

Mothers' relationships can influence adolescent children's relationships, study finds

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Until now, little research has been conducted on the association between parents' friendships and the emotional well-being of their adolescent children. A new study from researchers at the University of Missouri suggests that mothers' friendships with other adults can impact their adolescent children's relationships with their own friends, particularly the negative aspects of these relationships such as conflict and antagonism.

Gary C. Glick, a doctoral candidate at MU, and Amanda Rose, professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences, studied the development of friendships and other peer relationships during adolescence and their impact on psychological adjustment. They found that adolescents may mimic the negative characteristics of their mothers' relationships in their own peer-to-peer friendships suggesting that mothers can serve as role models for their adolescents during formative years.

"Mothers who display high levels of conflict with friends may signal to their children that such behavior is acceptable, or even normative in friendships," Glick said. "Additional findings suggest that adolescents internalize their reactions to their mothers' conflict with adult friends which may lead to anxiety and depression."

Previous research of this type focused on elementary-aged children, but MU researchers wanted to expand their study to focus on the formative

adolescent years. Youth ranging in age from 10 to 17 and their mothers were polled separately to measure perceived positive and negative friendship qualities in both groups. Results showed that positive friendship qualities were not always imitated by adolescents; however, negative and antagonistic [relationship](#) characteristics exhibited by mothers were much more likely to be mimicked by the youth studied.

"We know that conflict is a normal part of any relationship—be it a relationship between a parent and a child, or a mother and her friends—and we're not talking physical altercations but verbal conflicts," Glick said. "But being exposed to high levels of such conflict generally isn't going to be good for children. Parents should consider whether they are good role models for their children especially where their friends are concerned. When things go awry, parents should talk with their [children](#) about how to act with their friends, but more specifically, how not to act."

Glick anticipates that future research may include how conflict resolution may be incorporated into parental methods in the home.

Glick co-authored the study, "Association of [mothers'](#) friendship quality with adolescents' friendship quality and emotional adjustment," with Rose and Erika M. Waller from the College of Arts and Science at MU, as well as Lance P. Swanson, assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Suffolk University. The research was funded by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health and the article will appear in the *Journal of Research on Adolescence*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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