Parent Involvement during the College Transition: Trajectories and Associations with Freshmen's Engagement in Risky Behaviors

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BACKGROUND

- Parents are recognized as key socialization agents during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) that can facilitate a successful college transition
  - However, there is little consensus on the characteristics and influence of parent involvement (PI) during emerging adulthood and within the college context
- Engagement in risky behaviors, such as binge drinking, illegal drug use, and unprotected sex notably increases from high school to college (ACHA, 2015)
  - Cross-sectional research has found parent contact and emotional support are linked with less risky behaviors

➢ Using a prospective longitudinal design (4-waves) and latent growth curve modeling (LGM), the current study:

1) Assessed changes in PI across freshman year
2) Assessed changes in risky behaviors across freshman year
3) Assessed links between the change trajectories of PI and risky behaviors across freshman year

METHODS

Participants & Procedures

- 1279 domestic freshmen (55% female; 84% Caucasian) completed four online surveys the 2013-14 academic year

Measures

- PI = Support, Contact, & Academic Engagement
- Risky Behaviors = Drinking, Drug Use, & Sexual
- Controls = Student sex, race, housing status; Parental education level, payment of college education, and relationship quality

Analysis

- LGM in Mplus V.6 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010) with FIML
- Estimated trajectories (latent intercepts [I], linear slopes [S], and quadratic [Q] slopes) of PI, risky behaviors, and their associations (regressed risky behavior slope onto PI slopes)

Final growth model results for parent involvement variables and engagement in risky behaviors (N = 1279)

	Support			Contact			Academic Engagement			Risky Behaviors	
Fixed Effect	**I (*SE*)**	**S (*SE*)**	**Q (*SE*)**	**I (*SE*)**	**S (*SE*)**	**Q (*SE*)**	**I (*SE*)**	**S (*SE*)**	**Q (*SE*)**	**I (*SE*)**	**S (*SE*)**
Mean	4.17* (*.04*)	-.38* (*.05*)	.11* (*.02*)	19.03* (*.13*)	-.66* (*.16*)	.12* (*.05*)	3.80* (*.02*)	-.19* (*.03*)	.05* (*.01*)	.97* (*.08*)	.26* (*.05*)
Random Effect											
Variance	.62* (*.06*)	.04* (*.01*)	–	11.32* (*.80*)	.60* (*.15*)	–	.24* (*.02*)	–	–	3.39* (*.36*)	1.05* (*.13*)
Model Fit											
X^2, *df*	139.59*, 28			45.94*, 28			40.23, 37			278.85*, 29	
CFI, TLI	.93, .91			.99, .98			.99, .99			.56, .49	
RMSEA	.06			.02			.01			.08	
R^2	.50***	.05	–	.28***	.03	–	.39***	–	–	.05*	.02

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Changes in PI

❖ All three aspects of PI portrayed a similar nonlinear growth curve that was characterized by moderately high initial levels of involvement, small negative linear slopes, and small positive quadratic slopes

➢ Although the observed declines in PI were modest, these findings fill acknowledged gaps in literature on the nature of PI within the context of higher education (Sax & Wartman, 2010), and support the theory of emerging adulthood by providing quantitative evidence for how parents remain connected to their children during this developmental period

Changes in Risky Behaviors

❖ On average, freshmen reported engaging in risky behaviors "once in the past month" at the beginning of the fall semester and reported a .26 linear increase in risky behaviors about every 2.5 months across the first year in college

➢ Notwithstanding the small change in risky behaviors, it did occur and supports developmental perspectives that engagement in risky behaviors during emerging adulthood is normative (Arnett, 2005)

Linking PI & Risky Behaviors

❖ Increases in parent support (β = .39, *SE* = .13, $p < .01$) and contact (β = .41, *SE* = .10, $p < .001$) were associated with steeper increases in risky behaviors over freshman year

❖ Changes in parent support (R^2 = 14%, $p < .05$) and contact (R^2 = 21%, $p < .05$) explained changes in risky behaviors

➢ While contrary to expectations, these results provide a new perspective on links between PI and risky behaviors among freshmen and demonstrate the importance of studying associations between the change processes of both constructs

➢ Results indicate a possible bidirectional association, in that since freshmen are at risk for higher levels of risky behaviors, manifestation of these behaviors may influence parents to be more involved across the freshman year

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