WHAT REALLY MATTERS: EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EMERGING COLLEGE PERSONAL NETWORK AND WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

By

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(Under the Direction of A. Michele Lease)

ABSTRACT

The current study explored the link between social support exchange, network features, and positive outcomes among students during the transition to college. Relationship supportiveness was predicted to be positively associated with instrumental support needed to adjust to academic task demands and the emotional support needed for college well-being while features of tie strength were predicted to be associated with higher levels of belongingness. Participants were 140 first-year undergraduate students from the University of Georgia. Participants completed self-report measures and measures that utilized egocentric network methodology to capture their personal network of college student peers. Results indicate that the supportiveness of the new network is important for students' general belonging and college well-being -- but not academic adjustment. Findings also support that establishing at least one social tie that students interact with frequently and provides different types of social support will serve their well-being and belonging during the college transition.

INDEX WORDS: Peer Network; College Well-Being; Belongingness

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The theory of emerging adulthood was first proposed over 20 years ago by researcher Jeffrey Arnett (2000) and described the experience of individuals from their late teens to their mid-twenties - roughly ages 18 through 25 (Arnett, 2007). Arnett's contribution expanded the 'transition to adulthood' to a unique period of time defined by transition events, such as leaving home and starting families, pursuing postsecondary education, as well as developmental changes (e.g., cognitive development, relationship changes, etc.) (Arnett, 2007). Now recognized as a distinct developmental period (Tanner & Arnett, 2016), emerging adulthood is characterized as a time of identity exploration, increased responsibility, instability, and possibility (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2015).

Close peer relationships play a particularly important and central role during emerging adulthood as individuals move away from home and delay traditional milestones of adulthood, such as marriage and parenthood (Barry et al., 2016). Friendships during this time can serve emotional intimacy functions and aid in developmental tasks such as searches for romantic partners and discussing important matters (Barry et al., 2016). During this stage, friendship bonds might be stronger than those between family members, as many emerging adults feel closer to and engage in more discussions with their friends than family members (Barry et al., 2016; Pulakos, 1989). In terms of well-being, the quality of these close friendships contributes to emerging adults' well-being. Features of best friend quality can be impacted by both individual (i.e., gender) and contextual (i.e., romantic investment) factors (Langheit & Poulin, 2022).

For those seeking postsecondary education, the college environment is often conducive to both the personal growth and social development of emerging adults (Arnett, 2016). Theorists in the college student development literature describe transitions as events that disrupt an individual's roles, routines, and relationships (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Killam & Degges-White, 2017). Schlossberg's (2008) Transition Theory provides a framework for understanding where college students are in their transition (i.e., matriculating into vs. out of college) and how they might navigate and cope with that transition (Killam & Degges-White, 2017). Support, or the resources and people who strengthen and encourage any particular student (Killam & Degges-White, 2017), is a key focus of Transition Theory in that Schlossberg recommends students 'take stock' when navigating a challenging transition. Developing college students' sense of belonging through their support systems is beneficial to these transitions (Hoffman et al., 2002) and psychological adjustment (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). Belonging is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943), and college students who do not perceive they belong tend not to stay in college (Strayhorn, 2018). Strayhorn (2018), a college student development researcher, defines college students' sense of belonging as perceived social support, or feelings of connectedness, as well as the experience of 'mattering' on campus. According to Strayhorn, mattering refers to college students' feeling cared about, accepted, respected, and valued by their campus community. Strayhorn posits that the human need to belong can take a heightened importance in certain social contexts like college, where individuals can be more prone to feeling unsupported.

Associated with a sense of belonging, college students' overall subjective well-being is also important to consider when emerging adults enter college. Well-being is a multidimensional concept related to an individual's social relationships, daily functioning, and life satisfaction

(Seligman, 2013). Positive relations with others are a key construct identified across several models and measures of well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Diener et al., 2010; Seligman, 2013; Huppert & So, 2013). A systematic review of the first-year college student success literature identified social-emotional well-being as a key domain for a successful transition to college (van der Zanden et al., 2018). In terms of social support, researchers found that high quality friendships and a sense of belonging on campus positively contributed to first-year students' social-emotional well-being. Moreover, university adjustment was positively associated with the amount of social, emotional, and practical (i.e., receiving material assistance) support students received (Ramsay et al., 2007; van der Zanden et al., 2018). Surprisingly, informational support and cognitive guidance, such as advice or suggestions, from school professionals, parents, friends, and partners were not associated with university adjustment levels (Ramsay et al., 2007). Of the studies covered in the review, only Ramsay et al., (2007) examined the relationship between types of social support from varying sources and adjustment to college. Although first-year college students receive support from a variety of sources, such as parents or academic advisers, it is important to understand the social support these students receive from the people they interact with the most in their new environment—their friends and peers.

Personal Networks and the Convoy Model of Social Relations

A network is conceptualized as a set of actors and the connections among them (Wasserman & Faust; 1994). These relationships form the foundation of our social experiences and represent the ties people have with one other. Network research can be categorized into two camps: sociocentric and egocentric (Perry et al., 2018). Sociocentric network research refers to whole network studies, in which information is gathered from all participants in a bounded network and ties between all members of the network are represented. Egocentric network

research, also referred to as personal network research, starts with information gathered from a singular respondent in the network (i.e., an ego) and can expand to gathering information from the identified social ties of the respondent (i.e., alters). A core tenant of egocentric network research is that each individual has their own community of people around them, and this community shapes their lived experiences (Perry et al., 2018; McCarty et al., 2019). Personal networks are composed of many different relationships that vary in connection, intimacy, frequency of contact, proximity, and other characteristics (Perry et al., 2018). Research suggests that, on average, personal social networks include less than ten close ties, twenty people with whom they interact with weekly, and a few hundred semiregular interaction partners (Bidart & Charbonneau, 2011; Perry et al., 2018)

Personal networks undergo deep transformations over the life course (McCarty et al., 2019). A longitudinal qualitative study involving young adults in Normandy, France sought to identify a relation between the evolution of personal networks and the events marking entry into adult life (Bidart & Lavenu, 2005). The researchers identified several profiles that were distinct in terms of network size and changes in size over time: One profile demonstrated a continuous reduction of personal network size, a second profile indicated a continuous increase in personal network size, and a third profile was marked by an increase in network size followed by a decrease (Bidart & Lavenu, 2005). Particularly for students pursuing post-secondary education, networks initially increased through the accumulation of old and new network ties but then decreased due to a transition to the working world (Bidart & Lavenu, 2005). Researchers described these participants as maintaining a kind of teenage sociability, with large groups of friends, involvement in multiple activities, and frequent encounters with those friends (Bidart & Lavenu, 2005). Overall, factors that increased network size across profiles included remaining in

a single student lifestyle as well as investing in a career that requires additional schooling (Bidart & Lavenu, 2005).

Originally proposed by Kahn and Antonucci (1980), the social convoy model provides a framework for understanding changes in networks during pivotal transitions, such as leaving the childhood home or matriculating into post-secondary education. The convoy model of social relations has sought to incorporate both developmental and dynamic aspects of relationships (Antonucci et al., 2010). This model builds on traditional developmental theories, including attachment and role theory (Antonucci et al., 2010). Whereas attachment theory refers to the ways in which the initial relationships infants form with their caregivers ultimately influence other social relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978), role theory (Mead, 1934; Merton; 1957) refers to socially expected behavior for different socially ascribed positions, or roles. Moreover, according to socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1992) the social motivations of certain developmental periods can drive individuals' intentions to build, sustain, or adapt different types of social ties (Manalel & Antonucci, 2022). Taken together, these theories focus on how roles and relationships change over time depending on social and developmental expectations and demands (Antonucci et al., 2010). The convoy model also aligns with social network research and the social support tradition, positing that individuals are embedded in networks of close social relationships at various stages of their life course that vary in objective characteristics as well as support characteristics (Antonucci et al., 2010).

An individual's convoy is composed of their close relationships and important social ties. The four basic tenets of the convoy model are that social relationships are multi-faceted, change over time due to developmental and contextual processes, vary by personal and situational factors, and influence individuals' well-being (Antonucci et al., 2010). Social relationships are

multifaceted in that they serve different functions or provide different types of social support (Antonucci et al., 2010). Kahn and Antonucci (1980) identified aid, affect, and affirmation as the three main categories of social support exchange. Aid refers to instrumental support that relationships offer the convoy, such as assisting with tasks or helping when a friend is sick. Affect involves emotional support that is typically common among close relationships, such as family members or close friendships. An example of emotional support could be an individual's friend listening about a problem they are experiencing and offering sympathy and compassion. Affirmation does not necessarily involve tangible aid or emotional support, but instead encompasses support in the form of acceptance and agreement (Antonucci et al., 2010; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). Another aspect of the convoy model is support satisfaction, or the concept that different individuals might evaluate the same network of relationships differently and subsequently conclude if their convoy is adequate or not (Antonucci et al., 2010).

An important, key tenet of the convoy model is that the convoy is flexible and changes over the lifespan due to varying situational circumstances. These circumstances can create different roles, expectations and demands for individuals as they grow and develop (Antonucci et al., 2010; Antonucci et al., 2019; Manalel & Antonucci, 2022). Moreover, the individual's personal and situational characteristics interact to create their social convoy. Personal characteristics have the ability to influence the type of social relationships an individual seeks, needs, and develops. Situational characteristics, such as where a person lives, works, etc., play an important role as they affect the roles and demands that fall on an individual (Antonucci et al., 2010). The final tenet of the convoy model is that an individual's social convoy influences their health and well-being. Importantly, an individual's perception and evaluation of the support

quality of their convoy has significant effects on both physical and mental health (Antonucci et al., 2010).

In sum, research and theories surrounding personal networks are similar in their focus on the importance of personal networks for providing social support and relating to well-being. The convoy model also incorporates the idea that changes in networks relate to evolving contextual and developmental demands, such as those specific to emerging adulthood. The developmental tasks and transition markers of early adulthood (e.g., moving out of the childhood home, pursuing higher education) often lead to changes in social network size, composition, proximity, and contact frequency (Manalel & Antonucci, 2022). Individuals typically increase their friendship networks, as well as diversify their network composition, as they transition through adolescence and emerging adulthood (Manalel & Antonucci, 2022). Role-based social ties, such as the peers an individual meets as they take on new roles (e.g., college classmates, fellow employees) during this time are susceptible to changes (Manalel & Antonucci, 2022). As emerging adults enter post-secondary education and deal with the new task demands of that environmental context, the importance of a new, emerging network of social support composed of their peers is extremely important to consider for well-being and adjustment to the college.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

During times of major life transitions, relying on others for social support allows individuals to buffer stressful circumstances or negative events (Cohen & Willis, 1985) and maintain an overall sense of well-being (Awang et al., 2014; Lane & Fink, 2015). The transition from high school to college is a particularly unique period of personal social disruption for emerging adults. For many students, it is the first time they are living away from friends and family who have supported them throughout their development. Forming and navigating new relationships without these social supports can be challenging. Moreover, the quality and supportiveness of these new relationships is significant to college students' experiences. Specifically, Tinto's model of student departure (1994) emphasizes that the formation of new, close ties with other college students is important for new students to become socially integrated within their college community and is critical for greater college adjustment (Swenson et al., 2008), retention, and persistence (Goguen et al., 2010; Skahill, 2002).

Despite knowing the importance that the formation of a college-based network of close personal ties has on student's transition to college, specific aspects of these new relationships have not been thoroughly explored. Close ties are multidimensional in that they can fulfill multiple social support roles, functions, and exchanges (Perry et al., 2018). Social support functions and exchanges can include emotional support such as encouragement or offering comforting reassurance as well as more instrumental forms of support like providing information

on resources or access to new opportunities (Mendelson & Abound, 2014). Additionally, knowing which types of supports are the most important for aiding a successful transition to college would have implications for both students and those who support and guide them, such as parents and student affairs professionals.

Personal Networks

According to the convoy model of social relations (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980), features of the social networks individuals develop have implications for health, well-being, and navigation of development tasks across the lifespan (Manalel & Antonucci, 2022). The convoy model is a helpful theoretical framework for understanding not only how personal networks are multidimensional in structure, function, and quality (Antonucci et al., 2010; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980) but also their dynamic nature across the lifespan, changing to meet both new developmental tasks and environmental demands (Manalel & Antonucci, 2022). Convoy structure refers to characteristics of networks, such as size and composition of the network, and frequency of contact with network members. Functions of social convoys refer to social support exchange between members of personal networks, which impact wellbeing and adjustment (Manalel & Antonucci, 2022). According to the convoy model, social support exchange can be categorized into aid (i.e., instrumental support), affect (i.e., emotional support) and affirmation (i.e., acceptance and validation) (Antonucci et al., 2010; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). The convoy model also proposes that networks of social relationships change over time. (Antonucci et al., 2010). Specifically, an optimally functioning social convoy is dynamic and will change to meet the demands of an individual's specific needs depending on their changing developmental task demands and context (Antonucci et al., 2019; Manalel & Antonucci, 2022). For example, as adolescents enter the emerging adulthood phase of development (Arnett, 2000), new contexts in

which they live and work, such as higher education or the workforce, are accompanied by the necessary opportunity to develop new networks that can help them meet new demands and expectations of their environmental context.

The convoy model is useful for understanding which features of emerging college networks are the most important for helping students navigate the new task demands of college and their adjustment to college. Egocentric network research also emphasizes that structural aspects of social networks, such as network size, as well as their qualitative aspects (e.g., social support provided by network members) can influence psychological well-being and adjustment (Brissette et al., 2002; Cohen & Willis, 1985). Egocentric network research, as opposed to whole network (i.e., sociocentric) research, focuses on one centralized ego and the alters that comprise their social environment (McCarty et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2018). Network research indicates that individuals who have more people in their network tend to report less distress and greater positive affect than those who have fewer people in their network (Brissette et al., 2002; Cohen & Willis, 1985). On the other hand, some research suggests that the most powerful indicator of well-being is whether an individual reports just one single, close tie who they feel comfortable confiding in (Cohen & Willis, 1985), reflecting the importance of social support exchange (Perry et al., 2018) and similar to research reported on the importance of how social convoys provide social support (Antonucci et al., 2010).

In egocentric network research, studies indicate personal networks typically involve a few core ties, with a higher degree of contact frequency and emotional closeness, and many peripheral ties with a relatively lower degree of contact frequency and emotional closeness (McCarty et al., 2019). The most central layers of personal networks, often referred to as core ties, typically are kin-centered, relatively stable over time, and densely interconnected, and they

provide multistranded social support to ego (Marsden, 1987; McCarty et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 1997). The core discussion network (i.e., who people discuss important matters with) has been theorized to be composed of an individual's closest ties and is expected to be largely stable (Marsden, 1987; Perry et al., 2018). However, some research suggests that individuals also discuss important matters with weak ties, or persons who they do not feel emotionally attached to, such as doctors and colleagues (Small, 2013). These instances especially occur when weak ties either have desirable knowledge that an individual requires or are available when important issues arise (Small, 2013). Consistent with the social convoy model (Manalel & Antonucci, 2022), research suggests that when actors enter new institutional environments (e.g. college) their discussion networks change quickly because routine activities they engage in are quickly transformed (Small et al., 2015). Additionally, findings from network research suggest everyday interactions of actors, including those who would be considered weak ties, are more important to people's discussion network than that for which previous research has accounted (Small et al., 2015).

Within the network literature, features of individual's personal networks (i.e., egonets) are analyzed to examine the exchange of resources between an ego and their alters. Similar to the convoy model of social relations, the social support tradition of network analysis focuses on the quality, quantity, and function of social ties (Perry et al., 2018; Smith & Christakis, 2008). The process of exchange, or reciprocal, mutual support is hypothesized to be large component of social support (Langford et al., 1997). In personal network research, the members of a network can be identified in multiple ways. Personal network ties identified based on the exchange of resources (i.e., exchange-based network) can elicit social ties that fulfill specific relationship functions, such as instrumental, emotional, material, or informational support, as well as social

capital (Perry et al., 2018). Social capital refers to resources from network members that can be cultivated and exchanged through the maintaining of network relationships (Bourdieu, 2018; Perry et al., 2018). Research on social capital also emphasizes the importance of weak ties for obtaining important, novel information, such as job leads and business connections, whereas core ties tend to have access to the same information (Portes, 2000).

Some research suggests that asking research participants to name the alters in their network does not necessarily identify network ties with whom they actually interact (Small, 2019) yet identifies ties who are perceived to provide support to ego. Perceived social support refers to an individual's belief that love and caring (i.e., emotional support) and assistance (i.e., instrumental support) is available to them if they were to require it (Perry et al., 2018; Thoits, 1995). Some research on perceived social support indicates that it can be as important, if not more so, than actual support received (e.g., Turner & Marino, 1994). For example, during the transition to college, students reporting more perceived social support were less likely to experience internalizing problems, such as depression, anxiety, and somatization (Compas et al., 1986). Additionally, academic, social, and emotional adjustment among new college students was found to be dependent on the degree to which they receive socio-educational support from their friends as well as families (Awang et al., 2014). Lidy and Kahn (2006) reported that perceived social support mediated the relationship between three distinct personality factors and college adjustment, which suggests perceived social support would be a good target for interventions aimed at improving the transition to college.

Quality and Function of a Personal Network at College

Research has stressed that one of the most impactful environmental influences on college student development is the peer group (Astin, 1993; Goguen et al., 2010), which provides the

foundation for the college social experience. The formation of a network of quality social ties during the first year of college is related to a range of positive outcomes (Bowman, 2010). Developing new friendships during the first year of college is not only related to social adjustment but also to academic adjustment and students' attachment to the institution (Buote et al., 2007). Whereas friendships from high school are important and protective during the first few weeks of the college transition, developing new friendships is critical to college adjustment (Barry et al., 2016; Swenson et al., 2008). In a study of relationship quality and adjustment among 271 first-year college students, researchers found that forming new, high-quality relationships with college peers is important for students to form an institutional attachment to their new school (Swenson et al., 2008). In another longitudinal study of 1,845 undergraduate participants, new friendships were shown to help university students acclimate to their environment through providing a sense of belonging, offering emotional support, and being a source of fun and enjoyment (Buote et al., 2007). Although new friendships can serve as a source of entertainment, it is also important to note that too much time spent on social activities can lead to negative outcomes, such as academic underachievement (Astin, 1993; Goguen et al., 2010).

One large study conducted with college students (N = 4,501) from various types of institutions (e.g., liberal arts colleges, community colleges, research university, etc.) illustrated the importance of forming meaningful relationships at the beginning of college. In that study, Bowman (2010) reported that the formation of quality peer relationships during the first year of college has a significant effect on several dimensions of psychological well-being in Ryff's (1989) model, including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Additionally, Bowman reported students from larger research universities experienced greater gains in some areas, including positive relations

with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance, when compared to students who attended liberal arts colleges. Bowman's findings demonstrate that both meaningful social interactions with peers and greater opportunities for those social interactions that are afforded at larger post-secondary institutions can positively impact students' psychological well-being.

Other studies have demonstrated a positive association between peer relationship quality and persistence in college (e.g., Goguen et al., 2010). Having new friends who students find trustworthy and loyal are key factors in predicting academic achievement and are associated with a higher GPA during the first semester of college (Goguen et al., 2010). Fass and Tubman (2002) found that college student's perceived attachment (i.e., the degree of mutual trust and quality of communication) to peers, in addition to parents, was linked to wider patterns of social competence and adjustment, which might function as either protective or compensatory factors during the college transition. It is important to note that some research has indicated that one high quality relationship might be all that is required for a student to successfully adjust to their new college environment. For example, Swenson and colleagues reported that establishing a single close relationship with another college student who is loyal and shares common interests is associated with increased academic and social adjustment in addition to institutional attachment (Swenson et al., 2008). For some students, it is possible one close relationship can provide the needed support. In social network research, multiplexity refers to the multidimensionality of interpersonal relationships and how a singular alter might provide multiple strands of support to an individual ego (Perry et al., 2018). Research has found that ties that fulfill multiple relationship functions, or multiplex ties, are often perceived to be more supportive than unidimensional ties (Perry et al., 2018; Wellman & Wortley, 1989).

Current Study

Research has demonstrated that establishing new relationships and networks of social support in college are connected to positive outcomes (Awang et al., 2014; Barry et al, 2016; Buote et al, 2007; Swenson et al., 2008; 2010; Tinto, 1994), including student retention (Skahill, 2002) and persistence (Goguen et al., 2010). Moreover, we know from personal network literature that size of network is predictive of positive outcomes (Burt, 1987) —or even having a singular close tie (Cohen & Willis, 1985; Swenson et al., 2008) — but which aspects of other network features are important for predicting well-being and adjustment during the transition to college? Despite knowing the importance that new personal networks of support have on first-year students' transition into college (Mishra, 2020), less is known about networks of these emerging peer networks features, such as aspects of tie strength and degrees of social supportiveness. The current study explored the link between social support exchange and different network features and positive outcomes including subjective college well-being, sense of belongingness, and academic adjustment, among first-year college students.

For the current study, we collected data from first year college students in a large research institution about their college networks formed during the transition to the university setting. Importantly, to identify the specific members (i.e., alters) of participants' personal networks, we employed an exchange-based method commonly utilized in egocentric network research to elicit the names of participants' alters (i.e., a name generator) in their college-based personal network. Specifically, the name generator used is designed to capture students' core discussion network, or the group of people a student seeks when they have to discuss 'important matters' (Marsden, 1987; Small et al., 2015). After identifying each alter, participants were then asked to report on the degree to which the alter provides support functions (e.g., offer comfort

and encouragement, provide a sense of connection to university community, engage in pleasant activities; Mendelson & Abound, 2014). Because the focus of study was on the college-based personal network, the name generator specifically asked participants about ties with other students on their college campus.

We examined two related research questions focusing on participants' perceptions of strength of social ties and supportiveness of relationship functions provided by those in the exchange-based personal network and their adjustment during the transition to college. First, we examined the relationship between the degree to which relationship function supportiveness is fulfilled by a participants' network and positive outcomes, including college subjective wellbeing, general feelings of belongingness, and academic adjustment *(Question 1).* Supportive relationship functions provide a range of supports, including emotional (i.e., offering reassurance or comfort in uncertain situations) and instrumental support, or an exchange of social capital (i.e., providing information, resources, or opportunities). We hypothesized that relationship function supportiveness of students' emerging peer network to be positively associated with a range of benefits including the instrumental support needed to adjust to academic task demands and the emotional support needed for college well-being.

The second research question focused on the relationship between participants' perceptions of the strength of their social ties in a new network and subjective wellbeing, belongingness, and academic adjustment (*Question 2*). Tie strength refers to the intensity and duration of bonds between an ego and alter within a network (Marsden & Campbell, 1984; Perry et al., 2018). The most common way to operationalize tie strength in personal network research is through frequency of contact, duration of relationship, and emotional intimacy (Perry et al., 2018). Emotional intimacy or perceived closeness of relationship is found to be the truest

reflection of tie strength (Marsden & Campbell, 1984; Perry et al., 2018). We predicted that these two features of tie strength, student's perception of closeness with and frequency of communication with individuals identified in their emerging network, would be associated with positive outcomes, specifically a general sense of belongingness and connectedness on campus.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants

The participants for the current study included 140 first-year undergraduate students from the University of Georgia (UGA). In terms of gender, 78% of the sample identified as women, and 18% identified as men. UGA's gender breakdown for the 2021 incoming class is skewed and reflects more women than men (36% men, 64% women). Two participants identified as nonbinary, two participants identified as gender queer or gender nonconforming, and one preferred not to answer. Concerning racial/ethnicity background, 68% of participants were White, 20% were Asian or Asian American, 7% were Hispanic or Latinx, 4% were Black or African American, and 1% were Multiracial. According to the university's 2021 freshman profile, approximately 37% of admitted students identified as having a minority racial status (Graves, 2021). This indicates that our sample approximates the racial composition of the student population.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants were recruited through their First Year Odyssey Seminar (FYOS) during the Fall 2021 semester. FYOS courses are required for all first-year students. The seminars are designed to be capped at 15 students per seminar and to include students from various majors across campus. Researchers shared information surrounding the project with 20 FYOS classes through either a brief presentation during their seminar course and/or recruitment emails. Of all

the students who were in attendance the day of the presentation or received the email, 227 students provided an email address to be contacted with further information surrounding the study. Of those, 149 submitted a survey response.

Inclusion criteria to participate in the study included being 18 years of age or older and being a first-year student at UGA. As an incentive for their time, participants received a $10 Amazon gift card after they completed the data collection. Active consent to participate in the study was obtained via UGA Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool, before students completed data collection measures and procedures. All participants self-selected and consented to take part in the study. The current study's recruitment process, data collection measures and research procedures were approved by the University of Georgia's Human Research Protection Program and Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The entirety of the survey was completed via an online data collection tool, Qualtrics, at a time of convenience for the participant. Although the timing of when students completed the survey varied, almost all participants completed the survey between 4 and 8 weeks of arriving on campus. The survey was estimated to take around 15 to 25 minutes to complete. As part of a larger study on first year college students' transition into college, participants were prompted to fill out demographic information and complete questionnaires to assess their perceived levels of wellbeing, belongingness, and adjustment.

Measures

Sense of Belongingness

Participants completed The Social Connectedness and Social Assurances Scales (SCSAS; Lee & Robbins, 1995) to measure their sense of belongingness. The SCSAS is a 16-item scale that assesses different aspects of belongingness such as companionship, affiliation, and

connectedness. (Lee & Robbins, 1995). Two subscales (Social Connectedness and Social Assurances) compose the SCSAS with each scale containing 8 individual items. Students rated their agreement with items on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." The Social Connectedness subscale includes items that reflect emotional distance between the rater and others in their life (e.g., "Even around people I know, I don't feel that I really belong" and "I feel disconnected from the world around me"). The Social Assurances subscale contains items that reflect participants' feelings of reassurance by others (e.g., "I stick to my friends like glue", "I'm more at ease doing things together with other people", and "I wish to find someone who can be with me all the time"). The SCSAS demonstrated acceptable internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .739$) in the current study.

College Student Wellbeing

Participants completed The College Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire *(*CSSWQ*),* a brief, domain-specific measure of college student's covitality, to assess their subjective wellbeing (Renshaw & Bolognino, 2014). The CSSWQ defines covitality as an individual's cumulative subjective wellbeing which involves a combination of emotional, cognitive, social, and behavioral components (Renshaw & Bolognino, 2014). The CSSWQ is a 16-item questionnaire that consists of four subscales, each containing 4 individual items. Participants rated their agreement with items on a 7-point Likert-scale, ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." The measure's subscales include *academic efficacy*, *college gratitude*, *school connectedness*, and *academic satisfaction*. The first two subscales relate to college students' academic functioning while the latter subscales involve items related to the social context of college and how participants relate to it. Items on the *academic satisfaction* subscale include "I have a great academic experience at this college" and "I am happy with how

I've done in my classes" while the *academic efficacy* subscale includes items like, "I am a hard worker in my classes" and "I am a diligent student". The *school connectedness* subscale includes items such as "I feel like a real part of this school", "I can really be myself at this school" and "Other students here like me the way I am". Items on the *college gratitude* subscale include "I am so thankful that I'm getting a college education" and "I am grateful to the professors and other students who have helped me in class". For the current study, CSSWQ coefficient alphas demonstrated appropriate internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .897$).

Academic Adjustment

The Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS) was completed by participants to measure different aspects of students' academic adjustment to their college environment (Anderson et al., 2016). The AAS is a 9-item scale that includes three subscales: *academic lifestyle*, *academic achievement*, and *academic motivation*. On this scale, the wording of two items was slightly modified to contextualize the questions. Specifically, the word 'university' was replaced with 'UGA.' Participants answered items on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from "Rarely applies to me" to "Always applies to me." The *academic lifestyle* subscale includes items like "I sometimes worry I do not have the academic skills needed to enjoy being a student" while the *academic achievement* subscale includes items like "I think I am as academically able as any other student." The final subscale, *academic motivation*, includes items like "I expect to successfully complete my degree in the usual allocated timeframe." To raise the internal consistency for this scale, three items were removed that were impacting reliability. The items removed included, "I sometimes feel as though my education is not worth time away from my work or family,", "I will be disappointed if my studies don't lead me to the career I want" and "I am enjoying the lifestyle

of being a UGA student." The final scale consisted of 6 items (see *Appendix A*) and had an internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .704$).

Personal Networks

To create and gather information surrounding students' personal networks (i.e., egonets), a name generator and name interpreter were completed by participants that assessed contexts, interactions, and demographics of their close relationships.

Name Generator

Following the questionnaires, participants were directed to a name generator that utilized the Important Matters (Burt, 1984) framework to elicit the names of those in their personal network. The Important Matters name generator (Burt, 1984) is an exchange-based name generator that elicits ties with whom respondents discuss important matters (Perry et al., 2018). Specifically, participants were asked, "who are the students at UGA with whom you discuss topics or matters you find to be important." Before being asked to name individuals in their personal network, participants were asked to select which contexts they find themselves talking on a personal level with other UGA students. Context options for participants to select from included through "classes or academics," in "residence halls or dorms," "participating in student organizations," "participating in athletics or recreational activities," "participating in Greek life," "participating in religious or spiritual organizations," "participating in volunteer activities," or through "work or work study." Participants were allowed to select multiple contexts that they find themselves talking personally with other students. After considering these contexts, participants (i.e., ego) were asked to identify up to 10 students (i.e., alters) with whom they discuss important matters. When naming their alters, participants identified other students by writing their first name and last initial.

Name Interpreter

After identifying students in their network through the name generator, participants were directed to a name interpreter. The name interpreter presented participants with a series of questions about each alter they named, where they interact with the alter, and the nature of their relationship with the alter. First, participants were asked where they specifically interact with each alter. Similar to the context options, participants were able to mark all contexts where they interact with each specific alter who they identified. Next, demographic and background information was collected on each alter. Demographic questions that participant completed for each alter included information related to gender identity, race/ethnicity, residency information, and current major.

Information about the Ego-Alter Relationship

After reporting on interaction contexts and background information, participants answered questions relating to the nature of their relationship with each alter. On a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from "Not very close" to "Extremely close," participants rated how close they felt to each alter. To gather information on frequency of interactions, participants were asked how often they see or talk with each alter. Participants rated the frequency of their interactions with alters on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from "Once per month" to "More than once per day." Additionally, participants were asked if they knew the alter prior to attending UGA and, if so, where they knew the alter from (e.g., high school). An average score for frequency of contact with and perceptions of closeness with for all alters named in a personal network was used to measure these aspects of tie strength.

Participants also rated each alter on a series of relationship functions that reflect their emotional closeness, satisfaction, and exchange with each alter they identified. Specifically, participants completed a modified version of the McGill Friendship Questionnaire—Friendship Functions (MFQ-FF; Mendelson & Abound, 2014) for each alter. The MFQ-FF is a 30-item questionnaire with six subscales, or friendship functions, which include stimulating companionship, help, intimacy, reliable alliance, self-validation, and emotional intimacy (Mendelson & Abound, 1999). Instead of asking participants to answer a 30-item questionnaire for each alter, six summary statements that corresponded with the six subscales on the MFQ-FF were developed using the items that factored into each subscale. For example, items from the MFQ-FF's stimulating companionship subscale were modified into the summary statement, "engage in pleasant, entertaining, or interesting activities (e.g., is fun to do things with, tells you interesting things, or is exciting to talk to)." (*refer to Appendix A for each relationship function summary statement*). Each statement also included an example of the relationship function to aid in the participant's understanding. Participants rated each alter on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Never" to "Always" on each function of their relationship. To capture aspects of exchange between participants and their alters specific to the college environment, two additional functions were developed for use in the current study. The first additional relationship function involves alter providing information about resources or opportunities, like sharing information about class or events happening on campus (i.e., information/opportunities). The second additional relationship function involves the alter providing a sense of connection to the university community (i.e., connection). The degree to which relationship function supportiveness was met by the personal network was identified by taking the average level of each support function from all alters named in the network.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Research questions and hypotheses relied on data from the name generator. Because of this, analyses addressing the primary research questions were conducted with the 124 participants who named at least one alter during the name generator portion of the survey. It should be noted that of the124 participants, 10 completed all questions with the exception of the those assessing the relationship functions. In addition to these 10 participants, three participants did not complete questions surrounding aspects of tie strength (i.e., frequency of contact and perceived closeness). Due to this missing data, sample sizes varied depending on whether relationship functions, frequency of contact, or closeness was the focus of the analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were conducted using the modified sample of participants who named at least one alter ($N = 124$); all analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Software 29.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY). Descriptive statistics were first conducted for all study variables, including independent, dependent and control variables. Results can be found in Table 1. Skew and kurtosis for all variables were found to be within normal limits (Field, 2018).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of all Variables

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skew	Kurtosis
1. College Well-Being	124	89.50	11.67	55	112	-0.65	0.42
2. Belongingness	124	44.54	5.10	27	56	-0.07	0.48
3. Academic Adjustment	124	23.90	3.89	11	30	-0.81	0.40
4. Functions	111	32.48	4.98	21	40	-0.10	-0.89
5. Closeness	121	4.48	0.74	2	6	-0.28	-0.23
6. Frequency	121	4.36	0.85	2	6	0.19	-0.64

7. Size of Network	124	5.23	2.73	1	10	0.46	-0.93

Note. (Varying sample size due to missing data)

Descriptive statistics for all reported gender and racial categories were then conducted for dependent variables (i.e., college well-being, belongingness, and academic adjustment) and assessed for normality (see Table 2 and Table 3). Additionally, descriptive statistics for independent and control variables for gender and racial categories are reported in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Dependent Study Variables by Gender

	Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	*n*
Women						
	College Well-Being	89.99	11.64	55	112	99
	Belongingness	44.44	4.78	33	56	99
	Academic Adjustment	23.63	3.95	11	30	99
Men						
	College Well-Being	89.60	9.09	72	102	20
	Belongingness	46.40	5.15	36	56	20
	Academic Adjustment	25.20	3.02	19	29	20
Nonbinary						
	College Well-Being	81.50	16.26	70	93	2
	Belongingness	43.00	2.83	41	45	2
	Academic Adjustment	25.00	2.83	23	27	2
Gender Queer						
	College Well-Being	80.00	32.53	57	103	2
	Belongingness	36.50	13.44	27	46	2
	Academic Adjustment	27.00	2.83	25	29	2
Prefer not to Respond						
	College Well-Being	74.00	-	74	74	1
	Belongingness	37.00	-	37	37	1
	Academic Adjustment	15.00	-	15	15	1

Note. $N = 124$ (participants that named at least 1 alter)

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Dependent Study Variables by Race

	Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	*n*
Asian/Asian American						
	College Well-Being	88.50	10.04	63	106	24
	Belongingness	44.79	4.30	36	52	24
	Academic Adjustment	23.75	3.98	11	29	24

Black/African American						
	College Well-Being	75.40	14.05	55	94	5
	Belongingness	39.60	4.56	33	44	5
	Academic Adjustment	20.40	4.72	15	26	5
White						
	College Well-Being	90.76	11.36	57	112	87
	Belongingness	44.79	5.42	27	56	87
	Academic Adjustment	24.06	3.83	15	30	87
Multiracial						
	College Well-Being	89.00	-	89	89	1
	Belongingness	45.00	-	45	45	1
	Academic Adjustment	25.00	-	25	25	1
Hispanic/Latinx						
	College Well-Being	87.43	15.01	67	106	7
	Belongingness	44.14	2.12	41	47	7
	Academic Adjustment	24.71	3.50	20	29	7

Note. $N = 124$ (participants that named at least one alter)

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Independent and Control Study Variables by Gender

	Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	*n*
Women						
	Functions	32.98	4.95	21.88	40.00	88
	Close	4.47	0.76	2.56	6.00	96
	Frequency	4.37	0.87	2.56	6.00	96
	Size of Network	5.45	2.78	1.00	10.00	99
Men						
	Functions	31.13	4.58	23.25	40.00	18
	Close	4.62	0.64	3.25	5.60	20
	Frequency	4.51	0.75	3.50	6.00	20
	Size of Network	4.60	2.11	2.00	10.00	20
Nonbinary						
	Functions	31.25	6.01	27.00	35.50	2
	Close	4.50	0.71	4.00	5.00	2
	Frequency	4.00	1.41	3.00	5.00	2
	Size of Network	1.50	0.71	1.00	2.00	2
Gender Queer						
	Functions	24.50	3.06	22.33	26.67	2
	Close	3.72	0.08	3.67	3.78	2
	Frequency	3.66	0.47	3.33	4.00	2
	Size of Network	6.00	4.24	3.00	9.00	2
Prefer not to Respond						
	Functions	31.50	-	31.50	31.50	1
	Close	3.50	-	3.50	3.50	1
	Frequency	3.50	-	3.50	3.50	1

	Size of Network	2.00	-	2.00	2.00	1

Note. (Varying sample size due to missing data)

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of Independent and Control Study Variables by Race

	Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	*n*
Asian/Asian American						
	Functions	33.01	5.91	24.50	40.00	20
	Close	4.64	0.67	3.00	6.00	23
	Frequency	4.22	0.68	2.90	5.50	23
	Size of Network	4.71	2.54	2.00	10.00	24
Black/African American						
	Functions	30.63	7.66	21.88	40.00	5
	Close	4.05	0.84	2.75	5.00	5
	Frequency	4.35	1.28	3.00	6.00	5
	Size of Network	3.60	2.88	1.00	8.00	5
White						
	Functions	32.56	4.68	22.33	40.00	79
	Close	4.51	0.73	2.56	6.00	86
	Frequency	4.43	0.86	2.56	6.00	86
	Size of Network	5.55	2.74	1.00	10.00	87
Multiracial						
	Functions	-	-	-	-	-
	Close	-	-	-	-	-
	Frequency	-	-	-	-	-
	Size of Network	10.00	-	10.00	10.00	1
Hispanic/Latinx						
	Functions	31.46	3.75	26.00	40.00	7
	Close	3.83	0.71	2.83	6.00	7
	Frequency	3.99	0.98	2.67	6.00	7
	Size of Network	3.57	3.57	1.00	10.00	7

Note. (Varying sample size due to missing data)

Pearson correlations were conducted among all study variables and are displayed in Table 6. All dependent variables were significantly positively correlated, although college well-being and academic adjustment were the most highly correlated (r= .67). Size of network was positively correlated with college well-being (r = .31) and negatively correlated with frequency of contact (r = -.19). Independent variables that reflect different aspects of tie strength (i.e., frequency and closeness) were significantly positively correlated (r = .62). Relationship

functions, reflecting a high degree of social supportiveness, were moderately and positively correlated with variables that reflected tie strength as well.

Table 6
Pearson Correlation among all Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. College Well-Being	-	.465**	.670**	.237*	.142	.122	.307**
2. Belongingness		-	.245**	.360**	.336**	.171	.171
3. Academic Adjustment			-	-.076	-.004	-.015	.165
4. Functions				-	.492**	.351**	-.028
5. Closeness					-	.619**	-.116
6. Frequency						-	-.187*
7. Size of Network							-

Note. * p <.05. ** p <.01.

Before running analyses that examined research questions, we conducted t-tests to determine if there were any significant differences for dependent variables in those participants that nominated at least one alter (N = 124) and those who nominated no alters (N = 17). Significant differing levels of academic adjustment were not reported among these two groups, but the difference in college subjective well-being and belongingness was significant. Those who nominated at least one alter had significantly greater belongingness and college well-being than those who did not nominate any alters.

Table 7
T-Test by Nominations of Alters

	Nominated at least 1		Nominated 0		*t*	*p*	Cohen's *d*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
College Well-Being	89.50	11.67	83.94	14.55	1.79	.038	.46
Belongingness	44.55	5.10	41.47	4.22	2.38	.009	.62
Academic Adjustment	23.90	3.89	22.82	4.19	1.06	.147	.27

Note. df = 139

Overview of Data Analysis

Prior research indicates that both students' gender identity and racial status can impact their college social experience (Bowman, 2010). Because of this impact, gender and race were included in multiple regression models as covariates. Gender was dummy-coded as 0/1 variable

(1 = Women). Of note, five participants did not fall within the binary of this coding and were not included in regressions that included gender.

Due to a significant number of students completing the survey and unique academic experiences and stereotypes (i.e., 'model minority' perceptions) (Chang, 2017), Asian students were examined as their own category instead of being included in the racial minority group. Race was coded as a 0/1/2 variable (0 = White; 1 = Asian; 2 = Other Minority). The 'other minority' racial group included Black/African American, Multiracial and Hispanic/Latinx students. This racial group reflects historically underrepresented and disenfranchised groups within the United States education system (Matthews & López, 2020). In addition to gender and race, size of network was included as a covariate in all regressions.

Relation between Relationship Functions, College Well-Being, Belongingness, and Academic Adjustment

The first set of regression models examined the degree to which relationship functions predicted levels of college well-being, belongingness, and academic adjustment after accounting for the participants' gender (or race) and the size of their network. For the regression models with gender as a covariate, only participants who identified as binary men or women (n = 106) were included in analyses (the sample size of the nonbinary group was n = 5). A slightly larger sample was used for the regression models with race as the covariate (N = 111). Results can be found in Table 7a and Table 7b.

In analyses that included gender and size of network as covariates, the regression models predicting college well-being [$F(3,102) = 5.892$, $p = <.001$] and belongingness [$F(3,102) = 10.369$, $p = <.001$] were significant, whereas the model for academic adjustment was not [$F(3,102) = 2.024$, $p = .115$]. The degree to which alters provided relationship functions

significantly predicted college well-being, even after accounting for network size. In the belongingness model, gender, network size, and relationship functions were all significant. Men had higher levels of belongingness than women in this model.

Table 8a

Multiple Regression Analysis for College Well-Being, Belongingness, and Academic Adjustment: Gender, Network Size and Relationship Functions (N = 106)

Effect	B	SE B	95% CI for B		*p*	R^2 ($R^2_{Adjusted}$)
			LL	UL		
College Well-Being					<.001	.148(.123)
Constant	68.491	7.323	53.965	83.016		
Gender (Women = 1)	-2.282	2.773	-7.781	3.218	.413	
Network Size	1.398	.387	.631	2.165	<.001	
Functions	.499	.211	.080	.917	.020	
Belongingness					<.001	.234(.211)
Constant	34.212	2.959	28.343	40.081		
Gender (Women = 1)	-4.171	1.120	-6.393	-1.948	<.001	
Network Size	.371	.156	.061	.681	.019	
Functions	.365	.085	.196	.534	<.001	
Academic Adjustment					.115	.056(.028)
Constant	25.178	2.586	20.048	30.308		
Gender (Women = 1)	-1.665	.979	-3.608	.277	.092	
Network Size	.249	.137	-.022	.520	.071	
Functions	-.032	.075	-.180	.116	.665	

Note. (Gender Coded: Women = 1 and Men = 0)

In analyses that included race and size of network as covariates, the college well-being model [$F(3,107) = 9.085$, $p = <.001$] and belongingness model [$F(3,107) = 7.371$, $p = <.001$] were found to be significant. Similar to the previous regressions, the academic adjustment model was not [$F(3,107) = 1.734$, $p = .164$]. For college well-being and belongingness model, network size and relationship functions were significant predictors but not race.

Table 8b

Multiple Regression Analysis for College Well-Being, Belongingness, and Academic Adjustment: Race, Network Size and Relationship Functions (N = 111)

Effect	B	SE B	95% CI for B		*p*	R^2 ($R^2_{Adjusted}$)
			LL	UL		
College Well-Being					<.001	.203(.181)
Constant	65.208	7.182	50.970	79.446		

Race	-2.358	1.548	-5.427	.711	.131	
Network Size	1.408	.386	.642	2.173	<.001	
Functions	.560	.204	.155	.965	.007	
Belongingness					<.001	.171(.148)
Constant	30.856	3.137	24.640	37.078		
Race	-.366	.676	-1.706	.975	.590	
Network Size	.345	.169	.011	.680	.043	
Functions	.366	.089	.189	.542	<.001	
Academic Adjustment					.164	.046(.020)
Constant	25.026	2.560	19.952	30.101		
Race	-.531	.552	-1.625	.563	.338	
Network Size	.220	.138	-.053	.493	.113	
Functions	-.059	.073	-.203	.085	.418	

Note. (Race Coded: White = 0; Asian = 1; Other Minority = 2)

Relation between Tie Strength (Frequency of Contact, Perceived Closeness) and College Well-Being, Belongingness, and Academic Adjustment

The second set of regressions examined the degree to which different aspects of tie strength (i.e., frequency of contact with alters and perceived closeness with alters) predicted levels of college well-being, belongingness, and academic adjustment. Multiple regression models were run separately for frequency of contact and perceived closeness as unique aspects of tie strength. Similar to the previous set of regressions, sample sizes vary slightly by models due to coding criteria for covariates (i.e., gender and race).

First, regressions were conducted to examine the effect frequency of contact has on outcome variables. Results for these regressions are in Tables 8a and 8b. In analyses that included gender and size of network, the college well-being model [$F(3,112) = 5.153$, $p = .002$] and belongingness model [$F(3,112) = 3.301$, $p = .023$] were significant, whereas the academic adjustment model was not [$F(3,112) = 2.483$, $p = .065$]. Frequency of contact was not a significant predictor of either college well-being or belongingness after accounting for network size. However, network size was a significant predictor of all three outcome variables.

Table 9a

Multiple Regression Analysis for College Well-Being, Belongingness, and Academic Adjustment: Gender, Network Size and Frequency (N = 116)

Effect	B	SE B	95% CI for B		*p*	R^2 ($R^2_{Adjusted}$)
			LL	UL		
College Well-Being					.002	.121(.098)
Constant	73.028	6.468	60.212	85.843		
Gender (Women = 1)	-.143	2.634	-5.361	5.075	.957	
Network Size	1.448	.384	.687	2.209	<.001	
Frequency	2.199	1.197	-.173	4.572	.069	
Belongingness					.023	.081(.057)
Constant	39.995	2.889	34.270	45.719		
Gender (Women = 1)	-2.150	1.176	-4.481	.181	.070	
Network Size	.362	.171	.022	.701	.037	
Frequency	1.052	.535	-.008	2.112	.052	
Academic Adjustment					.065	.062(.037)
Constant	23.828	2.262	19.345	28.310		
Gender (Women = 1)	-1.679	.921	-3.504	.146	.071	
Network Size	.291	.134	.025	.557	.032	
Frequency	.007	.419	-.823	.837	.986	

Note. (Gender Coded: Women = 1 and Men = 0)

In analyses that included race and size of network as covariates, the college well-being model [$F(3,117) = 7.791$, $p = <.001$] and belongingness model [$F(3,117) = 3.287$, $p = .023$] were significant while the academic adjustment model was not [$F(3,117) = 1.826$, $p = .146$]. Network size and frequency of contact were significant predictors of college well-being and belongingness, whereas network size was the only significant predictor of academic adjustment.

Table 9b

Multiple Regression Analysis for College Well-Being, Belongingness, and Academic Adjustment: Race, Network Size and Frequency of Contact (N = 121)

Effect	B	SE B	95% CI for B		*p*	R^2 ($R^2_{Adjusted}$)
			LL	UL		
College Well-Being					<.001	.167(.145)
Constant	72.287	6.235	59.936	84.636		
Race	-1.997	1.551	-5.069	1.075	.200	
Network Size	1.523	.386	.759	2.287	<.001	
Frequency	2.368	1.196	.000	4.736	.050	
Belongingness					.023	.078(.054)
Constant	37.485	2.874	31.794	43.176		
Race	-.482	.715	-1.898	.933	.501	
Network Size	.379	.178	.027	.731	.035	

Frequency	1.202	.551	.111	2.294	.031	
Academic Adjustment					.146	.045(.020)
Constant	22.306	2.198	17.954	26.658		
Race	-.260	.547	-1.343	.823	.635	
Network Size	.283	.136	.014	.553	.039	
Frequency	.073	.421	-.761	.908	.862	

Note. (Race Coded: White = 0; Asian = 1; Other Minority = 2)

Multiple regressions were conducted to examine the effect perceived closeness has on well-being, belongingness, and academic adjustment (see Table 9a and 9b). The academic adjustment model was not significant [$F(3,112) = 2.486$, $p = .064$] in analyses that included gender, size of network, and closeness, but the overall college well-being model [$F(3,112) = 4.956$, $p = .003$] and belongingness model [$F(3,112) = 6.788$, $p = <.001$] were significant. Network size was the only significant predictor of college well-being and academic adjustment but perceived closeness was a significant predictor of belongingness even after accounting for network size.

Table 10a

Multiple Regression Analysis for College Well-Being, Belongingness, and Academic Adjustment: Gender, Network Size and Perceived Closeness (N = 116)

Effect	B	SE B	95% CI for B		*p*	R^2 ($R^2_{Adjusted}$)
			LL	UL		
College Well-Being					.003	.117(.094)
Constant	72.693	7.116	58.594	86.792		
Gender (Women = 1)	-.071	2.642	-5.306	5.165	.979	
Network Size	1.384	.380	.632	2.136	<.001	
Closeness	2.282	1.354	-.401	4.964	.095	
Belongingness					<.001	.154(.131)
Constant	34.761	3.043	28.731	40.791		
Gender (Women = 1)	-1.989	1.130	-4.228	.251	.081	
Network Size	.369	.162	.047	.691	.025	
Closeness	2.152	.579	1.005	3.299	<.001	
Academic Adjustment					.064	.062(.037)
Constant	24.090	2.483	19.171	29.010		
Gender (Women = 1)	-1.685	.922	-3.512	.141	.070	
Network Size	.289	.132	.027	.552	.031	
Closeness	-.048	.472	-.984	.888	.920	

Note. (Gender Coded: Women = 1 and Men = 0)

Finally, the overall college well-being model [$F(3,117) = 7.641$, $p = <.001$] and the belongingness model [$F(3,117) = 7.463$, $p = <.001$] were significant in regressions that included race and size of network as covariates, whereas the academic adjustment model was not [$F(3,117) = 1.821$, $p = .147$]. Again, only network size was a significant predictor of college well-being and academic adjustment; however, in the belongingness model, both size of network and perceived closeness were found to be significant predictors.

Table 10b

Multiple Regression Analysis for College Well-Being, Belongingness, and Academic Adjustment: Race, Network Size and Perceived Closeness (N = 121)

Effect	B	SE B	95% CI for B		p	R^2 ($R^2_{Adjusted}$)
			LL	UL		
College Well-Being					<.001	.164(.142)
Constant	71.421	6.955	57.647	85.194		
Race	-1.972	1.559	-5.059	1.115	.208	
Network Size	1.466	.381	.711	2.222	<.001	
Closeness	2.565	1.364	-.137	5.267	.063	
Belongingness					<.001	.161(.139)
Constant	31.527	3.053	25.481	37.573		
Race	-.214	.684	-1.569	1.141	.755	
Network Size	.401	.167	.070	.733	.018	
Closeness	2.453	.599	1.267	3.640	<.001	
Academic Adjustment					.147	.045(.020)
Constant	22.364	2.447	17.517	27.211		
Race	-.263	.548	-1.349	.823	.632	
Network Size	.281	.134	.015	.547	.039	
Closeness	.062	.480	-.889	1.012	.898	

Note. (Race Coded: White = 0; Asian = 1; Other Minority = 2)

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

When emerging adults enter the post-secondary educational context and begin to form new networks composed of their peers, they are not only establishing new friendships but also setting the foundation for their college experience (Astin, 1993; Goguen et al., 2010). What really matters in these emerging peer networks as college students learn to navigate the new task demands of an unfamiliar environmental context? Early in the transition, is frequency of interaction important to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to campus? Does the student need to feel they are developing close ties with members of the emerging personal network? Frequency of interaction and a sense of closeness might be important but is it also important for emerging networks to provide social support functions early in the transition to college? Past research indicates the size of the network is important for adjustment (Burt, 1987; Perry et al., 2018) or at least forming one high quality social tie (Swenson et al., 2008). Our results align with this previous work as we found that those who named at least one alter in their network reported more college well-being and a greater sense of connectedness and belongingness than those who did not name any alters. However, beyond network size, our goal was to examine whether tie strength and/or the degree to which the emerging network provides support functions is also important early into the college transition. Two related research questions were examined focusing on the function of social supports and aspects of tie strength in this new college peer network as students transition into the college environment.

The first research question examined the relationship between the degree to which relationship function supportiveness is fulfilled by participants' emerging college network and positive outcomes, including their subjective well-being specific to the college context, general sense of connectedness and belongingness, and their academic motivation and achievement. For regression models that included binary gender or race as covariates, size of network was a consistently significant predictor of college student subjective well-being and overall belongingness, as expected and consistent with past research (e.g., Burt, 1987; Perry et al., 2018), but interestingly was not predictive of academic adjustment. Furthermore, relationships functions also were not predictive of academic adjustment. However, relationship functions accounted for unique variance in regression models predicting college well-being and belongingness even when accounting for network size among students who reported having at least one alter on their new college campus. Together, these results indicate that having a personal network that provides a higher degree of social support functions is important for new college students' general sense of belonging and connectedness as well as their college subjective well-being. Students' transitions (Hoffman et al., 2002), psychological adjustment (Pittman & Richmond, 2008), and social-emotional well-being (van der Zanden et al., 2018) are all affected by students' sense of belonging and 'mattering' on campus (Strayhorn, 2018). Prior college student development research indicates university adjustment was positively associated with the amount of social, emotional, and practical (i.e., receiving material assistance) support students received (Ramsay et al., 2007; van der Zanden et al., 2018). Our findings add to this literature by asking participants to specify the members of the new network and the degree to which those alters on campus provide social, emotional, and practical support. Taken together, the results indicate the supportiveness of the new network is important for students' general

sense of belonging and college well-being -- but not their academic adjustment -- early in the transition to college life.

The second research question focused on the relationship between aspects of participants' strength of social ties, which included frequency of contact with and perceptions of closeness, in a new college network and subjective wellbeing, belongingness, and academic adjustment. For both men and women, frequency of contact contributed to the prediction of both college well-being and belongingness models. Frequency of contact was also a significant predictor in well-being and belongingness models that included race. Finally, the aspect of tie strength involving perceptions of closeness with alters was found to be significant predictor of students' general sense of belonging and connectedness but not for their college subjective well-being or their academic adjustment. Size of network was found to be a greater indicator of college subjective well-being across both gender and race models further demonstrating a greater number of social ties is important to university attachment. These findings demonstrate that perceptions of closeness, and the resulting emotional support functions from that close relationship, significantly impacts students' general sense of belonging. Although, perceptions of closeness only relating to belongingness beyond network size this early in the transition to college indicates that frequency of contact with and social supportiveness is more important for student well-being in the college context. During the transition to college, students reporting more perceived social support were less likely to experience internalizing problems, like depression, anxiety, and somatization (Compas et al., 1986). However, our data indicated that having social ties to do things with and who provide actual supports greatly matter for student well-being early on in the transition to college.

Limitations and Implications for Practice

The current study contains several limitations including results being limited to a large research institution, like UGA, that is predominately white. Moreover, the sample size in the current study could be larger as size of groups for minority students in the sample (i.e., Black, Multiracial, and Hispanic students) were too small to analyze separately. While only 5 Black students completed the survey, descriptive statistics indicate lower reports on all positive outcome variables (i.e., subjective well-being specific to the college context, general sense of belongingness, and academic motivation and achievement). Hispanic student's descriptive statistics suggest smaller networks and less strong network ties although they are reporting adequate levels of positive outcome variables. These observations might suggest that particular features of the network on belonging and well-being do not operate in similar way across all races. Another limitation to the current study is that all measures are self-report. However, the methodology utilized from egocentric network research (i.e., the name generator and interpreter) required participants to be more distinctive and reflective of their current relationships at UGA. This unique method is a strength of the current study and captures nuances of personal networks that general social support questionnaires may miss.

Knowing which aspects of tie strength and support functions, provided by those within the new college peer network, aid a student in having a successful transition to college has implications for both students and those who support and guide them, including parents and student affairs professionals. Consistent with previous research (Burt, 1987; Bowman, 2010), the current results indicate the establishment of a personal network on the college campus is an important predictor of college student subjective well-being (i.e., academic satisfaction, academic efficacy, college gratitude, and school connectedness). Results indicate network size

on campus is an important aspect of college well-being, but our results indicate having at least one social tie (i.e., alter) on campus is also predictive of college student well-being. Encouraging students to create large support networks of new college peers will positively impact their student well-being and increase their institutional attachment. Moreover, the establishment of new networks that fulfill social, emotional, and instrumental support functions impacts their general sense of belonging and connectedness in addition to their college well-being. In contrast, perceptions of how close they feel to these those in their new network impacted only their general sense of belongingness in the current study but not their college well-being or their academic adjustment. These findings align with Schlossberg's Transition Theory (2008) and suggest that 'taking stock' in a student's support system might also be a beneficial practice when working with college students who do not feel they belong. In sum, as students transition to and begin college, establishing at least one social tie with whom they interact with frequently and that provides different types of social support will serve their well-being within the college context as well as their general sense of belongingness and connectedness.

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APPENDIX A

Social Connectedness and Social Assurances Scales (SCSAS)

"Here are some questions about your social experience. Read each sentence and choose the one response that best describes how you've felt in the past month."

Social Connectedness

1. I feel disconnected from the world around me.
2. Even around people I know, I don't feel that I really belong.
3. I feel so distant from people.
4. I have no sense of togetherness with my peers.
5. I don't feel related to anyone.
6. I catch myself losing all sense of connectedness with society.
7. Even among my friends, there is no sense of brotherhood/sisterhood.
8. I don't feel I participate with anyone or any group.

Social Assurances

Companionship

9. I feel more comfortable when someone is constantly with me.
10. I'm more at ease doing things together with other people.
11. Working side by side with others is more comfortable than working alone.
12. My life is incomplete without a buddy beside me.

Affiliation

13. It's hard for me to use my skills and talents without someone beside me.
14. I stick to my friends like glue.
15. I join groups more for the friendship than the activity itself.
16. I wish to find someone who can be with me all the time.

College Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (CSSWQ)

"Here are some questions about your college experience. Read each sentence and choose the one response that best describes how you've felt in the past month."

Academic Satisfaction

1. I have had a great academic experience at this college.
2. I am happy with how I've done in my classes.
3. I am satisfied with my academic achievements since coming to college.
4. I am pleased with how my college education is going so far.

Academic Efficacy

5. I am a hard worker in my classes.
6. I am a diligent student.
7. I am an organized and effective student.
8. I study well for my classes.

School Connectedness

9. I feel like a real part of this school.
10. People at this school are friendly to me.
11. I can really be myself at this school.
12. Other students here like me the way I am.

College Gratitude

13. I am so thankful that I'm getting a college education.
14. I am grateful to the professors and other students who have helped me in class.
15. I feel thankful for the opportunity to learn so many new things.
16. I am grateful for the people who have helped me succeed in college.

Academic Adjustment Scale (AAS)

Please indicate the level of endorsement to which each of the following questions apply to you:

Academic Lifestyle

1. I sometimes worry I do not have the academic skills needed to enjoy being a student.

Academic Achievement

2. I am satisfied with the level of my academic performance to date.
3. I think I am as academically able as any other student.
4. I am satisfied with my ability to learn at UGA.

Academic Motivation

5. I expect to successfully complete my degree in the usual allocated timeframe.
6. The reason I am studying is to lead a better lifestyle.

Relationship Functions

To what extent does/is {alter}…

- Provide direction, advice, support, and other forms of assistance (e.g., do favors for you, offer an opinion).
- Understand you and provide open and honest conversation (e.g., tell private things to them or they know when something is bothering you).
- Reliable and available to you (e.g., would stay your friend through bad times or even if you argued).

- Offer reassurance encouragement, and positive affirmation (e.g., would make you feel comfortable in a new situation or calmer if you were nervous).
- Offer comfort and trust in new or uncertain situations (e.g., would make you feel comfortable in a new situation or calmer if you were nervous).
- Engage in pleasant, entertaining, or interesting activities with you (e.g., is fun to do things with, tells you interesting things or is exciting to talk to).
- Provide information, resources, or opportunities (e.g., things happening on campus, job opportunities, information about class).
- Provide a sense of connection to the university community (e.g., introduces you to others on campus, helps you feel like you're a part of things on campus).