent). In support of H2, results indicated that students who live geographically distant from their parent ($M = 5.94, SD = 1.16$) reported more idealistic distortion than did students who live geographically close to yet separate from their parent ($M = 5.84, SD = 1.18$), who reported more idealistic distortion than did students who live with their parent ($M = 5.59, SD = 1.31$), $t(660) = 2.50, p = .01$. See Figure 1 for a visual representation of means.

A significant univariate effect was also detected for living arrangements on positive affect thinking, $F(2, 658) = 6.87, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. The Levene's test was unremarkable for positive affect thinking, indicating that the assumption of homoscedasticity was upheld. This main effect was further examined using planned contrast tests reflecting the hypothesized directionality of group differences (coefficients: -3 = lives with the parent; 1 = lives geographically close to yet separate from the parent; 2 = lives geographically distant from the parent). In support of H2, results indicated that students who

lived geographically distant from their parent ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 1.20$) reported significantly more positive affect thinking than did students who lived geographically close to yet separate from their parent ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.30$), who reported more positive affect thinking than did students who lived with their parent ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.40$), $t(660) = 4.48$, $p < .001$. See Figure 2 for a visual representation of means.

Hypothesis three predicted that students who reside geographically distant from their parents would report greater relational quality than students who reside geographically close to yet separate from their parents, who would report greater relational quality than students who reside with their parents. This hypothesis was tested using a MANCOVA with living arrangements (co-residence, geographically close yet separate, and geographically distant) serving as the between-subjects factor, and relational/communication satisfaction and relational closeness as dependent variables that share conceptual linkage as indicators of relational quality. The frequency of FtF communication and aggregate frequency of mediated communication were once again used as potential covariates. Parent biological sex (dummy-coded) was also included as a potential covariate due to its relationship with relational/communication satisfaction, which surfaced during analysis of RQ2. The dependent variables were significantly correlated, Bartlett's test of sphericity: $\chi^2(2) = 164.39$, $p < .001$.

The MANCOVA produced a significant multivariate effect for living arrangement, Wilks' $\Lambda = .97$, $F(4, 1308) = 5.50$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. The frequency of FtF communication was retained as a significant covariate, Wilks' Λ

$= .99$, $F(2, 654) = 3.33$, $p = .04$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. The aggregate frequency of mediated communication was also retained as a significant covariate, Wilks' $\Lambda = .98$, $F(2, 654) = 6.89$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. Parent biological sex was also significant, Wilks' $\Lambda = .99$, $F(2, 654) = 3.23$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Box's M test was nonsignificant, indicating the assumption of homoscedasticity was met.

At the univariate level, a significant main effect was detected for living arrangements on relational/communication satisfaction, $F(2, 660) = 9.79$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. The Levene's test for relational/communication satisfaction was significant, however, indicating the results should be interpreted with caution, $F(2, 658) = 5.53$, $p = .004$. This main effect was further examined using planned contrast tests reflecting the hypothesized directionality of group differences (coefficients: coefficients: -3 = lives with the parent; 1 = lives geographically close to yet separate from the parent; 2 = lives geographically distant from the parent). In support of H3, results indicated that students who live geographically distant from their parent ($M = 5.93$, $SD = 1.15$) reported more relational/communication satisfaction did students who live geographically close to yet separate from their parent ($M = 5.89$, $SD = 1.13$), who reported more relational/communication satisfaction than did students who live with their parent ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 1.36$), $t(661) = 3.90$, $p < .001$. See Figure 3 for a visual representation of means.

A significant univariate main effect was also detected for living arrangements on relational closeness, $F(2, 660) = 5.78$, $p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. The Levene's test was unremarkable for relational closeness, indicating that the

assumption of homoscedasticity was upheld. This main effect was further examined using planned contrast tests reflecting the hypothesized directionality of group differences (coefficients: -3 = lives with the parent; 1 = lives geographically close to yet separate from the parent; 2 = lives geographically distant from the parent). In support of H3, results indicated that students who live geographically distant from their parent ($M = 5.23$, $SD = 1.38$) reported more relational closeness did students who lived geographically close to yet separate from their parent ($M = 5.08$, $SD = 1.34$), who reported more relational closeness than did students who lived with their parent ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 1.46$), $t(675) = 2.57$, $p = .01$. See Figure 4 for a visual representation of means.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The present study examined multimodal communication patterns within college students' parental relationships. It sought to determine whether the frequency of FtF and mediated communication is associated with parent-child relational quality, and tested a mediational model of the idealization process. Additionally, the present study explored whether students with different living arrangements (i.e., living with the parent, living geographically close to yet separate from the parent, and living geographically distant from the parent) differ in their levels of parental idealization and relational quality. As a whole, these results provided nuanced understanding regarding the ways in which communication modalities, idealization, and living arrangements influence relational quality in parent-student relationships during college.

Multimodal Communication Patterns of College Students and their Parents

Hofer and Moore (2010) reported that the average college student communicates with their parents 13.5 times each week, and that mobile communication devices serve as “electronic tethers” which enable nearly constant parental communication throughout students' day-to-day lives. In response to RQ1, participants in the present study revealed even greater amounts of parental communication, with the average student reporting 23 interactions with their primary parent during a typical school week. A large amount of variability existed; students revealed as little as zero and as many as 270 parental interactions per week. Interestingly, approximately 70% of the students fell at or below the statistical average of 23 parental interactions per week. Hence, the statistical mean

may have been inflated by the fact that a distinct and relatively large proportion of students were hyper-connected to their parents, with 10% of participants reporting more than 50 parental interactions during a typical school week. Although these students are certainly statistical anomalies, it is difficult to label them as outliers given that one out of every ten students fell into this category. Additional analysis is necessary to determine who these students with hyper-parental connections are, and whether they differ from other students in ways that the present study did not address.

More specifically, students in the present study revealed an average of 5 FtF interactions, and 19 mediated interactions with their parent during a typical school week. Again, these averages reflect the fact that most students did not see their parents FtF in a typical week, yet many students lived with their parents and thus reported high levels of FtF interaction. Text messaging and phone calls were the most commonly reported forms of mediated interaction, whereas email, instant messaging, social networking sites, and video-conferencing were relatively uncommon. Hence, it appears that students and parents likely use phone calls when their needs are best met through a vocal channel, and text messaging when their desire a text-based channel. The relative infrequency of email use in the present study is noteworthy given that participants in Trice's (2002) study averaged 6 emails to their parents in a week. This decrease in email usage can likely be attributed to the increased accessibility of alternative text-based communication options, such as text messaging.

The widespread adoption of smart phones and other mobile devices might also help explain the increased amount of overall parental communication that was seen in the present study. Hofer and Moore's (2010) data were collected during 2008, and mobile device usage has continued to experience rapid growth during recent years. Rapid technological innovation and diffusion might therefore partially explain why students in the present study reported more frequent parental interaction than noted in previous studies. Regardless of the reason, it is evident that most college students engage in large amounts of parental communication, which warrants focused examination of the effects associated with communication frequency.

Communication Modalities, Idealization, and Relational Quality

Whereas RQ1 simply described the multimodal communication patterns of college students and their primary parents, RQ2 explored the effects of FtF and mediation communication frequency within this context. More specifically, RQ2 examined how using various channels related to students' reports of parental idealization and relational quality. Existing research has examined idealization and relational quality in romantic relationships (e.g., Fowers & Applegate, 1995; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Murray et al., 1996; Rusbult et al., 1994; 2000), and the present study was able to successfully augment existing measures of idealistic distortion and positive affect thinking to examine parent-child relationships during college. The present study also attempted to create self-presentation measures that would fit the ongoing relational context, however this attempt was unsuccessful and the measures were dropped from analysis.

Students in the present study reported high average levels of idealization and relational quality with their primary parent, which is not surprising given that positivity biases are considered to be a prominent aspect of all close relationships (Martz et al., 1998). The presence of such high average scores indicates that a ceiling effect existed, yet the frequency of FtF and mediated parental communication was still able to predict both idealization and relational quality levels.

Idealistic distortion refers to one's tendency to view another person in an unrealistically positive manner (Fowers et al., 2002). Results from RQ2 indicated that idealistic distortion was significantly and positively related to the frequency of mediated communication between students and their parents. Further analysis of individual channels revealed that the frequency of phone call interactions was positively related to idealistic distortion. Idealistic distortion was not related to the frequency of FtF communication in the present study, which is surprising given that past research labels blocked FtF communication as the best predictor of idealistic distortion (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). This distinction might represent measurement differences because the present study assessed the average amount of FtF interaction in a week, and Stafford and Merolla's findings involved a measure of days since FtF interaction. Regardless, the present study suggests that the frequent use of mediated communication, particularly phone calls, is linked with students' tendency to report positive illusions about their parent.

Within the present study, Cate et al.'s (1995) positive affect thinking scale was adapted to assess the extent to which students reflect upon shared love and

fond memories of their parent. Results indicated that the frequency of FtF communication was significantly and negatively related to positive affect thinking, which supports Stafford and Merolla's (2007) claim that the blocking of FtF interaction is related to increased relational reminiscence. The adage "how can I miss you if you won't go away?" seems pertinent to this result. Students who rarely see their parents are more likely to miss them, which may provoke positive affect thinking.

Although FtF interaction was negatively related to positive affect thinking, the frequency of mediated interaction was the best predictor of positive affect thinking. Students who engaged in more mediated parental communication also reported greater positive affect thinking. In regard to specific mediated channels, positive affect thinking was significantly and positive related to phone calls, social networking sites, and text messaging, yet was negatively related to instant messaging. It is intriguing that many forms of mediated communication were significant predictors of positive affect thinking, yet did not predict idealistic distortion. One potential explanation is that various forms of mediated interaction facilitate a sense of presence (Tong & Walther, 2011), and might provoke students to reflect upon the relationship. Hence, the sending and receiving of text messages and social networking site messages might ensure that the parent remains on the students' mind, even if these channels do not encourage the establishment of positive illusions. Likewise, students who are engaging in positive affecting thinking might feel the urge to contact their parent, and mediated communication is often the most convenient mode of contact. It is less

clear why instant messaging was negatively related to positive affect thinking; however, it could represent a statistically significant yet practically meaningless relationship given the overwhelmingly low levels of instant messaging use amongst the majority of participants.

The present study also examined how FtF and mediated communication frequencies relate to parent-child relational quality indicators such as relational/communication satisfaction and relational closeness. Results indicated that relational/communication satisfaction was positively related to the frequency of mediated communication, and negatively related to the frequency of FtF communication. Expanded analysis of individual mediated channels revealed that phone calls were positively related to relational/communication satisfaction. Finally, the frequency of mediated communication was significantly and positively associated to relational closeness, with phone calls serving as the only individual channel that significantly predicted closeness. The fact that mediated communication frequency was positively related to parental relational quality falls in line with the now widely accepted claim that CMC can facilitate relational communication and maintenance (Walther, 1992, 1996). Moreover, it mirrors research which indicates that Internet communication frequency (Gunn & Gunn, 2000) and telephone communication frequency (Dainton & Aylor, 2002) are associated with greater relational quality in long-distance relationships.

Likewise, the somewhat unintuitive finding that relational/communication satisfaction is associated with a lack of FtF interaction also supports previous research (Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1999). Although physical

proximity is often considered to be an important requirement for close relationship success, college students were most satisfied with their parental relationship when they saw the parent less frequently. Emerging adults attempt to find a balance between closeness and autonomy with their parents (Dubas & Peterson, 1996; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009), and the present study's results indicate that relational quality is maximized when students maintain a strong sense of parental connection via mediated interaction (particularly phone calls), with less frequent FtF interaction.

A Mediational Model of Parental Idealization

The present study examined whether the concept of partner idealization can help explain the observed trend in which college students display increased relational quality with their parents (Golish, 2000; Lefkowitz, 2005; Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980). The parent-child relationship typically shifts toward a more mediated nature during college, especially if the child moves away from home to attend school. The timing of this shift in communication modality accompanies a noted increase in parent-child relational quality, which implies that idealization processes might be relevant to understanding college students' parental relationships.

The present study reveals that idealization does, indeed, provide a conceptual framework to examine the effects of FtF and mediated communication frequencies on relational quality. Partner idealization is a process that involves both behavioral and cognitive mechanisms (Miller et al., 2003), so H1 was assessed by including both mechanisms in a unified mediational model aimed at

predicting relational quality. Behavioral processes were observed via the frequency of FtF and mediated interaction, and cognitive processes were assessed using idealistic distortion and positive affect thinking. Within this model, the frequency of FtF and mediated communication were predicted to display direct effects on idealization and relational quality indicators, with idealization indicators mediating the relationship between communication frequencies and relational quality. Previous research has examined components of this model (e.g., Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1999), however the present study is the first to assess the coherent model, including both direct and indirect pathways.

Two bodies of scholarship informed the construction of the idealization model tested in the present study. Research regarding idealization in long-distance romantic relationships indicates that “idealization stems from FtF interaction deficits,” and has found that mediated communication is unrelated to idealization and communication quality (Stafford & Merolla, 2007, p. 38). Likewise, the hyperpersonal perspective asserts that restricted FtF communication and reliance on mediated communication can both lead individuals to form exaggerated partner impressions (Walther, 1996). The theory, however, does not indicate which component (i.e., the limitation of FtF or the heavy use of mediated communication) plays the most prominent role in producing idealized partner perceptions. By including both FtF and mediated communication frequencies in the same model, the present study was able to speak toward the relative

importance of each as they contribute to idealization processes between college students and their parents.

Results from the present study suggest that the frequency of mediated communication is more important than the limitation of FtF communication in producing parental idealization and provoking increased parental relational quality. The frequency of mediated communication was directly related to both indicators of parental idealization, and both indicators of relational quality. Additionally, as predicted by H1, idealistic distortion and positive affect thinking partially mediated the relations between mediated communication frequency and both relational/communication satisfaction and relational closeness. It can therefore be concluded that students reported greater relational quality both as a function of increased mediated communication, and also as a function of idealization that results from increased mediated communication. This conclusion supports the hyperpersonal perspective (Walther, 1996) and suggests that much can be gained by continuing to examine both behavioral (i.e., direct effects) and cognitive (i.e., indirect effects) pathways toward idealization and hyperpersonal communication.

The frequency of FtF communication displayed a more nuanced effect within the present study. FtF communication frequency was directly related to positive affect thinking, yet did not display significant direct effects on either indicator of relational quality. Likewise, the pathway between FtF communication frequency and idealistic distortion was set to zero within the model because RQ2 failed to detect a significant correlation between the variables. Analysis of RQ2

detected a relationship between FtF communication frequency and relational/communication satisfaction, but this relationship was no longer significant within the comprehensive model. Interestingly, positive affect thinking was found to fully mediate the relationship between FtF communication frequency and relational quality. The frequency of FtF communication was inversely related to relational/communication satisfaction and relational quality, but only as a function of increased positive affect thinking. This finding is intriguing because it reveals that students with limited parental FtF interaction did not report increased relational quality unless it led them to engage in higher levels of positive affect thinking. Hence, the present study lends substantial support to Stafford and Merolla's (2007) claim that limited FtF communication leads individuals in ongoing relationships to engage in increased relational reminiscence and other positive relational ruminations, which in turn, provoke a greater sense of relational quality. Moreover, the present study's use of idealization as a conceptual framework was able to detect a mediation effect that would have been overlooked if FtF communication frequency and relational quality were examined independent of the idealization processes.

The full model in the present study, including FtF and mediated communication frequencies, explained 34% of the variance in relational closeness, and 74% of the variance in relational/communication satisfaction. It must be noted, however, that the effect size estimate for relational/communication satisfaction is likely inflated due to the variable's strong conceptual overlap and empirical correlation with idealistic distortion. Indeed, past research defines

idealistic distortion as an indicator of relational satisfaction, such that satisfaction is partially constituted by an individual's ability to overlook their partners' imperfections and see that person in an overly positive manner (Fowers & Applegate, 1995; Fowers et al., 2002; Murray et al., 1996). Idealistic distortion and relational/communication satisfaction displayed very high correlations within the present study, however further analysis revealed distinctions between idealistic distortion and relational/communication satisfaction. For example, participant biological sex was a significant covariate for idealistic distortion, but did not for relational/communication satisfaction. Likewise, parent biological sex was a significant covariate for relational/communication satisfaction, yet did not predict idealistic distortion. These distinctions support the decision to conceptualize idealistic distortion as intrinsically related to, yet distinguishable from relational/communication satisfaction (e.g., Conley et al., 2009; Murray & Holmes, 1997). Hence, the present study offers a useful and powerful meditational model of the idealization process in parent-child relationships during college.

Geographic Distance and Living Arrangements

The concept of partner idealization is generally examined within two areas of communication research: computer-mediated communication and long-distance relationships. Whereas RQ2 and H1 examined the role of FtF and mediated communication frequencies on idealization and relational quality, RQ3, H2, and H3 attempted to more directly interrogate the importance of geographic distance and living arrangements. Past research regarding romantic relationships has

utilized a dichotomous approach by labeling couples as long-distance or geographically close (e.g., Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1999). However, additional distinctions regarding living arrangements were necessary to fit the present study's focus on parent-child relationships during college.

Moving out of the parental home is an important transition point that symbolizes an emerging adults' ability to function away from their parents (Aquilino, 2006; Golish, 2000). Students who live separate from their parents have been found to report more positive outcomes such as greater well being (Golish, 2000; Lefkowitz, 2005), greater attainment of adulthood (Kin & Beyers, 2010), and greater relational quality with their parents (Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980). The present study therefore separated students into three groups: students who live with their parent, students who live geographically close to yet separate from their parent, and students who live geographically distant from their parents. Without this distinction, it would be difficult to determine whether observed differences between geographically close and geographically distant parent-child relationships are confounded by issues of co-residence.

Analysis of RQ3 detected a significant multivariate effect for living arrangement on the frequency of FtF and mediated communication. More specifically, the three groups revealed similar levels of mediated communication, with no detected mediated communication frequency differences. Conversely, the three groups significantly differed in their levels of FtF interaction. Students who live with their parents reported the most FtF interaction, followed by students who

live separate from yet geographically close to their parents, followed by students who live geographically distant from their parents. The latter two groups revealed significant differences, yet both groups averaged less than 2 FtF interactions per week. Students who live with their parents averaged 19 FtF interaction per week, which was a drastic increase compared to the other two groups. As such, living arrangements, or coresidence, might be a more important determinant of college students' parental FtF communication frequency than geographic distance.

In sum, analysis of RQ3 lend additional support to Stafford and Merolla's (2007) study, in which long-distance and geographically close romantic partners differed in their FtF communication frequency, but not in their mediated communication frequency. Although the three groups reported similar amounts of mediated interaction, mediated communication likely plays a different role within the three groups. Geographically close partners likely use mediated communication as a supplement to their FtF interactions (Johnson et al., 2008). Conversely, mediated interaction represents a greater proportion of long-distance partners' total interaction (Dellmann-Jenkens et al., 1994; Miller et al., 2003; Stafford & Merolla, 2007), and reliance on mediated communication is a condition which lends itself to partner idealization. As such, mediated interaction might still play an important role in the previously described idealization process. Moreover, as indicated by H1, mediated communication appears to function similarly within the defined model regardless of where the student lives, with increased mediated interaction provoking greater parental idealization and more relational quality.

Hypotheses two and three continued to examine the importance of living arrangements and geographic distance, yet sought to determine whether the three groups differed in their levels of parental idealization and relational quality, irrespective of communication frequency differences. This contribution is important because previous research has not examined whether geographically close partners differ from long-distance partners when controlling for communication frequency effects.

As predicted, levels of idealistic distortion, positive affect thinking, relational/communication satisfaction, and relational closeness were highest for students who live geographically distant from their parents, followed by students who live geographically close to yet separate from their parents, followed by students who live with their parent. These differences were significant across all levels of the living arrangement variable on both indicators of idealization and both indicators of relational quality. Interestingly, analysis of means revealed that the greatest parental idealization and relational quality differences existed between students who live with their parent and students who do not live with their parent, regardless of whether that parent is geographically close or geographically distance. Hence, geographic distance and living arrangement (i.e., with the parent or separate from) both influence parental idealization and relational quality, but students' living arrangement appears to be a more important consideration for college students and their parents.

The importance of living arrangements within the present study likely reflects the fact that students and parents both possess negative views about

emerging adults living at home (Aquilino, 1996). Moving out of the parents' home is an important symbol of adulthood (Aquilino, 2006; Golish, 2000), and students who live separate from their parents report more positive outcomes such as increased autonomy (Kin & Beyers, 2010), and parental closeness (Golish, 2000; Lefkowitz, 2005). Conversely, coresidence can provoke students to engage in increased parental conflict, and hinder their sense of autonomy (White, 2002). As such, the present study's results suggest that living with a parent might make it harder for students to engage in idealization because students are constantly reminded of their parents' negative traits. Living separate from their parents appears to provide students with the necessary space for idealization and relational quality levels to increase, even if the student is geographically close, but especially if the student is geographically distant from their parent.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study successfully examined multimodal communication, idealization and relational quality within the context of college students' parental relationships. Although important insight was gleaned from this analysis, several limitations must be addressed. Future research directions can be inferred by identifying ways to rectify the limitations and widen the scope of the present study.

The first limitation pertains to the generalizability of results. The present study identified emerging adult college students as the target population, and used a convenience sample from a large state-funded university. The sample is likely similar to the student bodies of other large state-funded universities, however

generalizations to other college students should be made cautiously. More importantly, it is unknown whether the parent-child relationship patterns noted in the present study are applicable to all emerging adults.

The larger emerging adult population likely displays more diversity than represented within the present study's primarily middle-class and well-educated sample. For example, 42% of participants in the present study indicated that they live geographically distant from their parent, yet Hamilton and Hamilton (2006) point out that "going-away to college" is not the typical emerging adult experience. Approximately 70% of graduating high school seniors attend some form of post-secondary education, but many individuals enroll in online or two-year programs as opposed to traditional four-year universities (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Likewise, a large proportion of individuals proceed directly from high school into the workforce. It is plausible that the observed patterns regarding multimodal communication, living arrangements, parental idealization, and relational quality would hold true regardless of the educational status of emerging adults. However, college has been labeled one of the major characteristics of emerging adulthood because it typically provokes individuals to delay adult responsibilities and rely on their parents for support until after completing their degree (Arnett, 2000; 2006). Increased parental reliance might influence the ways in which students' relate to their parent, so additional research is necessary to understand whether the present study's result would hold true outside of the college context.

A second limitation is that the present study relied upon students' ability to accurately recall their parental communication frequencies during a typical school week. This method made it relatively easy to draw a large sample of students, and was well suited for the somewhat exploratory nature of the present study. Future research might follow-up on the present study by asking a smaller sample of students to keep a detailed diary of their actual parental communication. A diary method might be hindering for students who engage in large amounts of parental communication, but would offer complementary insight to the present study's findings.

A third limitation is that the present study was conducted from the perspective of students, and therefore offers a one-sided understanding of parent-child relationships during college. This decision was made because parents are known to display an incredibly strong positivity bias regarding their young children (Wenger & Fowers, 2008), and it was expected that parents would continue to display universally high levels of idealization and relational quality regarding their emerging adult children. Emerging adults tend to report satisfying parental relationships (Hofer & Moore, 2010), but were expected to display more variability within the context of the present study. Although parents might display greater levels of idealization and relational quality than students, existing research suggests that parents can experience relational tension if they disagree with their emerging adult child's decisions, points of view, or overall lifestyle (Hendry, 2010). Likewise, many parents report negative views about their young adult children living at home (Aquilino, 1996), and might experience distress if they

feel that their parenting left their child ill-prepared to thrive within society (Ryff & Seltzer 1996b). Given the potential for parents to feel distress regarding their emerging adult children, future research might broaden the scope of the present study to determine if idealization processes are pertinent to the parental experience. Likewise, dyadic parent-child data could be obtained, and would also enable the use of idealization measures which require dyadic data (e.g., Murray et al., 1996).

A fourth limitation is that the present study utilized a cross-sectional design. The underlying argument posited was that leaving the parental home to attend college provokes reduced FtF interaction and increased reliance on mediated interaction, and therefore provides students with the necessary space to develop more idealized perceptions of their parents. This process could be best examined using longitudinal data which surveys high school seniors or incoming college freshmen before they begin school, and follows these same students over the course of their first year of college. Following the same group of students as they transition to college would enable a thorough understanding of the timing in which idealization processes begin to occur.

A final limitation of the present study is that it presents a narrow understanding of larger family and societal dynamics. The present study focused on understanding the interplay of FtF and mediated communication frequency, geographic distance/living arrangements, idealization, and relational quality in college students' parental relationships. Participants' age, biological sex, and number of siblings were all examined as potential covariates, as was the

biological sex of the primary parent. As with any study, the decision to focus on these variables limited the present study's ability to examine other potentially intriguing variables. Future research can offer a more rich understanding of college student's parental idealization and relational quality by broadening the scope to include some of the following concepts.

First, culture and socio-economic status might provide increased complexity regarding the role of distance and living arrangements within the present study. Cultural differences, might influence the timing in which children are expected to leave their family home (Buhl, 2007). Likewise, socio-economic status and other financial hardships prevent many emerging adults from attending college (Gitelson & McDermott, 2006), and often force individuals to remain in their parents' home because they cannot afford to live alone. The present study examined where students live, but did not probe the underlying reasons (e.g., cultural expectations and financial concerns) for said living arrangements. It is possible that students who choose to live at home experience greater parental relational well being than students who are forced to live at home. Hence, future research should attempt to examine culture and socio-economic status within the context of living arrangements and parent-child outcomes during college.

Second, emerging adult's parental relational quality might be affected by events that provoke family distress. For example, parent-child conflict might play a role within the proposed model of idealization and relational quality. Existing research suggests that residing with a parent can provoke increased conflict (White, 2002). The present study found that students who reside at home report

less idealization and lower parental relational quality, and increased conflict might help explain this observation. Similarly, emerging adults might display different levels of parental relational quality after the occurrence of hurtful events, particularly if forgiveness was not granted (Brann, Rittenour, & Myers, 2007). Likewise, a history of parental divorce has been found to negatively predict adults' parental relational quality (O'Connor et al., 1996). Parental divorce might lead individuals to live separate from one parent for many years before college, which would influence the idealization processes described in the present study. Finally, the present study asked participants to report on their primary parent, however, it did not examine whether this primary parent was the sole parent, as is often the case in single-parent households. Future research should demonstrate greater awareness of these family dynamics which might greatly influence how parents and children relate.

Future research should also probe whether various markers of adulthood relate with the idealization processes described in the present study. Hofer and Moore (2010) assert that large amounts of parent-child communication might be hindering college students' ability to develop into autonomous adults. It is therefore important to examine whether the frequency of FtF and mediated parental interaction is related to adulthood markers (e.g., autonomy, financial independence, relational maturity, and filial maturity). The development of adult social roles is an important task for emerging adults, and it is vital that parents and emerging adults find an acceptable balance between autonomy and closeness so that they can maintain a mature relationship through adulthood (Dumas &

Peterson, 1996; Kenyon & Koerner, 2009; Nydegger, 1991). Hence, relational quality is not the only important outcome to consider within the context of communication frequency and idealization. Students might be deeply satisfied with their parental relationships even if these relationships include unhealthy levels of communication which ultimately hinder students' ability to function autonomously. The present study did not directly assess students' sense of autonomy, however this concept is an important consideration for future research.

Finally, the present student presented a model in which idealization mediates that relationship between FtF and mediated communication frequencies and relational quality in college students' parental relationship. Within in this model high levels of idealization are linked with greater perceptions of relational quality. Questions remain, however, regarding the long term effects of parental idealization. Previous research regarding romantic relationships suggests that idealistic distortion contributes to relational quality (Miller et al., 2006; Murray, et al., 1996; Murray et al., 2000), yet this relationship might actually possess a curvilinear component. Extremely high levels of partner idealization can provoke negative relational outcomes when partners chronically fail to meet each others' idealized expectations (McNulty, 2010; McNulty & Karney, 2004). Likewise, Stafford and Merolla (2007) indicate that idealization assists relational quality when partners are distant, yet is related to relationship termination when partners become proximate. Together, these studies suggest that idealization can sometimes provoke negative long-term outcomes in romantic relationships.

Unlike romantic relationships, the parent-child relationship is nonvoluntary and might therefore be more protected from the negative outcomes of idealization. Likewise, romantic relational partners usually become more intimate over time, and may possess the ultimate goal of marriage or other forms of cohabitation. College students pursue a different trajectory with their parents in the sense that they progress toward a permanent sense of autonomy, with the anticipation of established a separate household. As such, idealization might possess fewer long-term risks for college students and their parents. Future research should specifically address the long-term implications of parent-child idealization.

Practical and Theoretical Conclusions

The emerging adult years are the longest (Ryff & Seltzer, 1996a) and least studied developmental period of the parent-child relationship (Birditt, Fingermann, Lefkowitz, & Dush, 2008; Gitelson & McDermott, 2006; O'Connor et al., 1996; Sherrod, Haggerty & Featherman, 1993). The present study offered in-depth analysis of the multimodal communication patterns of parents and college students, and revealed that the FtF and mediated communication frequencies are related to relational quality via idealization mechanisms. Living arrangements and geographic distance were found to be important factors, above and beyond communication channel effects. Together, these results offer important practical and theoretical contributions.

Emerging adulthood is associated with increased parent-child relational well-being (Schulenberg et al., 2005). College student want to be autonomous, yet

still desire a close parental bond (Kenyon & Koerner, 2009). Although students in the present study were overwhelmingly happy with their parental relationships, closeness and satisfaction levels were highest among students who live separate from their parents, and who report more mediated and less FtF interaction. These findings have important practical implications for families as they enter the transition period of emerging adulthood. On a practical level, parents and children may worry that their relationship will deteriorate if their child moves away from home to attend college. The present study suggests that this concern is unfounded. Students reported a greater sense of parental relational quality when they lived separate from their parent, and actually indicated the most satisfaction and closeness when they lived geographically distant from their parent.

Parent-student relationship quality was facilitated by high levels of mediated interaction (particularly phone calls) and limited FtF interaction in the present study. This combination of communicative behaviors was found to directly and/or indirectly (e.g., via idealization mechanisms) provoke increased relational quality. That said, the majority of college students remain local as opposed to “going-away” for school (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006), it is not always financially practical for students to live separate from their parents (Aquilino, 1996). It is therefore important to acknowledge that students who reported living at home and engaging in frequent FtF parental interaction still reported close and satisfied parental relationships, just to a lesser extent than their peers. These students might still find ways to improve their relational quality by

limiting FtF interaction with their parent, particularly if FtF interactions are a source of stress or conflict within the relationship.

On a theoretical level, the present study offers important insight regarding the potential for hyperpersonal communication within on-going relationships. The hyperpersonal perspective (Walther, 1996) asserts that the channel, sender, receiver, and feedback characteristics of CMC enable individuals to carefully craft messages which maximize their positive presentation and minimize the presence of negative communication. As a result, online associates often develop idealized, or hyperpersonal impressions which lead partners to experience expectancy violations and reduced relational quality upon meeting FtF (Ramirez Wang, 2008; Ramirez & Zhang, 2007). These claims, however, were developed and are most commonly tested within the context of online-based relationships. Hyperpersonal communication processes might become relevant when a primarily FtF relationship migrates to an online setting (Human & Lane, 2008; Walther & Parks, 2002); however, Tong and Walther (2011) point out that the hyperpersonal perspective remains relatively unexplored in regard to ongoing or multimodal relationships.

The present study adds a unique contribution to the field of CMC research by examining an ongoing relationship at a time in which partners commonly begin to rely on more mediated interaction. CMC partners who have never met offline are said to form hyperpersonal relationships when they make generalizations based on limited cues (Walther, 1996), however, partners engaged in FtF relationships that switch toward primarily mediated interaction might form

idealized perceptions because they draw upon lingering physical memories of their partner to fill in the informational gaps associated with mediated interaction (Human & Lane, 2008). Hence, hyperpersonal or idealized perceptions likely represent a process in which ongoing relational partners begin to overlook negative partner traits while inflating perceptions of positive affect in a primarily mediated relational context. The present study's model of hyperpersonal dynamics reveals that idealized partner perceptions occurred as a result of mediated communication use between college students and their parent. Future research should attempt to determine whether the present study's model is applicable to other forms of ongoing relationships that shift toward mediation communication, such as romantic relationships or friendships that become geographically distant.

The present study also contributes to scholarly knowledge regarding idealization processes in long-distance relationships. Existing research has focused almost exclusively on long-distance romantic relationships (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1999), or long-distance friendships (Human & Lane, 2008; Johnson, 2001). The present study made two important contributions to this line of research. First, this study tested the concepts of partner idealization within a relationship that is often long-distance, yet remains unstudied within a long-distance framework. Unlike romantic partnerships and friendships, the parent-child relationship is a nonvoluntary bond that is generally marked by high levels of commitment, even if partners encounter relational difficulties or are geographically distant. That said, the present study

revealed that college students are still susceptible to idealization processes which provoke differing levels of parental relational quality. Similar to romantic partners, emerging adult children reveal the best parental relationship outcomes when they engage in high levels of mediated interaction and low levels of FtF interaction.

Second, the present study broke apart the traditional long-distance/geographically close dichotomy that is frequently used in romantic relationship research (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1999). The present study instead included elements of both geographic distance and living arrangements to distinguish between students who live with their parents, students who live geographically close to yet separate from their parents, and students who live geographically distant from their parents. Moreover, this study controlled for students FtF and mediated parental communication in an attempt to isolate the variance explained by geographic distance and living arrangements. This distinction proved important, because the biggest differences in idealization and relational quality emerged between students who live at home and students who do not. Future research regarding romantic relationships might utilize a similar approach by distinguishing cohabiting partners from partners who live geographically close yet separate from each other.

In conclusion the present study suggests that idealization is a potential important concept within ongoing relationships such as the parent-child relationship during college. The present study successfully aligned concepts from

various scholarly disciplines (e.g., human communication, psychology, and family studies) in order to conceptualize the behavioral and cognitive mechanisms that facilitate idealization within the parent-child context. As such, this study can serve as an important springboard for future research regarding emerging adult-parent relationships, hyperpersonal communication in ongoing relationships, and idealization in long-distance relationships.

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Table 1

Factor Loadings for Idealization Measures

Scale	Idealistic Distortion	Mediated Presentation	Positive Affect Thinking
My parent completely understands me.	.64	-.10	.27
I could not ask for a better parent.	.92	.001	.001
My parent always has my best interests at heart.	.95	-.02	-.12
My parent always does whatever they can to provide for me.	.90	.07	-.19
My parent and I get along perfectly.	.67	-.02	.23
My parent possesses all the qualities of an ideal parent.	.85	.01	.07
I take advantage of mediated communication to censor the information my parent receives about me.	.03	.87	.09
I use mediated communication to avoid unpleasant interactions with my parent.	-.04	.91	-.03
I edit the mediated messages I send my parent to make sure that I come across in a positive manner.	.02	.88	-.03
I think about all of the fun my parent and I have had together.	.04	.001	.87
I think about all the memories I have of our relationship.	-.03	.02	.92
I reflect on how much I love my parent.	.02	-.03	.90
I think about all of the experiences that my parent and I have shared together.	.02	.03	.92
I reflect on how much my parent loves me.	.02	.03	.88

Table 2

Factor Loadings for Relational/Communication Satisfaction

Scale	Relationship Satisfaction
This relationship is rewarding.	.89
I am very satisfied with our typical conversations.	.91
I am very satisfied with the amount of communication between me and my parent.	.80
My parent genuinely wants to get to know me.	.87
I would not want to do anything that would hurt this relationship.	.80
My parent expresses a lot of interest in what I have to say.	.89
During our typical conversations, I am able to present myself as I want my parent to view me.	.81
I feel like I could talk about anything with my parent.	.77
I am satisfied in this relationship	.92
I am very dissatisfied with our typical conversations (Reverse)	.65

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Matrix for Idealization and Relational Quality Variables

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. Idealistic Distortion	1.00				
2. Mediated Presentation	.12*	1.00			
3. Positive Affect Thinking	.47*	.07	1.00		
4. Relational/Communication Satisfaction	.87*	.07	.56*	1.00	
5. Relational Closeness	.40*	.007	.56*	.49*	1.00

Note: * $p < .01$

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Parent-Child Communication Channel Frequencies

	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Mo</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Face-to-Face	4.61	0	0	13.47	0	100
Email	1.05	0	0	3.77	0	70
Instant Messaging	.91	0	0	5.24	0	100
Phone Calls	5.96	4	2	7.79	0	100
Text Messaging	9.46	5	0	15.64	0	100
Social Networking Sites	.84	0	0	2.36	0	25
Video Conferencing	.46	0	0	1.66	0	25
Total Mediated Comm.	18.69	11	10	24.81	0	270

Table 5

Comparison of Untransformed and Log Transformed Parent-Child Communication Channel Frequencies

	Untransformed			Log Transformed		
	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
Face-to-Face	13.47	5.09	29.53	.48	1.51	1.55
Email	3.77	12.83	208.67	.28	1.83	4.10
Instant Messaging	5.24	13.92	234.07	.27	3.25	11.49
Phone Calls	7.79	4.95	39.81	.33	.34	.62
Text Messaging	15.64	3.83	17.13	.48	.17	-.23
Social Networking Sites	2.36	5.21	35.97	.27	2.04	3.69
Video Conferencing	1.66	7.75	85.65	.21	2.82	8.70
Total Mediated Communication	24.81	4.46	30.35	.39	.19	.31

Table 6

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Idealistic Distortion

Predictor	Zero-order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1: Control Variables					.02**
Parent Biological Sex	.04	.15	.08	.07	
Participant Biological Sex	-.11**	-.24	.08	-.12*	
Step 2: Channel Frequencies					.02**
Face-to-Face	-.01	-.07	.08	-.04	
Total Mediated	.13**	.40	.10	.16**	
<i>Notes.</i> Total $R^2 = .04$; adjusted $R^2 = .03$. $F(4, 656) = 6.61, p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$					

Table 7

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Positive Affect Thinking

Predictor	Zero-order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1: Control Variables					.01
Parent Biological Sex	.07	.13	.08	.06	
Participant Biological Sex	.05	.08	.08	.04	
Step 2: Channel Frequencies					.07**
Face-to-Face	-.10**	-.30	.08	-.14**	
Total Mediated	.24**	.65	.10	.25**	
<i>Notes.</i> Total $R^2 = .08$; adjusted $R^2 = .07$. $F(4, 656) = 13.37, p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$					

Table 8

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Relational/Communication Satisfaction

Predictor	Zero-order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1: Control Variables					.01*
Parent Biological Sex	.11**	.25	.08	.12*	
Participant Biological Sex	-.03	-.09	.08	-.05	
Step 2: Channel Frequencies					.04**
Face-to-Face	-.05	-.18	.08	-.09*	
Total Mediated	.19**	.53	.10	.21**	
<i>Notes.</i> Total $R^2 = .06$; adjusted $R^2 = .05$. $F(4, 657) = 9.80, p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$					

Table 9

Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Relational Closeness

Predictor	Zero-order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1: Control Variables					.004
Parent Biological Sex	.05	.09	.08	.04	
Participant Biological Sex	.04	.07	.08	.04	
Step 2: Channel Frequencies					.05**
Face-to-Face	-.02	-.13	.08	-.07	
Total Mediated	.23**	.61	.10	.24**	

Notes. Total $R^2 = .06$, adjusted $R^2 = .05$, $F(4, 671) = 69.71$, $p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Table 10

Expanded Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Idealistic Distortion

Predictor	Zero-order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1: Control Variables					.02*
Parent Biological Sex	.04	.15	.08	.07	
Participant Biological Sex	-.11**	-.24	.08	-.12*	
Step 2: Channel Frequencies					.03*
Face-to-Face	-.01	-.07	.09	-.04	
Email	.05	.09	.15	.03	
Instant Messaging	.01	-.15	.16	-.02	
Phone Calls	.13**	.42	.14	.14*	
Text Messaging	.05	-.09	.02	-.09	
Social Networking Sites	-.01	-.10	.09	-.03	
Video-Conferencing	.05	.27	.21	.06	
<i>Notes.</i> Total $R^2 = .04$; adjusted $R^2 = .03$. $F(9, 656) = 3.23$, $p = .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$					

Table 11

Expanded Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Positive Affect Thinking

Predictor	Zero-order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1: Control Variables					.01
Parent Biological Sex	.07	.13	.08	.06	
Participant Biological Sex	.05	.08	.08	.04	
Step 2: Channel Frequencies					.08**
Face-to-Face	-.10**	-.28	.14	-.14**	
Email	-.08*	.08	.15	.02	
Instant Messaging	.005	-.32	.16	-.09*	
Phone Calls	.19**	.45	.14	.15**	
Text Messaging	.18**	.21	.09	.10*	
Social Networking Sites	.15**	.42	.16	.11*	
Video-Conferencing	.12**	.33	.21	.07	
<i>Notes.</i> Total $R^2 = .09$, adjusted $R^2 = .08$, $F(9, 656) = 6.93$, $p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$					

Table 12

*Expanded Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting
Relational/Communication Satisfaction*

Predictor	Zero- order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1: Control Variables					.01
Parent Biological Sex	.11**	.25	.08	.12*	
Participant Biological Sex	-.03	-.90	.08	-.05	
Step 2: Channel Frequencies					.05
Face-to-Face	-.05	-.22	.09	-.11*	
Email	.05	.05	.15	.01	
Instant Messaging	-.01	-.13	.16	-.04	
Phone Calls	.20**	.66	.14	.22**	
Text Messaging	.12**	.06	.09	.03	
Social Networking Sites	.05	.09	.16	.03	
Video-Conferencing	.04	.04	.21	.008	
<i>Notes.</i> Total $R^2 = .07$, adjusted $R^2 = .06$, $F(9, 657) = 5.21$, $p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$					

Table 13

Expanded Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Relational Closeness

Predictor	Zero-order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1: Control Variables					.004
Parent Biological Sex	.05	.09	.08	.04	
Participant Biological Sex	.04	.07	.08	.04	
Step 2: Channel Frequencies					.08**
Face-to-Face	-.02	-.14	.08	-.17	
Email	.09*	.11	.14	.03	
Instant Messaging	.03	-.13	.16	-.04	
Phone Calls	.25**	.70	.13	.23**	
Text Messaging	.14**	.08	.09	.04	
Social Networking Sites	.08*	.11	.16	.03	
Video-Conferencing	.13*	.42	.21	.09*	
<i>Notes.</i> Total $R^2 = .08$, adjusted $R^2 = .07$, $F(9, 671) = 6.52$, $p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$					

Figure 1

Proposed Mediation Model for Parental Idealization

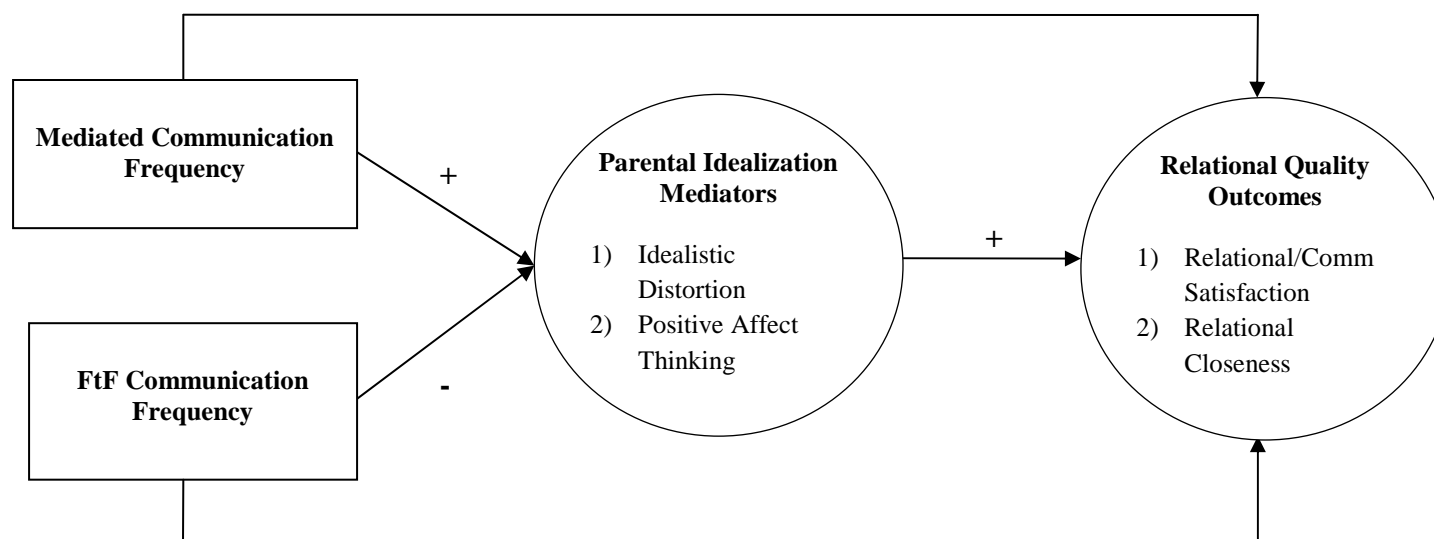
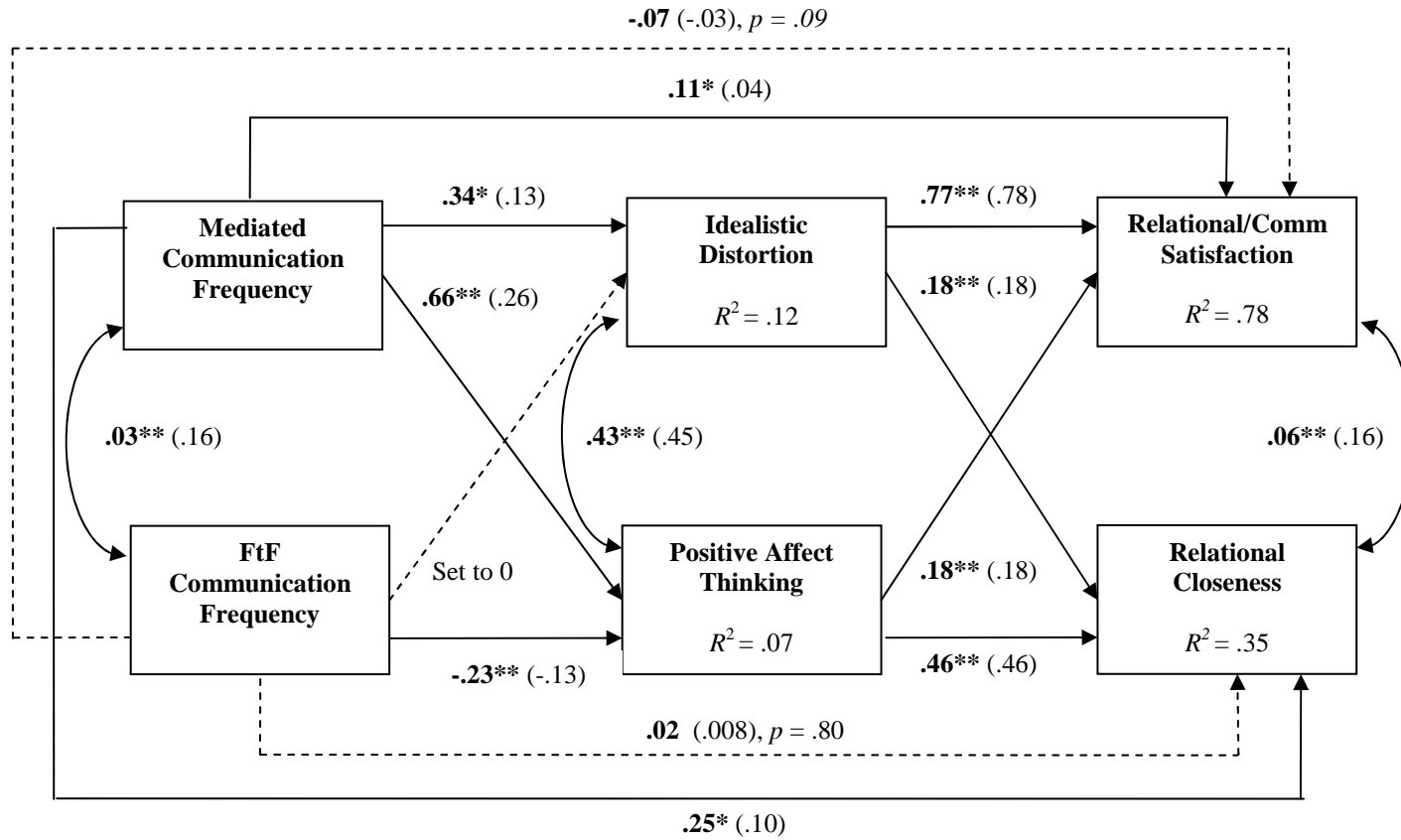


Figure 2

Final Meditational Model for Parental Idealization



Notes: Unstandardized coefficients are in bold, standardized coefficients are in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Table 14

Confidence Intervals for Mediated Effects

	95% Lower Confidence Interval	95% Upper Confidence Interval
Mediated Comm Frequency → Idealistic Distortion → Rel/Comm Satisfaction	.11	.41
Mediated Comm Frequency → Positive Affect Thinking → Rel/Comm Satisfaction	.08	.17
Mediated Comm Frequency → Idealistic Distortion → Relational Closeness	.02	.11
Mediated Comm Frequency → Positive Affect Thinking → Relational Closeness	.21	.41
FtF Comm Frequency → Positive Affect Thinking → Rel/Comm Satisfaction	-.08	-.02
FtF Comm Frequency → Positive Affect Thinking → Relational Closeness	-.19	-.06

Note: Confidence intervals were obtained from PRODCLIN. All effects are significant at .05

Figure 3

Means Plot for Living Arrangements on Idealistic Distortion

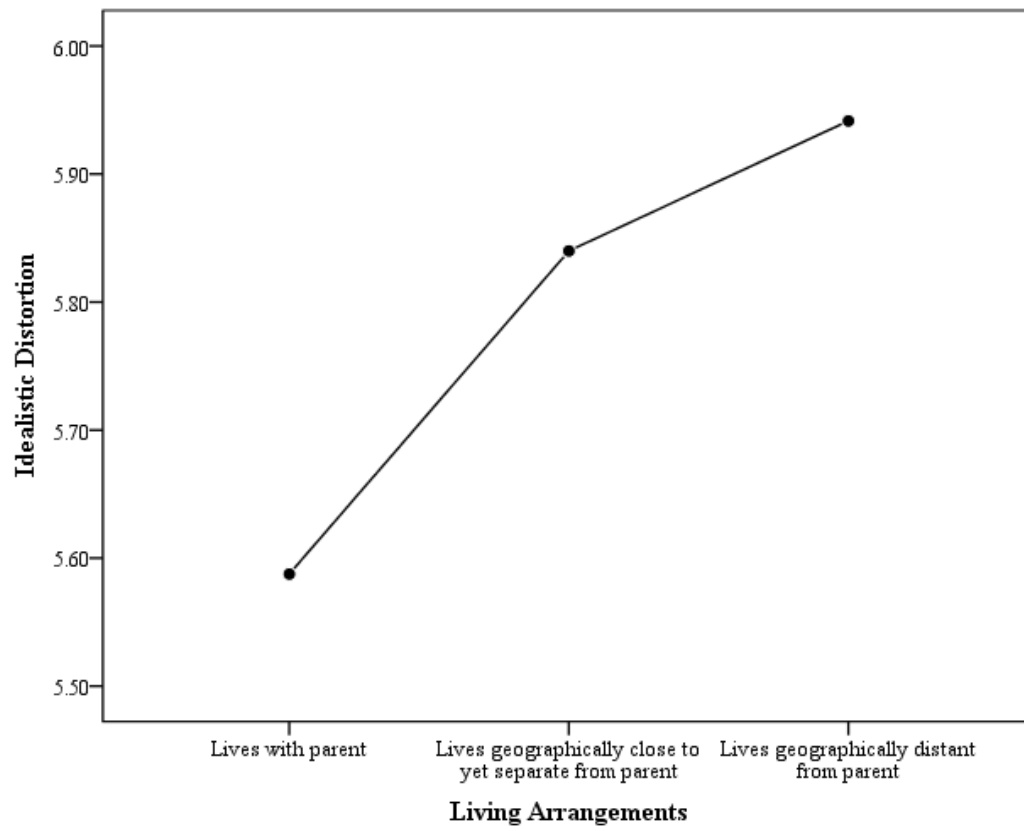


Figure 4

Means Plot for Living Arrangements on Positive Affect Thinking

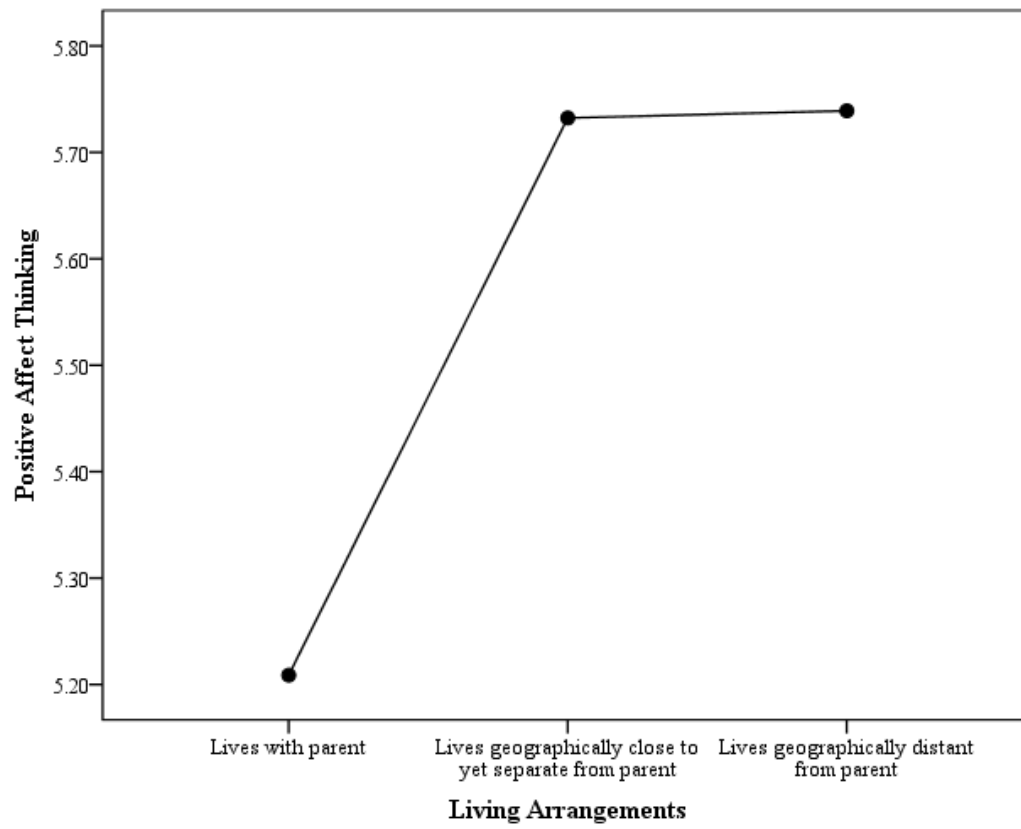


Figure 5

Means Plot for Living Arrangements on Relational/Communication Satisfaction

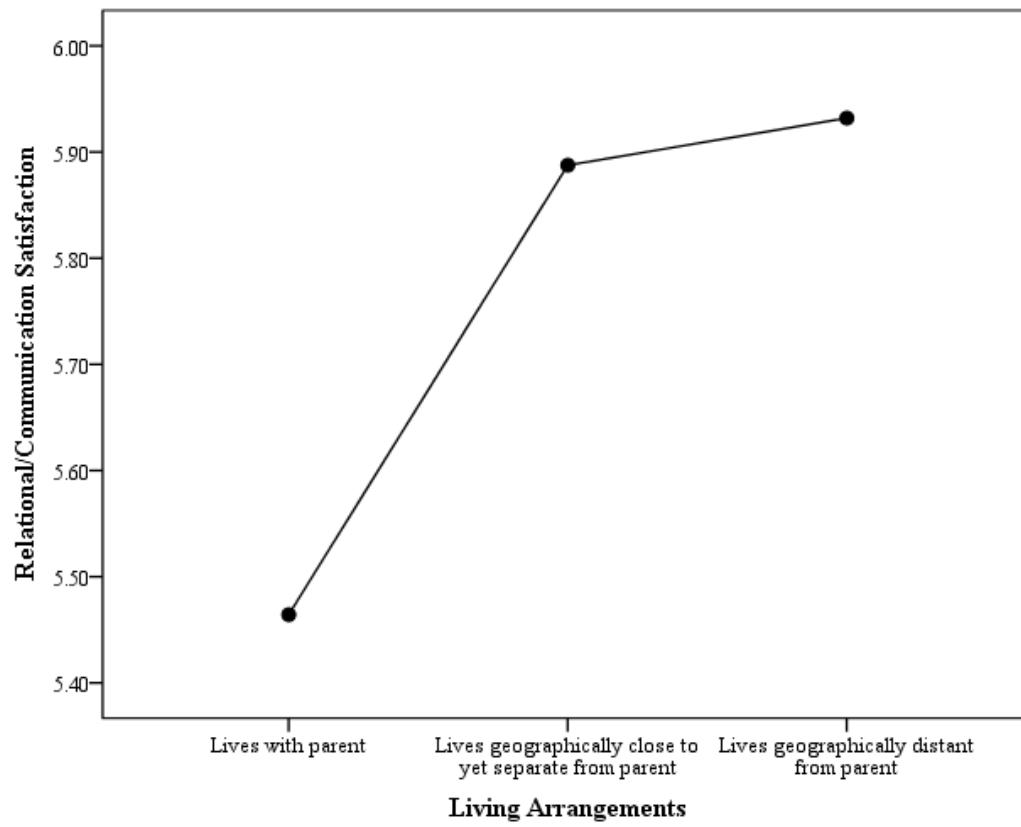
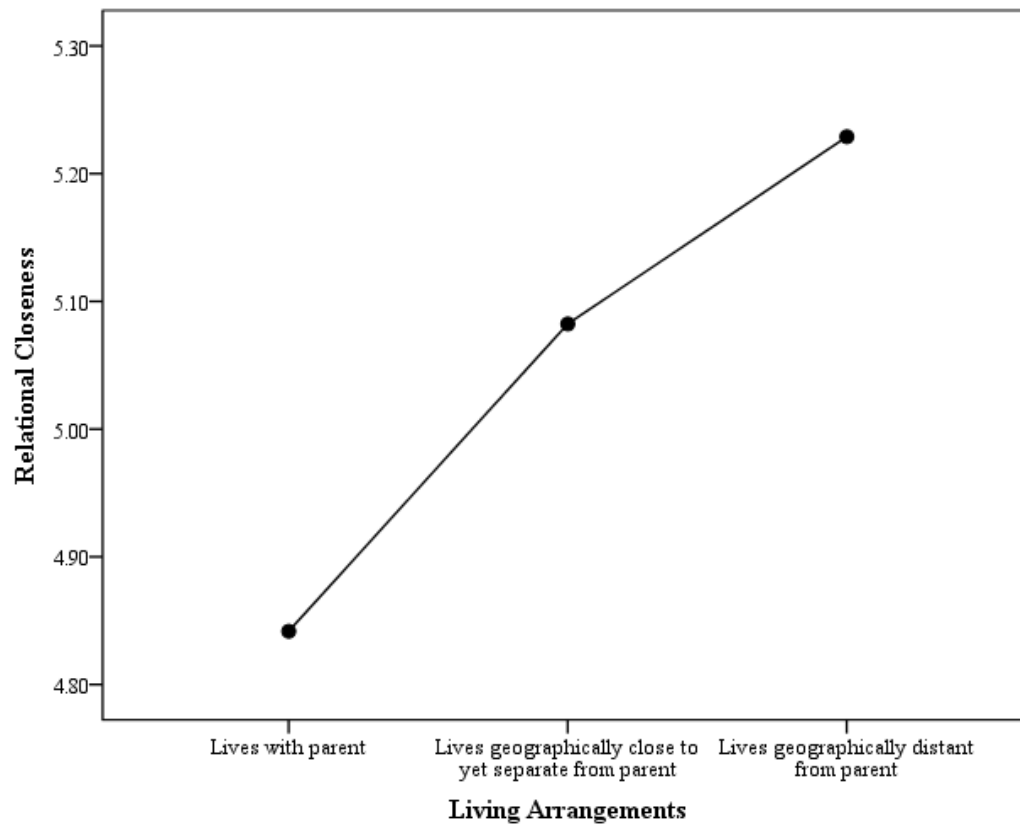


Figure 6

Means Plot for Living Arrangements on Relational Closeness



APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Parent-Child Communication During College

Cover Letter and Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Erin Bryant and I am a doctoral student in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University, under the supervision of Dr. Kory Floyd.

I am conducting a research study that examines college students' relationships with their parents. I am inviting your participation, which will involve completing an online survey. Your participation in this study is voluntary and should require no more than 30 minutes to complete. You can skip questions if you wish. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, and you will still have an opportunity to earn extra credit via an alternative assignment. You must be 18-25 years of age in order to participate in this study.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

When you are finished completing the survey, you will be linked to a separate document where you will be asked to provide your name as well as the name of the instructor who referred you to this survey. This information cannot be linked to your survey responses and will be used only to provide instructors with a list of students who completed the survey. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known.

If you have any questions concerning this study, please contact the research team at: embryant@asu.edu. 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 Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Research Compliance Office, at (480) 965-6788.

Completing the questionnaire will be considered your consent to participate.

Sincerely,

Erin Bryant
Dr. Kory Floyd

Identification of a Parent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. Please take a moment to think about the parent whom you would consider to be your primary parent, meaning that this person is your main source of parental support. The remainder of this survey will ask you to answer questions in response to only this parent.

1. Please take a moment to think about the parent whom you would consider to be your primary parent, meaning that this person is your main source of parental support. Which sex is this parent?

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

2. Are you biologically related to this parent?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

3. Which of the following best describes your high school living arrangements in comparison to this parent?

- ☐ I lived with this parent fulltime.
☐ I lived with the parent parttime.
☐ I did not live with this parent.

Other (please specify)

4. Which of the following best describes your current living arrangements in comparison to this parent?

- ☐ I currently live in the same household as this parent.
☐ I currently live separate from this parent, but they are geographically close enough that I could see him/her on a regular basis if I wanted to do so.
☐ I live separate from this parent, and the geographic distance is great enough that I could not see him/her on a regular basis if I wanted to do so.

5. Please describe any factors that led you to select this current living arrangement.

6. Approximately how many months ago did you move out of this parent's household?

Months

7. Do you still reside with this parent during school-term breaks (e.g., winter and summer)?

- ☐ Yes, I reside with this parent during school-term breaks.
- ☐ No, I do not reside with this parent during school-term breaks.

Communication Channel Usage

This next section asks you to identify how frequently you utilize different forms of communication with your previously identified primary parent. Please answer each question as accurately as possible.

8. DURING A TYPICAL SCHOOL WEEK, approximately how many times do you use each of the following forms of communication with your primary parent?

Face-to-face	<input type="text"/>
Email	<input type="text"/>
Instant Messaging	<input type="text"/>
Phone Calls	<input type="text"/>
Text Messaging	<input type="text"/>
Social Networking Sites	<input type="text"/>
Video-conferencing (e.g., Skype)	<input type="text"/>

9. Please estimate the percentage of your total interactions with this parent that are conducted in each of the following ways. Your numbers should add up to 100%

% via face-to-face	<input type="text"/>
% via Email	<input type="text"/>
% via Instant Messaging	<input type="text"/>
% via Phone Calls	<input type="text"/>
% via Text Messaging	<input type="text"/>
% via Social Networking Sites	<input type="text"/>
% via Video-conferencing (e.g., Skype)	<input type="text"/>

10. Interactions are generally initiated by one person, meaning that the initiator makes the first contact. Please estimate the percentage of your total interactions with this parent that you initiate, as well as the percentage of interactions that your parent initiates. Your numbers should add up to 100%

% of interactions that I initiate	<input type="text"/>
% of interactions that my parent initiates	<input type="text"/>

11. Approximately how long has it been since you have seen this parent face-to-face? Please choose to answer this question using one (and only one) of the following options: days, weeks, months, or years. Please select whichever option is easiest for you to recall, and leave the other options blank.

Days	<input type="text"/>
Weeks	<input type="text"/>
Months	<input type="text"/>
Years	<input type="text"/>

Parental Views

This next section asks you to continue thinking about your primary parent.

12. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your primary parent (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

	Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
My parent completely understands me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I could not ask for a better parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parent always has my best interests at heart.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parent always does whatever they can to provide for me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would not want to do anything that would hurt this relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parent and I get along perfectly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parent possesses all the qualities of an ideal parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I always devote my full attention to my parent when we are together.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am always on my best behavior when I am around my parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I try to find ways to ensure that face-to-face time with my parent is special.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I take advantage of mediated communication to censor the information my parents receive about me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use mediated communication to avoid unpleasant interactions with my parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I edit the mediated messages I send my parent to make sure that I come across in a positive manner.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Parental Views (2)

13. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your primary parent (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
This relationship is rewarding.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am very satisfied with our typical conversations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with the amount of communication between me and my parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parent genuinely want to get to know me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am very dissatisfied with our typical conversations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would not want to do anything that would hurt this relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parent expresses a lot of interest in what I have to say.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
During our typical conversations, I am able to present myself as I want my parent to view me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like I could talk about anything with my parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied in this relationship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Parental Views (3)

14. The next set of questions asks you to reflect on your own behaviors in regard to this parent. Please mark your answer to indicate how characteristic you think the statement is of how you behave (1 = extremely uncharacteristic, 7 = extremely characteristic).

	Extremely Uncharacteristic							Extremely Characteristic
I think about all of the fun my parent and I have had together.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think about the memories I have of our relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I reflect on how much I love my parent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think about all of the experiences that my parent and I have shared together.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I reflect on how much my parent loves me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Demographic Information

Thank you again for your participation in this survey. This final section asks you to answer a few questions about yourself. You will then be directed to a separate survey where you will provide your name and course information so that extra credit can be awarded. You must complete the extra credit page in order for us to record your participation.

16. What is your biological sex?

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

17. Please answer the following in numerical format:

What is your current age (in years)?

18. Please answer the following in numerical format.

How many siblings do you have?

19. What is your current class rank based on credits earned?

- ☐ Freshman
☐ Sophomore
☐ Junior
☐ Senior

20. Do you currently receive any amount of financial assistance from this parent?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

21. What is your current marital status?

- ☐ Unmarried
☐ Married

22. Do you think that you have reached adulthood?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ In some respects yes, in some respects no.

23. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity? (check all that apply)

- ☐ African American
- ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Native American



Other (please specify)

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Kory Floyd
STAUF

 **From:** Mark Roosa, Chair 
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 02/01/2012

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 02/01/2012

IRB Protocol #: 1201007324

Study Title: An Examination of Partner Idealization in Parent/College Student Relationships

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

