



What Does My Best Friend Think of My Relationship? Links with Psychological Well-being in Established Adulthood

Andrea Villaburu¹ · François Poulin¹

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Abstract

A person's best friend and romantic partner both contribute to their psychological well-being. Generally, they know each other, and sometimes the friend serves as a confidant regarding conjugal concerns. As a result, the friend can develop an appreciation of the couple. This study examined this appreciation and its links to three aspects of the target participant's well-being (life satisfaction, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms). It was expected that these links would vary based on the target participant's gender and the friendship duration. The sample included 151 triads (i.e., 33 years old target participants, 64.9% women; their best friend and their partner). The best friends completed a scale measuring their approval of the couple. The target participants filled out questionnaires about their well-being. Finally, the target participants and their partner completed a questionnaire on the target participant's experience of psychological domestic violence (control variable). For life satisfaction, regressions showed a positive association with approval for women when the friendship was of short or medium duration. Regarding self-esteem, the link existed among women and in friendships of short duration. This could be explained by closer friendship among women and the need for approval in newer friendships. For depressive symptoms, the link disappeared when experienced violence was considered.

Keywords Social approval · Friendship · Couples · Well being · Human sex differences · Established adulthood

Introduction

The best friend holds a significant place in childhood and adolescence, but as people transition into adulthood, the romantic partner gradually becomes the primary source of support and intimacy (Chow et al., 2012). This shift can be explained by attachment theory, which defines attachment as a relationship providing a sense of belonging, security, and protection in times of vulnerability (Sable, 2008). The attachment hierarchy perspective builds on this by suggesting that close relationships are ranked by emotional importance. For example, as the romantic relationship develops, it progresses in this hierarchy to eventually reach the top, replacing the best friend (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997; Umemura et al., 2018). Nonetheless, the best friend remains present in adulthood and continues to fulfill certain needs

(Wrzus et al., 2016). Furthermore, both friendship and romantic relationship contribute uniquely to well-being (Camirand & Poulin, 2022).

Typically, the relationships a person maintains with their best friend and their romantic partner do not evolve in isolation. Thus, the best friend and partner generally know each other and may even socialize in contexts initiated by the person. Ultimately, they come to know each other and can develop mutual appreciation. The best friend forms their own opinion about the person's choice of partner and the couple. This opinion can impact the couple's stability and commitment (Etcheverry et al., 2008; Le et al., 2010; Sinclair et al., 2015). Moreover, best friend's approval of the couple can also impact the person's well-being (Holmberg & Blair, 2016). This study aims to examine this question in established adulthood. Potential moderating effects of gender and friendship duration on this link are also explored.

Established Adulthood

Established adulthood, between ages 30 and 45, involves various responsibilities, including professional, romantic,

✉ Andrea Villaburu
villaburu_lopez.andrea@courrier.uqam.ca

¹ Department of Psychology, Université du Québec à Montréal, Montreal, QC, Canada

parental, and social obligations (Mehta et al., 2020; Mehta & Arnett, 2023). This period is demanding due to balancing work and family commitments, often requiring significant sacrifices. Established adults tend to focus more on others, especially due to their parental roles, becoming less self-centered (Reifman & Niehuis, 2023). Most have solidified their identity, reporting significant progress in professional, relational, and parental domains, while their prosocial interactions remain stable (Mehta & Arnett, 2023; Reifman & Niehuis, 2023). Main stressors include work and romantic relationships.

Friendship in Established Adulthood

Friendship is a voluntary, spontaneous, reciprocal, and egalitarian relationship (Wrzus et al., 2016). It serves six functions: enjoyable activities, emotional security, reliable alliance (i.e., trust and loyalty), validation, intimacy, and support (i.e., emotional, instrumental, and informational). In adulthood, friendships offer a safe space to share personal thoughts, manage emotions, alleviate stress and understand other relationships (Blieszner & Adams, 1992). Through friendships, people develop social skills and shape themselves. Friends provide companionship, affection, and guidance in adapting to life transitions, supporting personal growth and stability as adult responsibilities increase (Blieszner & Roberto, 2004).

The number of friends tends to increase in young adulthood (Wrzus et al., 2016), but work and family demands later require prioritizing certain ties. Friendship quality and time spent with friends often decline after marriage and during the transition to parenthood (Wrzus et al., 2016). The dyadic withdrawal hypothesis suggests that increased romantic involvement requires a withdrawal from the larger social network (Johnson & Leslie, 1982). Thus, as romantic relationships deepen, the number of friends and contacts tends to decrease (Johnson & Leslie, 1982; Kalmijn, 2003). Furthermore, the number of friendships continues to decline with age, and the perspectives of remaining friends in later relationship stages, such as marriage, are often seen as less influential (Kalmijn, 2003).

Finally, adult friendships vary in duration; some are recently formed while others have existed for many years. Long-term ones offer more intimacy, satisfaction, and reliability (Johnson, 2012; Sherman et al., 2000), and are associated with higher self-esteem and better mental health (Camirand & Poulin, 2022). However, in established adulthood, these friendships may face new challenges like relocation for work or housing (Mehta, 2025). As a result, friendships may be left behind or become less present daily life, prompting people to seek new connections. While established adults are generally open to new connections,

they often face responsibilities, time constraints and limited opportunities. Workplace is common place to meet new friends (Mehta, 2025). People also may participate in activities that facilitate meeting new people (Blieszner & Roberto, 2004), and being parents can create friendship opportunities (such as through prenatal classes). Finally, even without children, having long-time friends who do can limit opportunities to see each other and encourage seeking new child-free friends.

The Relationship Between the Best Friend and the Romantic Partner

This study draws on social network theory, which posits that people are embedded within a web of social ties that influence their behaviors and well-being (Valente, 2015). For example, friendships boost happiness, self-esteem, and provide support and companionship (Sherman et al., 2000). In adulthood, the number and quality of friendships, as well as the support, companionship, and socialization opportunities they provide, are all associated with well-being (Pezirkianidis et al., 2023). Similarly, coupled adults report greater life satisfaction, fewer mental and physical health problems, higher self-esteem, and more positive emotions than single people (Gómez-López et al., 2019).

Accordingly, friendship and couplehood should not be seen as two isolated social experiences. Sometimes, the couple forms within a social circle, with the friend and partner knowing each other before. Even if they did not know each other previously, they may develop a rapport through social activities. Additionally, the person may discuss their friend with their partner and vice versa. For example, the friend may act as a confidant when the person faces difficulties in their relationship (Julien et al., 2000). Ultimately, the friend and the partner may come to develop mutual appreciation or antipathy.

One manifestation of this possible appreciation or dislike is the best friend's approval or disapproval of the relationship. This concept reflects the reactions and opinions of the social circle towards the relationship (Felmlee, 2001; Sinclair et al., 2015). While the social circle can include family and broader networks, the best friend is believed to hold a particular place due to the intimacy and closeness of this relationship. Indeed, Blair et al. (2018) found that support for the couple from friends, but not from family, is associated with the couple's well-being. Approval can be manifested directly (e.g., encouragement to continue the relationship) or indirectly (e.g., inviting the couple to an event) (Blair & Holmberg, 2008; Felmlee, 2001). Friends' approval primarily depends on perceived relationship satisfaction, commitment, and the availability of alternative partners (Etcheverry et al., 2013).

The concepts of *uncertainty reduction* and *relational uncertainty* can help explain why people seek their friend's opinion about their romantic relationship. According to uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), humans are inherently motivated to seek information to reduce uncertainty in social interactions. Building on this, relational uncertainty refers to doubts about one's own or a partner's commitment, or the relationship itself (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). These uncertainties can be distressing and lead people to adopt various strategies to reduce ambiguity, such as seek input from a third party. For example, when people are uncertain about the future of their romantic relationship, they often turn to friends for guidance and validation (Plamondon & Lachance-Grzela, 2018). Supportive feedback can reduce relational doubts and is linked to lower chances of breakup (Parks & Adelman, 1983; Sinclair et al., 2015). Thus, friend's approval may be a valuable resource in managing relationship uncertainty and supporting both relational and personal well-being.

Friend's approval or disapproval impacts couples in some ways. Young adults who perceive approval of their relationship feel more love, commitment, and positivity toward their partner, while disapproval reduces these emotions (Sinclair et al., 2015). A meta-analysis shows that low levels of commitment, love, or support increase the likelihood of a breakup (Le et al., 2010). Similarly, perceived social marginalization of a romantic relationship predicted breakdown, with commitment acting as a mediating factor (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2007). This suggests that social disapproval may lead to breakup by lowering love and commitment. However, all is not lost; positive attachment behaviors from a partner (i.e., accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement) can buffer the relationship from these negative effects, offering protection against social disapproval (Bradford et al., 2020).

To understand how people consider their social network's views, Jenson et al. (2021) examined factors affecting trust in negative opinions about their romantic relationships. People tend to trust friends' views if they perceive them as experienced in relationships, unbiased, and based on credible evidence. People who are deeply invested in their relationship are more likely to perceive biases, which can undermine their trust in dissenting opinions. This tendency may protect their positive perception of the relationship.

These effects of approval or disapproval highlight the importance of relational consistency described by Heider's balance theory (Heider, 1958). This theory suggests that people prefer balanced relationships and cognitions towards others, meaning that these are coherent and affectively consistent (Adejumo et al., 2008; Crandall et al., 2007). It focuses on triads, where balance is achieved when the relationships among the three elements are coherent and

positive (Adejumo et al., 2008). An imbalance occurs when a person has positive relations with both their friend and partner, but the relationship between the friend and the partner is negative. Such imbalance creates psychological tension, leading people to adjust their cognitions to restore balance (Adejumo et al., 2008). One adjustment may be a change in the relationship with the disapproving friend, as such disapproval is associated to reduced emotional closeness to that friend (Gillian et al., 2022).

Gender and Friendship Duration as Moderators

Gender differences are observed in adult friendships. Women often feel closer to their friends than men do (Camirand & Poulin, 2022; Mendelson & Aboud, 1999), which may lead them to believe their best friend knows them well, understands what is best for them, and thus, values their approval of the couple more. Women also tend to maintain more exclusive friendships (i.e., not shared with their partner), even after marriage (Sauter et al., 2022). This suggests their friends are more likely to take their side and offer negative feedback about the partner, unlike men whose friends are more equally connected to both partners. Furthermore, women are more likely to discuss their relationship issues face-to-face and in detail with their best friend, while men tend to address these issues while engaging in another activity (Helms et al., 2003). This could reflect a greater importance placed on conversations with the best friend by women, and thus, more weight on the friend's opinion. Finally, friends' disapproval affects relationship quality more for women than for men (Bradford et al., 2020).

It is expected that a person would be more likely to be affected by the approval or disapproval of their couple when the friend has known them for a longer period. Longer-term friendships often involve deeper intimacy (Johnson, 2012; Sherman et al., 2000), characterized by sensitivity to each other's emotions and sincere communication of thoughts, feelings, and personal information (Mendelson & Aboud, 1999). A long-time friend may be more familiar with the couple's relationship and feel more comfortable expressing their opinion. Furthermore, during adolescence, people form their identity, build more intimate relationships, and develop social and personal skills through friendships (Blieszner & Roberto, 2004). As a result, long-term friendship may have a deeper emotional history and involve mutual growth in emotional regulation and conflict resolution. Over time, the friend may come to better understand the other's communication style, allowing them to express sensitive messages (such as relationship approval or disapproval) in ways that are more likely to be well received and understood. This long-term friendship closeness may also lead the person to believe that their friend knows them well

and therefore has a better sense of the type of relationship that suits them. Beyond simply knowing the person well, long-term friends often serve as witnesses to key life transitions and past relationships, helping to sustain a sense of identity continuity over time (Blieszner & Roberto, 2004). Their opinion may thus carry unique weight, as it is tied not just to interpersonal closeness but to a shared history that spans the person's relational and personal development. In addition, the longer a friendship lasts, the more likely the person is to have a positive perception of their friend and to trust them (Mendelson & Aboud, 1999). This is probably because, over time, the friend has had more opportunities to demonstrate their positive qualities as a friend, which may make the person feel more comfortable seeking their opinion and placing greater trust in it. However, for some people (especially men), their closest friend might be a "memory friendship", formed in youth and still emotionally important despite infrequent contact (Rawlins, 1992). In such cases, the emotional weight of shared memories can rival that of close, regularly nurtured friendships.

Objectives and Hypotheses of the Present Study

Most studies have examined approval from the social circle (either family and/or friends) and perceived approval (Plamondon & Lachance-Grzela, 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2017). This study focused specifically on the best friend, given their importance for well-being, and explored actual approval as reported by the friend. Additionally, the links between best friend approval and psychological well-being are under-researched, and no study has considered the moderating effects of gender and friendship duration. Moreover, since established adulthood is marked by major transitions (Mehta et al., 2020), it is a relevant period to examine these links. Finally, this analysis addressed both positive and negative dimensions of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

The first objective of this study examined the links between the best friend's approval of the couple and the target participant's psychological well-being. Well-being was operationalized by two positive aspects (life satisfaction and self-esteem) and one negative aspect (depressive symptoms). Greater approval was expected to be associated with higher life satisfaction (H1a), better self-esteem (H1b), and fewer depressive symptoms (H1c). The second objective examined whether gender moderated the link between approval and psychological well-being. It was expected that the associations examined in the first objective would be more pronounced among women than among men (H2). The third objective examined the moderating role of friendship duration on the link between approval and psychological well-being. It was expected that the links examined in the first objective would be stronger in longer friendships

(H3). The fourth objective involved an exploratory examination of the interaction between the two moderators.

Given the documented associations between psychological well-being and domestic psychological violence (Coker et al., 2002), duration of the romantic relationship (Gibb et al., 2011), presence of children (Yöyen et al., 2025), personal income (Pukelienė & Kisieliuskas, 2013), education (Gaydosch et al., 2018), and ethnicity (Gaydosch et al., 2018), it was important to consider these variables in our analyses. Moreover, domestic violence, relationship duration and having children, were not only likely to impact personal well-being directly, but also to shape how close others perceived and evaluated the relationship. This perception could, in turn, have affected the level of social approval, which was central to our study. Including these variables as control allowed a more precise estimation of the unique contribution of best friend approval to psychological well-being outcomes.

Method

Participants

Target participants come from a longitudinal study designed to investigate the development of personal relationships from adolescence to adulthood. Findings from this study have previously been reported about friendships (Langheir & Poulin, 2024), romantic relationships (Raymond & Poulin, 2023) and parent-child relationships (Charest-St-Onge & Poulin, 2025). This longitudinal study was initiated in 2001 with 390 sixth-grade students ($M_{\text{age}} = 12.38$ years, $SD = 0.42$, girls = 58%) from eight French-speaking elementary schools boards in the greater Montreal area. Parental consent was obtained, and approximately 75% of students in those classes participated. Most were Caucasian (90%) and Canadian-born (96%). Most participants resided with both biological parents (70%) and were considered middle-class ($M_{\text{income}} = \text{Can\$}50,000$). Since then, they have participated in multiple follow-up assessments. In 2022, when they were on average 33 years and 2 months old ($SD = 4$ months), 305 of them agreed to participate in a new assessment wave. Chi-square tests were conducted on sociodemographic variables collected at the beginning of the longitudinal study to compare target participants who took part in the 2022 wave ($n = 305$) with those who did not ($n = 85$). Non-participants were more likely to be boys, $\chi^2(1, 390) = 6.78$, $p = 0.009$, $\phi = -0.13$, and to come from a family structure other than one with two biological parents, $\chi^2(1, 386) = 11.98$, $p < 0.001$, $\phi = -0.18$. Among those who participated, 252 (82.62%) were in a relationship. Their partners and best friends were invited to complete a questionnaire (see procedure); 194 (75.49%)

partners and 185 (73.40%) friends agreed to participate. Only target participants for whom both the partner and the best friend completed the questionnaires are included in the analyses ($n=151$). Overall, 64.2% of the target participants identified as women, 33.8% as men, and 2% identified as either women or men and additionally selected an identity such as bigender, gender creative, or queer. Among them, 69.5% had at least one child. Finally, 94% were in a mix-gender relationship, 96.7% cohabited with the partner, and 12.6% were married. The median annual personal income ranged between Can\$60,000 and Can\$79,999. Additionally, 90.1% of target participants had a best friend of the same gender.

Procedure

Target participants were contacted by a research assistant and invited to complete an online questionnaire. If they were in a relationship, they were asked for permission to contact their partner. The assistant then called the partner, explained the study and requested their participation. The assistant also asked to the target participant to identify their closest friend (who cannot be a romantic partner, family member or relative) and requested permission to contact them. The assistant then called the friend to explain the study and solicit their participation. Target participants, partners, and best friends signed a consent form, completed an online questionnaire via LimeSurvey, and received financial compensation. The project received ethical approval from the ethics committee of the Université du Québec à Montréal.

Measures

Approval of the Couple by the Best Friend

Best friends rated a French version of four statements regarding their approval of the target participant's couple from Etcheverry and Agnew's (2004) social network approval study. Each statement includes a bracketed section indicating approval or disapproval, which determines the extremes on the response scale for each statement. The response scale ranges from -3 (disapproval) to 3 (approval) with seven anchor points. For example, the statement "I think my friend [should not/should] continue in their current romantic relationship" has -3 as "Should not," 0 as "No opinion," and 3 as "Should." The total score corresponds to the average of the responses to the four statements. The instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the current sample (coefficient $\alpha=0.93$). Some studies have employed this instrument in similar contexts, indicating that it is considered relevant and reliable by the research community, although these studies have primarily been conducted

by the same group of researchers (Etcheverry et al., 2008, 2013; Etcheverry & Agnew, 2016).

Life Satisfaction

Target participants responded to five statements measuring their overall satisfaction with life, such as "The conditions of my life are excellent." These statements are from the French version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Blais et al., 1989; Diener et al., 1985). Responses were collected using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The total score is the average of responses to each statement, with a higher score indicating greater satisfaction. The instrument showed excellent internal consistency in the current sample ($\alpha=0.91$). In the study by Diener et al. (1985), the scale demonstrated strong convergent validity with other indicators of subjective well-being and discriminant validity from measures of negative personality traits.

Self-Esteem

Target participants completed the validated French version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965; Vallières & Vallerand, 1990). This questionnaire assesses overall self-esteem through 10 statements (e.g., "I take a positive attitude toward myself"), rated on a four-point Likert scale (0 =strongly disagree, 3 =strongly agree). Some items are negatively worded. The average of responses to each item was calculated, with a higher score indicating higher self-esteem. The internal consistency of the instrument was excellent in the current sample ($\alpha=0.89$). In the study by Vallières and Vallerand (1990), confirmatory factor analysis supported the unidimensional structure of the scale, and the moderate positive correlations with life satisfaction and negative correlations with depression further supported its construct validity.

Depressive Symptoms

Target participants completed the validated French version of the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck et al., 1961; Bourque & Beaudette, 1982). This questionnaire measures depressive symptoms over the past two weeks with 21 items. Each item describes a symptom commonly observed in clinically depressed people and offers four response options of varying intensity, ranging from 0 (neutral) to 3 (maximum severity). For example: "I do not feel sad," "I feel sad," "I am sad all the time and I can't snap out of it," and "I am so sad and unhappy that I can't stand it." Participants selected the option that best reflects their experience. The sum of responses to each item was calculated to determine

the severity of symptoms, with a higher score indicating a higher level of depressive symptoms. The internal consistency of the instrument was excellent in the current sample ($\alpha=0.88$). Bourque and Beaudette (1982) demonstrate the construct validity of the inventory by showing that its factorial structure aligns with results from previous research.

Target Participant's Gender

Target participants reported the term(s) that best describe their gender identity. They could select more than one option from a list presented in alphabetical order. Response options included: Agender, Bigender, Gender Creative, Woman, Gender Fluid, Man, Non-binary, Queer, Indigenous or Culturally Specific Gender Identity, Questioning/Unsure, "I prefer to self-describe" (with a write-in option), and "I prefer not to answer." Although 2% of participants selected an additional gender identity (non-binary, Two-Spirit, or self-described), all of them also selected either "Woman" or "Man." Due to the small sample size, and to facilitate clearer interpretation of results, participants were categorized based on their binary gender selection. Gender was coded as 1 = Woman and 2 = Man.

Friendship Duration

Since the study began, when target participants were 11 years old, they have been annually asked about their friendships, including naming their best friend. Friendship duration was determined by calculating the number of years since target participants first named their best friend identified at age 33, who also completed the approval measure. This score can range from 1 (first named at age 33) to 22 (first named at age 11).

Domestic Psychological Violence Experienced

Target participants and their partners responded to eight items of psychological violence in the couple from the validated French version of the Conflict Tactics Scales-II questionnaire (Lussier, 1997; Straus et al., 1996). Statements measure psychological violence perpetrated in the last year such as "I shouted or yelled at my partner" and experienced such as "My partner did this to me." Statements are quantified on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (this has never happened) to 6 (more than 20 times in the past year) and includes option 7 (not in the past year, but it did happen before). Categories were recoded so that 7 equals 0. Two scores were used in this study: domestic psychological violence experienced as reported by the target participant and psychological violence perpetrated as reported by the partner. The internal consistency of the instrument was

slightly below the threshold for moderate reliability in the current sample ($\alpha=0.68$), according to the criteria proposed by Nunnally (1978), who suggested that an alpha of 0.70 can be considered acceptable in early stages of research exploration (Agbo, 2010). The scores were obtained by calculating the sum of the responses to the items. These two scores were then combined ($r=0.68$) to create a score of domestic psychological violence experienced by the target participant. Construct and discriminant validity of the scale were demonstrated in the study by Straus et al. (1996).

Duration of the Romantic Relationship

Target participants were asked to report the duration of their romantic relationship by specifying the number of years and months. Responses were recoded in months.

Biological Parenthood Status

Target participants were asked, "Do you have any children for whom you are the biological parent?" Response options were "yes" or "no."

Personal Income

Target participants reported their personal income on an 11-point scale ranging from less than Can\$20,000 to over Can\$200,000.

Education Level

Target participants reported their highest level of education by selecting one of nine response options, ranging from (1) "Less than a high school diploma or equivalent" to (9) "University certificate, diploma, or degree above the bachelor's level (doctoral level)."

Ethnicity

Target participants self-identified their ethnic group. For analytical purposes, two subgroups were created: white and non-white.

Data Analysis

To address the first objective, three hierarchical linear regressions were conducted (one for each dependent variable: life satisfaction, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms). In each regression, control variables (domestic psychological violence experienced, duration of the romantic relationship, parenthood status, personal income, education and ethnicity) were entered in the first step, and approval from the best

friend was entered in the second step. This order reflects our research focus: approval is our main variable of interest. Entering it after allows us to assess its unique contribution beyond the effects of the control variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

To address the second and third objectives, moderation analyses were performed integrating gender and then friendship duration as moderator variables.

To explore the fourth objective, a moderated moderation was conducted. All moderation analyses were conducted while controlling for domestic psychological violence experienced, duration of the romantic relationship, parenthood status, personal income, education and ethnicity.

The regression analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS software, version 29. Moderation analyses were performed using the PROCESS V4.2 macro (Hayes, 2022).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analyses are reported in Table 1. Normality assumptions were checked for standardized residual values in each regression and moderation analyses, and extreme values were examined. For self-esteem, the residuals exhibited negative skewness and extreme values, so a logarithmic transformation with reflection was applied. For depressive symptoms, the residuals showed skewness and extreme values, and thus a logarithmic transformation was applied. Following these adjustments, all analyses with standardized residual values met the normality assumptions within acceptable norms of ± 1.00 , with no presence of extreme scores (± 3.29 SD from the mean). Lastly, the assumption of no multicollinearity was verified. None of the independent variables had a VIF greater than 2.5, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern.

Bivariate correlations are reported in Table 1. Approval of the couple by the best friend was positively correlated with positive aspects of well-being and negatively correlated with depressive symptoms. Gender was not correlated with approval or positive well-being dimensions but was negatively correlated with depressive symptoms; women reported higher levels than men. Friendship duration was only correlated with gender; men maintained longer friendships. Finally, domestic psychological violence experienced was negatively correlated with approval and positively correlated with depressive symptoms.

Table 1 Descriptive data and bivariate correlations

Variable	M (SD)	Range	Asymmetry	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Approval	2.06 (1.48)	-3.00–3.00	-1.64	1.87											
2. Life satisfaction	5.65 (1.24)	1.00–7.00	-1.39	2.09	0.31**										
3. Self-esteem	2.55 (0.49)	0.20–3.00	-1.63	3.83	0.21**	0.62**									
4. Depressive symptoms	8.19 (8.30)	0–49.00	2.32	7.46	-0.20*	-0.51**	-0.74**								
5. Gender ^a	1.35 (0.48)	1–2	0.63	-1.62	0.07	-0.09	0.07	-0.22**							
6. Friendship duration	13.61 (7.53)	1–22	-0.52	-1.20	0.07	0.07	0.16	-0.13	0.17*						
7. Psychological violence	8.62 (12.70)	0–79.50	3.04	12.11	-0.29**	-0.17*	-0.16	0.30**	-0.06	0.04					
8. Romantic duration	99.40 (58.36)	1–225	0.25	-0.82	0.19*	0.07	0.8	-0.09	-0.01	-0.08	0.17*				
9. Parenthood status ^b	1.30 (0.46)	1–2	0.86	-1.28	0.03	-0.18*	-0.11	0.02	0.12	0.03	-0.11	-0.22**			
10. Personal income ^c	4.06 (1.99)	1–11	1.63	4.01	0.10	0.16*	0.12	-0.16*	0.18*	0.16	-0.13	-0.09	0.07		
11. Education ^d	5.11 (2.14)	1–9	-0.04	-1.10	0.06	0.27**	0.15	-0.17*	-0.23**	-0.00	-0.17	-0.09	-0.01	0.40**	
12. Ethnicity ^e	0.94 (0.24)	0–1	-3.76	12.28	-0.08	-0.06	-0.04	0.03	-0.11	0.08	-0.03	0.06	-0.14	-0.05	0.03

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$. ^a1 = Woman, 2 = Man. ^b1 = Yes, 2 = No. ^c1 = Less than \$20,000; 2 = \$20,000 to \$39,999; 3 = \$40,000 to \$59,999; 4 = \$60,000 to \$79,999; 5 = \$80,000 to \$99,999; 6 = \$100,000 to \$119,999; 7 = \$120,000 to \$139,999; 8 = \$140,000 to \$159,999; 9 = \$160,000 to \$179,999; 10 = \$180,000 to \$199,999; 11 = \$200,000 or more. ^d1 = Less than a high school diploma or equivalent; 2 = High school diploma or equivalent certificate; 3 = Trade school certificate or diploma; 4 = College or CEGEP certificate/diploma (general DEC); 5 = College or CEGEP certificate/diploma (technical DEC); 6 = University certificate or diploma below the bachelor's level; 7 = Bachelor's degree; 8 = University certificate, diploma, or degree above the bachelor's level (Master's level); 9 = University certificate, diploma, or degree above the bachelor's level (Doctoral level); ^e0 = Non-white 1 = White

Hierarchical Linear Regressions

For the first objective, it was hypothesized that higher approval would be associated with greater life satisfaction (H1a), higher self-esteem (H1b), and fewer depressive symptoms (H1c). Regression results are presented in Table 2. For the target participant's life satisfaction, approval of the couple explained a significant portion of the variance beyond control variables ($\Delta R^2 = 0.057$, $p = 0.002$). Specifically, approval was associated with higher life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.26$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.42], $p = 0.002$). For self-esteem, approval did not explain a significant portion of the variance beyond control variables ($\Delta R^2 = 0.017$, $p = 0.104$). For depressive symptoms, the addition of approval did not explain a significant portion of the variance beyond control variables ($\Delta R^2 = 0.002$, $p = 0.580$).

Moderating Effect of Gender

For the second objective, it was hypothesized that the associations between approval and well-being outcomes would be more pronounced among women than among men (H2). For life satisfaction (Fig. 1), the interaction between approval and gender approached significance ($\beta = -0.14$, 95% CI [-0.29, 0.01], $p = 0.068$). The link between approval and life satisfaction was significant only among women ($\beta = 0.36$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.54], $p < 0.001$), but not among men ($\beta = 0.06$, 95% CI [-0.21, 0.33], $p = 0.647$). For self-esteem (Fig. 2), the interaction was significant ($\beta = -0.18$, 95% CI [-0.34, -0.02], $p = 0.032$). The link between approval and self-esteem was significant among women ($\beta = 0.26$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.46], $p = 0.012$), but not among men ($\beta = -0.12$, 95% CI [-0.40, 0.18], $p = 0.453$). Finally, for depression, the interaction was not significant ($\beta = 0.04$, 95% CI [-0.11, 0.20], $p = 0.595$).

Table 2 Results of hierarchical regressions

Outcome: Life satisfaction							
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	df	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Block 1				4.073	(6, 144)	0.145	0.145***
Psychological violence	-0.016	-0.166	-2.084				
Romantic duration	0.002	0.090	1.119				
Parenthood status	-0.508	-0.188	-2.350				
Personal income	0.042	0.068	0.798				
Education	0.130	0.223	2.617				
Ethnicity	-0.504	-0.096	-1.232				
Block 2				10.189	(1, 143)	0.202	0.057**
Approval	0.220	0.261	3.192				
Outcome: Self-esteem							
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	df	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Block 1				1.635	(6, 144)	0.064	0.064
Psychological violence	-0.004	-0.175	-2.104				
Romantic duration	0.000	0.089	1.066				
Parenthood status	-0.059	-0.092	-1.099				
Personal income	0.010	0.067	0.760				
Education	0.012	0.085	0.949				
Ethnicity	-0.064	-0.051	-0.626				
Block 2				2.672	(1, 143)	0.081	0.017
Approval	0.029	0.143	1.635				
Outcome: Depressive symptoms							
	<i>B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	df	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Block 1				4.426	(6, 144)	0.156	0.156***
Psychological violence	0.023	0.328	4.150				
Romantic duration	-0.002	-0.151	-1.899				
Parenthood status	-0.036	-0.019	-0.237				
Personal income	-0.061	-0.136	-1.615				
Education	-0.024	-0.057	-0.672				
Ethnicity	0.095	0.025	0.328				
Block 2				0.307	(1, 143)	0.158	0.002
Approval	-0.028	-0.046	-0.554				

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Fig. 1 Moderator effect of gender on the link between approval and life satisfaction

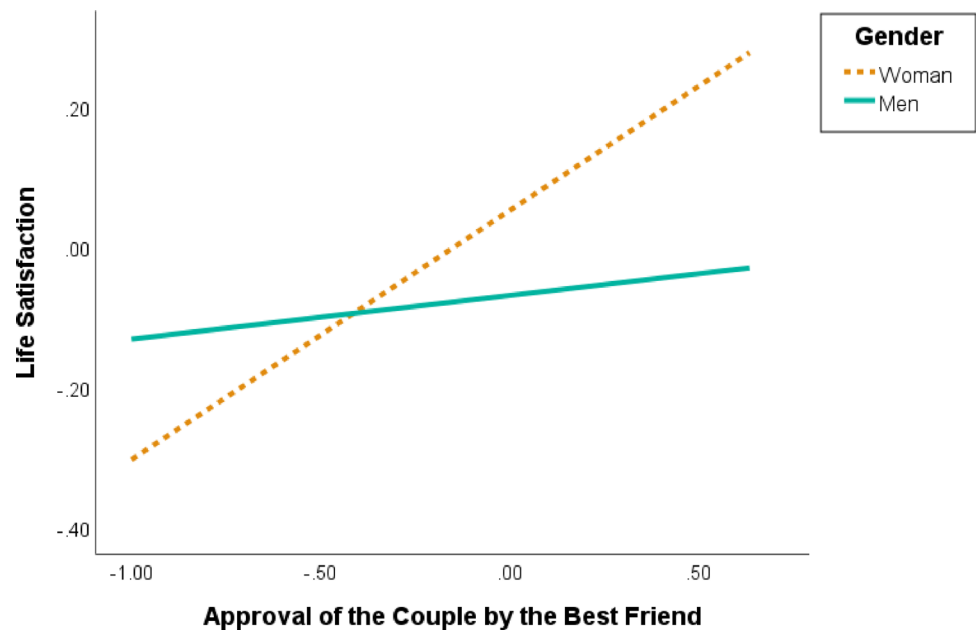
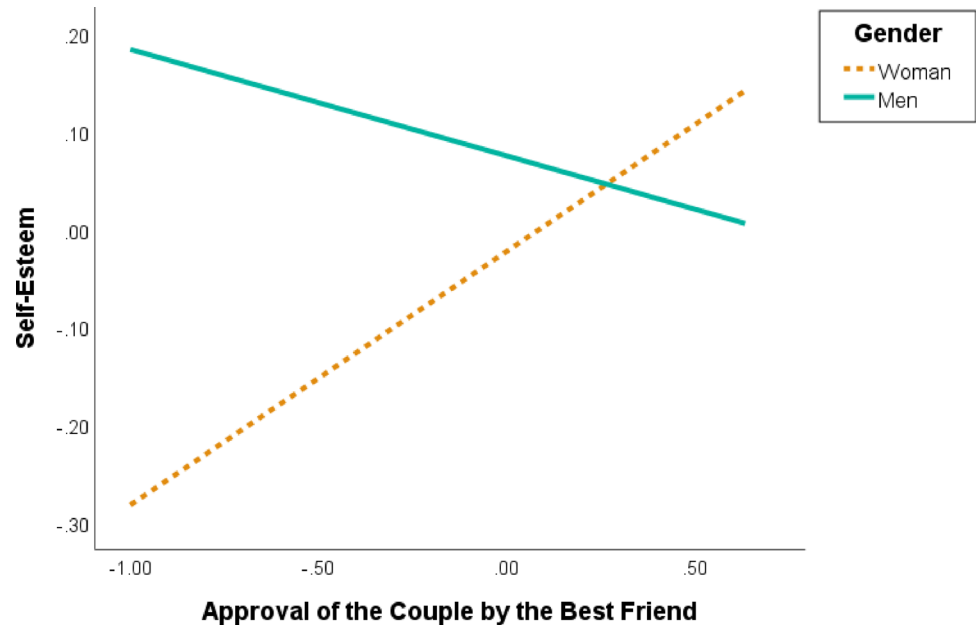


Fig. 2 Moderator effect of gender on the link between approval and self-esteem



Moderating Effect of Friendship Duration

For the third objective, it was hypothesized that the associations between approval and well-being would be stronger in longer friendships (H3). For life satisfaction (Fig. 3), the interaction between approval and friendship duration was significant ($\beta = -0.15$, 95% CI $[-0.30, -0.00]$, $p = 0.044$). Three levels of friendship duration were created based on its mean (i.e., -1 SD, at the mean, and $+1$ SD). The link between approval and life satisfaction was significant for short (6.08 years; $\beta = 0.40$, 95% CI $[0.19, 0.62]$, $p < 0.001$) and medium-duration friendships (13.61 years; $\beta = 0.25$, 95% CI $[0.09, 0.41]$, $p = 0.002$), but not for long-duration ones (21.14

years; $\beta = 0.10$, 95% CI $[-0.12, 0.32]$, $p = 0.360$). For self-esteem (Fig. 4), the interaction approached significance ($\beta = -0.15$, 95% CI $[-0.31, 0.01]$, $p = 0.061$). The link between approval and self-esteem was significant for short-duration friendships ($\beta = 0.28$, 95% CI $[0.04, 0.51]$, $p = 0.020$) but not for medium ($\beta = 0.13$, 95% CI $[-0.05, 0.30]$, $p = 0.150$) or long-duration friendships ($\beta = -0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.26, 0.21]$, $p = 0.842$). For depressive symptoms, the interaction was not significant ($\beta = 0.09$, 95% CI $[-0.06, 0.24]$, $p = 0.255$).

Fig. 3 Moderator effect of friendship duration on the link between approval and life satisfaction

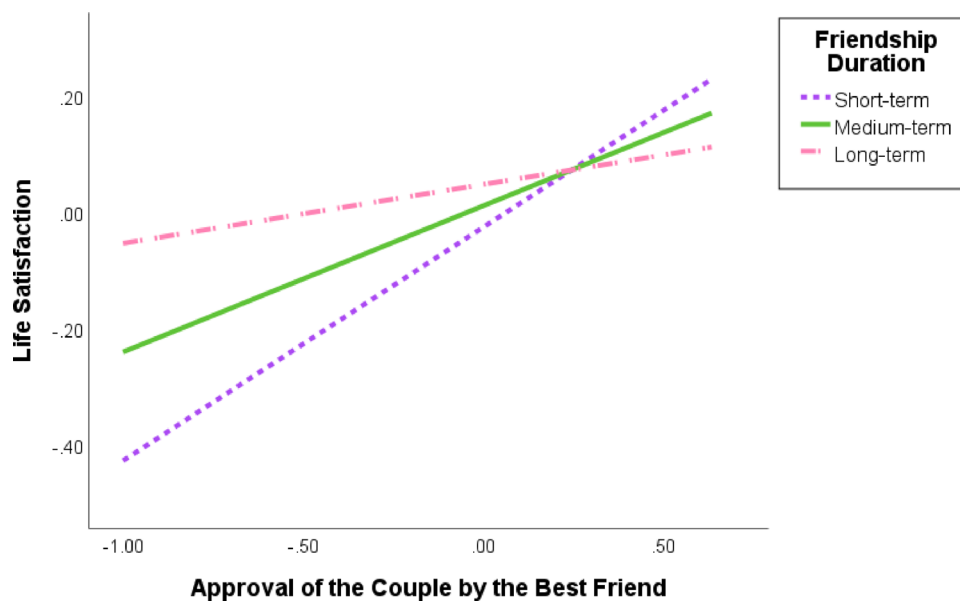
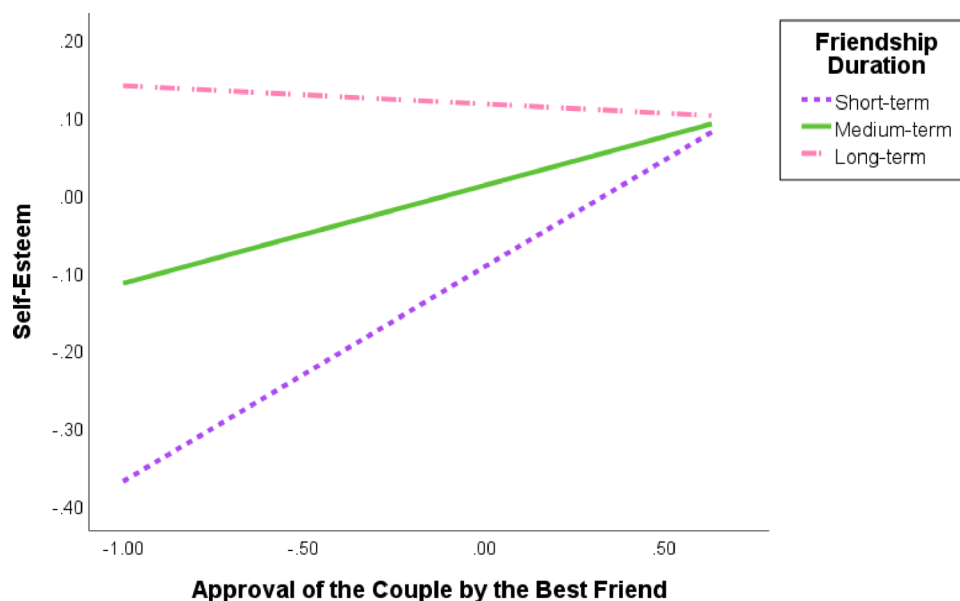


Fig. 4 Moderator effect of friendship duration on the link between approval and self-esteem



Interaction Between the Two Moderators

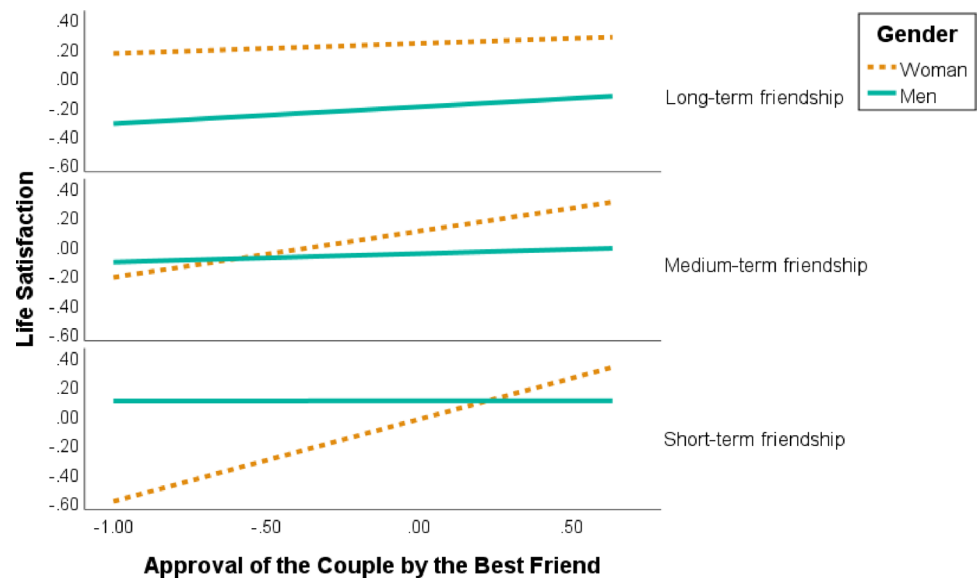
For the fourth objective, exploratory analyses were conducted to examine whether the interaction between gender and friendship duration moderates the associations between approval and well-being outcomes. For life satisfaction (Fig. 5), the interaction between approval, gender, and friendship duration was significant ($\beta=0.15$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.29], $p=0.043$). The link between approval and life satisfaction was significant among women with short-duration ($\beta=0.56$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.81], $p<0.001$) or medium-duration friendships ($\beta=0.32$, 95% CI [0.13, 0.50], $p=0.001$), but not for long-duration friendships ($\beta=0.07$, 95% CI [-0.20, 0.33], $p=0.608$). The link was not significant among men, regardless of whether the friendship was

short ($\beta=0.00$, 95% CI [-0.37, 0.37], $p=0.996$), medium ($\beta=0.06$, 95% CI [-0.20, 0.32], $p=0.662$), or long-duration ($\beta=0.12$, 95% CI [-0.22, 0.45], $p=0.500$). The interaction was not significant for self-esteem ($\beta=0.10$, 95% CI [-0.05, 0.25], $p=0.200$) or depressive symptoms ($\beta=-0.04$, 95% CI [-0.19, 0.11], $p=0.560$).

Discussion

Although the link between approval of the couple by friends and relationship quality has been previously documented (Etcheverry et al., 2008; Le et al., 2010; Sinclair et al., 2015), the link with personal well-being has been rarely studied (Holmberg & Blair, 2016). As established adulthood

Fig. 5 Moderator effects of gender and friendship duration on the link between approval and life satisfaction



is a distinct developmental period due to the numerous transitions (Mehta et al., 2020), it was important to extend the study of friend's approval of the couple to this developmental stage. Furthermore, most studies focused on overall perceived approval from one's social circle, neglecting actual approval reported by the best friend. The results of this study showed that approval of the couple by the best friend was associated with positive aspects of psychological well-being, with stronger links observed among women and in newer friendships. These findings are consistent with social network theory (Valente, 2015), which highlights that well-being is shaped not only by dyadic relationships but also by the broader network in which these relationships are embedded. When interpreting these findings, it is important to keep in mind that effect sizes remain relatively small.

Link Between Approval of the Couple by the Best Friend and Well-being

The results indicated that, after accounting for domestic psychological violence experienced, duration of the romantic relationship, parenthood, personal income, education and ethnicity, approval of the couple by the best friend was positively associated with the target participant's life satisfaction, but not with self-esteem. These findings fully supported Hypothesis 1a. Hypothesis 1b was only partially supported: while greater approval was significantly correlated with higher self-esteem (H1b), this association did not remain significant in the regression analyses. This suggests that the association, while present, may be relatively weak or unstable once control variables are considered. Overall, correlations pointed to a more consistent and substantial association between friend approval and life satisfaction than with self-esteem. Notably, none of the control variables were

significantly associated with self-esteem either, suggesting that the loss of significance is not due to stronger predictors. Rather, it may reflect a generally low predictive power of the model for this outcome or some shared variance between approval and control variables, despite no problematic multicollinearity. Our results align with Sinclair et al. (2015) in showing that approval is associated with positive emotions. Indeed, these authors found that perceived approval from others was linked to increased love, commitment, and positivity towards the partner. From the perspective of balance theory (Adejumo et al., 2008; Heider, 1958), such approval may foster congruence between one's investment in the romantic relationship and the social feedback received from a close friend, thereby enhancing psychological well-being. This association between social approval and positive affect can also extend to more complex mechanisms. Indeed, studies have shown that support for the relationship is associated with relationship well-being, which is itself associated with mental health (Blair et al., 2018; Blair & Holmberg, 2008), highlighting the potential relevance of approval for personal and relational fulfillment. Although this link has been little explored, our results suggest that friends' approval of the couple and personal well-being are also related in established adulthood. During this period, our findings indicate that best friends remain important. Additionally, previous studies have focused only on perceived approval. This study provides evidence of an association between approval reported by the friend, and certain aspects of well-being. While some argue that perceived approval may matter more (Felmlee, 2001), our results indicate that actual approval may also be meaningfully related to these outcomes.

Although a significant correlation was found between approval and the negative aspect of participants' well-being, operationalized here by depressive symptoms, this

association did not persist in the regression analysis, supporting partially hypothesis 1c. In established adulthood, work and family life demands are particularly high (Mehta et al., 2020), with relationship and professional obligations being the main sources of stress during this period (Reifman & Niehuis, 2023). As suggested by the concept of ego depletion, humans have limited cognitive resources (Baumeister et al., 1998). Coping with daily stress draws on these reserves and may lead to passivity or reduced engagement in secondary activities (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). In this context, it is therefore plausible that adults simply lack the mental energy to dwell on their friends' social disapproval, which may, in turn, reduce the impact of such judgments on their psychological well-being. Moreover, established adults generally possess a stronger identity (Reifman & Niehuis, 2023), and their friends' opinions about their romantic relationship are often considered less important once the relationship has matured (Kalmijn, 2003). As a result, adults may show greater confidence in their choice of partners and be less vulnerable to others' judgments. An explanation of how opinions can influence well-being when they are positive rather than less favorable lies in the positivity bias. This bias refers to people's tendency to prioritize positive information in their reasoning (Hoorens, 2014).

Further, bivariate correlations showed that approval was negatively associated with the target participant's depressive symptoms. However, this association became non-significant in the regression model once domestic psychological violence experienced was considered. Importantly, approval was negatively associated with domestic psychological violence. In other words, when the target participant experiences violence, their friend is more likely to disapprove of the couple. However, depressive mood seems to be more affected by experiencing violence in their relationship; the fact that their friend disapproves of the relationship does not add to their distress. This scenario does not apply to the positive aspects of well-being; the target participant feels more satisfied with life and themselves when their friend approves of their relationship, regardless of psychological violence.

The results align with balance theory (Heider, 1958), which suggests people seek harmony in relationships and attitudes (Adejumo et al., 2008). When a friend approves of the relationship, the congruence between the person's investment in their couple and the friend's supportive view fosters psychological well-being. Conversely, if the friend disapproves, it generates psychological tension by disrupting this harmony. To restore balance, the person might emotionally distance themselves from their friend (Gillian et al., 2022), reducing the emotional weight of the disapproval and thus preserving the person's well-being. People may also adjust their cognitions to restore balance (Adejumo et al.,

2008). For instance, they may attribute biases to the friend's disapproval, which may decrease trust in their opinion (Jenson et al., 2021) and thus lessen its psychological impact. Although these strategies do not establish perfect balance if the disapproval persists, they can ease its negative effects.

Gender Moderation

Consistent with the second hypothesis, the results showed that approval was positively related to positive aspects of well-being in the target women participants, but not in men. This gender difference may be explained through the lens of attachment theory: women tend to use best friends more as a safe haven than men do, seeking support, comfort, and reassurance from them (Markiewicz et al., 2006). This is in line with previous studies indicating greater intimacy in women's friendships (Camirand & Poulin, 2022; Mendelson & Aboud, 1999) and deeper conversations (Helms et al., 2003), signaling a greater importance placed on their best friend's opinion. Relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002) can also shed light on this finding: when partners experience problems or concerns in their marriage, women tend to discuss these issues as much with their close friends as with their spouse, whereas men are more likely to turn primarily to their partner (Helms et al., 2003). As a result, men may be less exposed to friends' opinions when facing relationship difficulties, which may help explain the lack of a significant link between approval and their well-being. These findings underscore the importance of friendships in women's well-being, providing emotional support and validation that can be essential for maintaining high life satisfaction and positive self-esteem. By highlighting this unique link in women's friendships, these results also emphasize the importance of recognizing and promoting the value of friendships for women's emotional well-being. Conversely, only 53 target participants were men, compared to 98 women. It is possible that there were effects among the men, but the size of this subsample may not have been sufficient to ensure adequate statistical power to detect these effects.

Friendship Duration Moderation

The results indicated that approval of the couple by the best friend was positively associated with the target participant's life satisfaction when the friendship was of short or moderate duration, and with self-esteem when it was of short duration. These results are initially surprising as they completely contradict the third hypothesis. In fact, it was expected that the links between approval and well-being would be stronger when the friendship had lasted longer. This hypothesis was based on the idea that the longer the friendship persists,

the more the person tends to have a positive perception of their friend and trust them (Mendelson & Aboud, 1999), thereby attaching greater importance to their opinion. However, in cases where the friendship has lasted a long time (i.e., since around the age of 13), approval was not linked to well-being.

Some explanations can be proposed to better understand this surprising result. First, friendship characteristics are not static over time. For example, events, circumstances, and developmental changes can positively or negatively influence affection and trust (Blieszner & Roberto, 2004). It is possible that a person may continue to consider their long-term friend as their best friend, based on attributes that have long defined their friendship, without considering changes such as moving or parenting. Thus, even if that friend now plays a less central role, they may still be seen as the best friend. This may reflect a shift in the attachment hierarchy (Umemura et al., 2018), where the partner has gradually taken the primary role, reducing the influence of the friend's opinion, even if the emotional bond remains. Second, a best friend may also retain their status if the person relies on shared memories. However, as interactions are rare in these memorial friendships (Rawlins, 1992), the friend is less involved in the person's romantic relationship. As a result, there are fewer opportunities for them to express approval in a way that the person would consider. Thirdly, the number of friendships tends to decrease with age, and once established in adulthood, time available for friendships becomes limited (Kalmijn, 2003; Wrzus et al., 2016). Thus, it is difficult to have the opportunity to develop new intimate friendships that could replace the one they have long considered the closest. While friendship duration moderates the link between approval and positive dimensions of well-being, the effect is not universal. Fourthly, since the workplace is a key context for forming friendships among established adults (Mehta, 2025), more recent friendships have likely developed there. Friends who work together often see each other daily, may share lunch, and have time to discuss everyday life. At a life stage where people are often busy and short free time, these regular interactions are particularly valuable for opening about one's romantic relationship and receiving feedback.

The concept of relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002) offers a valuable framework for understanding these findings. In long-standing friendships, individuals may have already sought their friend's input during previous relational challenges and received feedback at critical moments in their romantic relationships. Over time, these uncertainties may have been addressed and resolved with the help of the friend. While the friend's opinion may still be valued, it likely brings less novelty or new insight. As a result, its ability to reduce current uncertainty and

consequently its impact on well-being may be diminished. In contrast, in newer friendships, the individual may have had fewer opportunities to discuss their romantic relationship in depth with the friend. The friend's approval in this context can therefore provide fresh, clarifying input at a time when relational doubts may still be present. This approval may feel especially meaningful and helpful in reducing ambiguity, which in turn may enhance psychological well-being.

Heider's balance theory (Adejumo et al., 2008) also helps illuminate these findings. In more recent triads (person, their friend, and their partner), the balance between these interconnected relationships may still be fragile. A friend's approval contributes to a harmonious and affectively consistent system, which promotes psychological comfort and well-being. In contrast, in long-standing friendships, people may have developed strategies to protect themselves from its potential negative effects on well-being. For example, they may engage in cognitive reappraisal to restore internal consistency by attributing the friend's disapproval to bias (Jenson et al., 2021) or to a decline in the friend's relevance.

Joint Moderation of Gender and Friendship Duration

Subsequent analyses showed that the effect of friendship duration applied only to women. For men, approval was not linked to well-being, regardless of friendship duration. This shows that women not only attach more importance to their friend's opinion, but that this importance is stronger when the friendship is of short or moderate duration. Women might feel closer to their friend (Camirand & Poulin, 2022) and therefore seek more intense emotional support. In newer friendships (formed six years ago or less), where the relationship may not be solidified, women could be more inclined to care about their friend's opinion. It is also possible that women find same-sex interactions more rewarding than men, and are thus more motivated to seek friend's validation (Borland et al., 2019). Those in more recent friendships might be especially attentive to validation, possibly to consolidate the bond.

Women may also be more likely to maintain exclusive friendships than men (Sauter et al., 2022). This tendency may be stronger in newer friendships, as these are more likely to have begun while the person was already in a relationship. In such contexts, the person might aim to strengthen the friendship before integrating the friend into the couple's social circle. A friend who meets one partners separately, rather than the couple together, may be more likely to take sides instead of offering neutral support to help resolve couple disagreements (Sauter et al., 2022). This

could lead the person to develop a more negative or polarized view of the relationship, which may in turn affect their well-being.

Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions

A key strength of this study is the collection of information directly from each triad member (i.e., the target participant, their friend, and their partner). This respondent diversity distinguishes this study from previous research. Specifically, we directly queried the friend about their approval of the couple, whereas most studies are limited to the target participant's perceived approval (Plamondon & Lachance-Grzela, 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2017). Moreover, most studies have focused on approval from the social network (family and/or friends) (Plamondon & Lachance-Grzela, 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2017), neglecting that of the best friend. Finally, this study advances knowledge on couple approval, a topic with limited exploration regarding its link to personal well-being. Focusing on the developmental stage of established adulthood provides a new perspective on this topic (Mehta et al., 2020).

This study also has certain limitations. Firstly, the sample is composed mainly of mixed-gender couples, so the results cannot be generalized to couples representing the full spectrum of sexual diversities. Although Blair et al. (2018) and Blair and Holmberg (2008) observed that support processes operate similarly in same-sex and mixed-sex couples, their models do not treat gender as a separate analytical factor. While gender effects may vary for non-heterosexual people, the limited variation in sexual orientation in this study constrains the ability to explore how gender and sexual orientation might interact in shaping support dynamics. Future research should include more diverse couple configurations and analyze gender simultaneously, to better capture the complexity of these relational processes. Secondly, although gender identity was measured using an inclusive, multi-option format that allowed participants to self-identify, all participants who selected a non-binary identity (e.g., Two-Spirit, or self-described) also selected either "Woman" or "Man." Given the small size of this subgroup, analyses used binary gender coding (woman and man). This limits our ability to fully capture the experiences and relational dynamics of people whose gender identities do not align neatly within the binary framework. This reduces the generalizability of the findings, and the study may not adequately reflect the perspectives of gender-diverse participants. Future research should aim to recruit larger and more gender-diverse samples to allow for analyses that better represent the full spectrum of gender identities and relational experiences. Thirdly, the sample lacked diversity in cultural and socioeconomic background. Most participants were

Caucasian and Canadian-born, raised in middle-class families, and lived with both biological parents. This homogeneity limits the generalizability of the findings to populations with different cultural norms and economic contexts. Cultural background may shape how individuals interpret and value social approval. For example, people from individualistic cultures may be less influenced by others' opinions than those from cultures advocating conformity to social expectations. Future research including participants from more varied cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds would allow for a better understanding of how contextual factors influence the perceived importance of best friends' opinions. Fourthly, although the data came from a longitudinal study, the main variables (except for friendship duration) were measured only once. As a result, the analyses are cross-sectional, which limits our capacity to determine the directionality of associations. On one hand, friend's approval may influence the target participant's well-being; on the other hand, the friend may rely on the target participant's well-being to establish their approval. Without temporal sequencing, it is impossible to determine whether friend approval acts as a cause, consequence, or correlate of well-being. Furthermore, cross-sectional data reduce dynamic social processes to a single snapshot, potentially obscuring patterns of change over time or mutual influences between variables. A design measuring all variables at multiple time points would better capture these temporal dynamics and clarify the direction of effects. Fifthly, friendship duration was based on the first year the target participant identified their best friend (who is mentioned at age 33), without considering periods where that friend was not referenced. This approach may overestimate the actual duration of the friendship. However, we find it more suitable, as self-reported friendship length could result in subjective responses influenced by memory lapses. Sixthly, some interactions approached significance ($p=0.05$). Nevertheless, given the relatively small sample size and the clear significance of simple effects, we chose to consider them. However, these interactions should be interpreted with caution and ought to be replicated in future studies.

For future research, a more comprehensive model could be tested based on the results obtained in this study. Blair et al. (2018) proposed a model in which relational well-being mediates the link between best friend approval and psychological well-being. An interesting avenue would be to test this model while also examining the moderating effects of gender and friendship duration. It would also be valuable to explore whether the effects of best friend approval on personal well-being are fully mediated by relational well-being, or whether a direct link remains even when accounting for the mediating pathway. Future research could also explore the association between actual and perceived

approval by examining their respective influences on personal psychological well-being. Although some studies have investigated these types of approval in association to relational well-being (Felmlee, 2001), this area of research remains relatively limited, and nothing is currently known about how they differentially impact individual outcomes. It would be valuable to determine whether perceived approval has a stronger or additive effect on psychological well-being compared to actual approval. Additionally, investigating potential moderators such as the emotional closeness in the friendship could provide deeper insight into when and for whom each form of approval is most impactful. Such research would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the social mechanisms underlying personal well-being. Finally, complementing quantitative approaches with qualitative methods, such as interviews, could provide richer insights into the subjective experiences and meanings people attach to their friends' approval. These narratives may reveal underlying psychological processes and contextual factors that are not easily captured through standardized measures.

Conclusion

Few studies have focused on the link between couple approval and personal well-being in established adulthood, a period marked by significant changes. This study highlights the connections between best friend approval of the couple and life satisfaction and self-esteem in adults. It underscores the importance of considering gender and friendship duration, as the results indicate these links are specific to women with friendships of short or moderate duration. To promote well-being, both the public and mental health professionals should be aware of the effect of best friend approval on well-being. For women, particularly those in friendships of shorter or moderate duration, integrating discussions about friend approval into counselling and therapeutic contexts could help people better understand the social dynamics that contribute to their well-being. Such personal work could include strategies to help people balance external opinions with their own relational judgment, especially when peer disapproval contributes to emotional distress.

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Data Availability The research was not pre-registered. The data used in the research cannot be shared with any person to maintain confidentiality.

Declarations

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical Approval This study was previously approved by the ethics committee, Comité d'éthique de la recherche avec des êtres humains (CIEREH), of the Université du Québec à Montréal (approval #2022-4748).

Consent to Participate All participants provided written informed consent prior to participating.

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