

# YOU GOT A FRIEND IN ME: MECHANISMS OF PERCEIVED SUPPORT IN EMERGING ADULT FRIENDSHIPS

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## Introduction

- **Emerging adulthood** (Ages 18-25) is a period characterized by exploration, change and instability
- **Friends** are a **key source of social support** during this period, and **feeling supported** is associated with many benefits (Carbery & Buhrmester, 1998; Gan et al., 2020)
- Little research has investigated the factors associated with people's perceptions of support within these friendships
- **Friendship quality** and **observable support behaviours** are two key factors that might contribute to perceptions of support
- For married couples, relationship quality is the primary predictor of perceived support (Priem et al., 2009)
- Because friendships are fundamentally different from marriages, it is important to investigate how global relationship evaluations and observable behaviours might contribute to perceived support

## Current Study

- In the current study we explore the associations between **observed support** and **friendship quality** on **perceptions of support** during interactions between same-gender pairs of young adult friends

## Methods

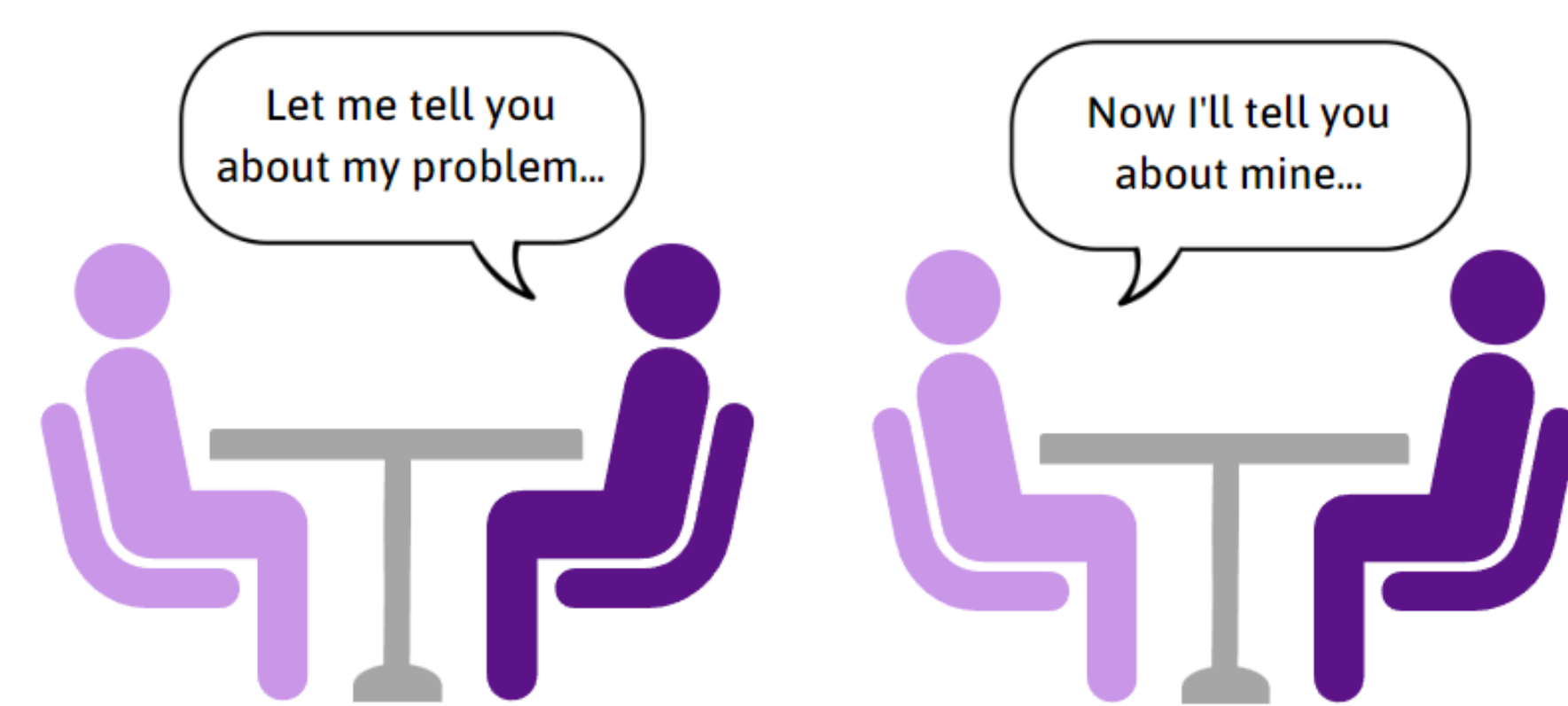
### Participants

- 133 same-gender friend dyads (66.2% female; 18-24 years, M age = 19.63, SD = 1.35)

### Problem Talk Task

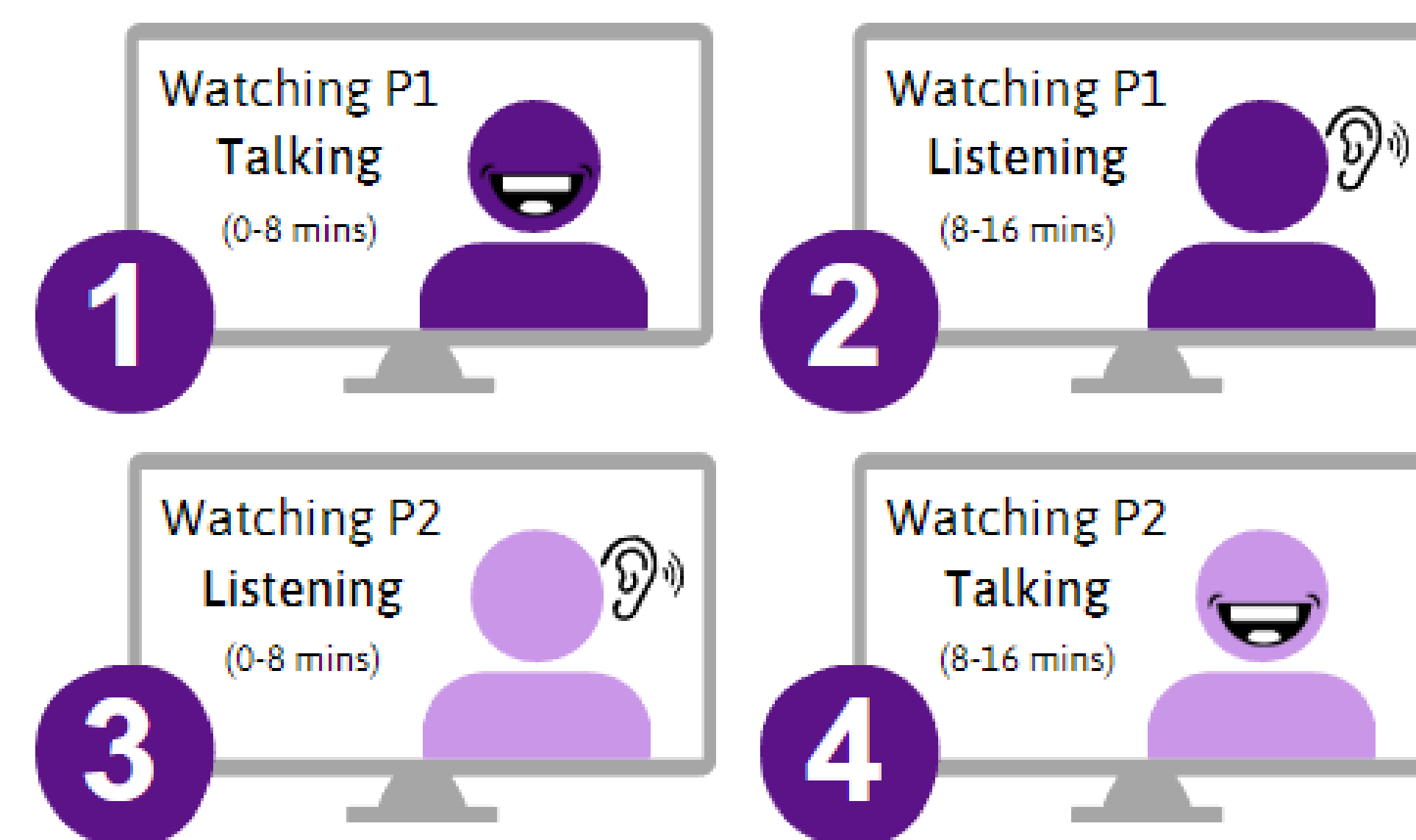
 (Rose et al., 2016)

- Each participant talked about a problem for 8 minutes while their friend listened



### Observer Ratings

- Undergraduate students were recruited to watch each videotaped interaction and provide ratings of support



## Measures

### Friendship Quality

 (FQQ; Simpkins & Park, 2001)

- Assesses positive features of friendship quality (21 items; 5-point Likert scale)
- E.g., "My friend cares about my feelings"

### Perceived Support

- Assesses perceived support during Problem Talk Task (5 items; 7-point Likert scale)
- E.g., "I felt supported by my friend"

### Observed Support

- Observers watched each videotaped interaction from the perspective of both participants
- Modified versions of perceived support items to assess observable support during the interaction (5 items; 7-point Likert scale)
- N=6 observers' ratings aggregated per participant
- E.g., "This person feels supported by their friend"

## Results

### Data Analysis

- Due to the dyadic nature of our data, we used Actor-Partner Interdependence Models for our analysis
- Examined both actor effects (the association between a participant's predictor and their own outcome) and partner effects (the association between a participant's predictor and their friend's outcome)

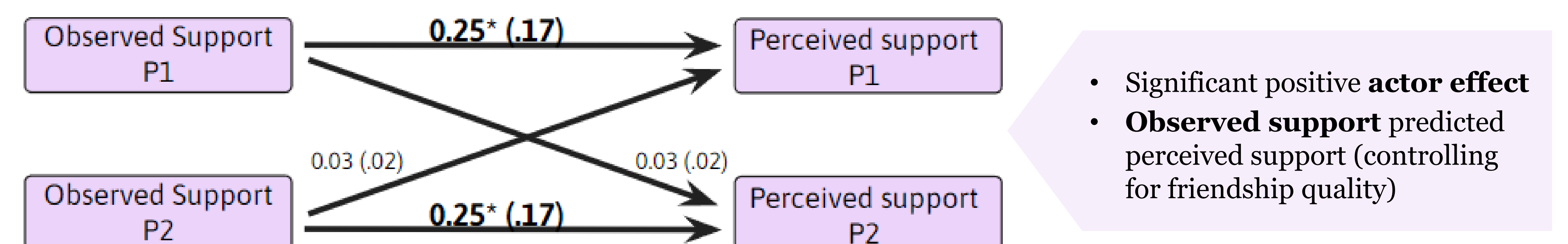
### Pairwise correlations between key study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perceived Support	<b>.229**</b>	.419**	.237**	-.008	.152*	-.092
2. Positive Friendship Quality	.269**	<b>.504**</b>	.170**	-.029	.243**	.067
3. Observed Support	.175**	.146*	<b>.670**</b>	.115	.337**	.069
4. Age	-.007	-.020	.129*	<b>.769**</b>	.030	-.162**
5. Gender	.152*	.243**	.337**	.030	<b>1</b>	.089
6. English as First Language	.002	.128*	.094	-.145**	.089	<b>.444**</b>

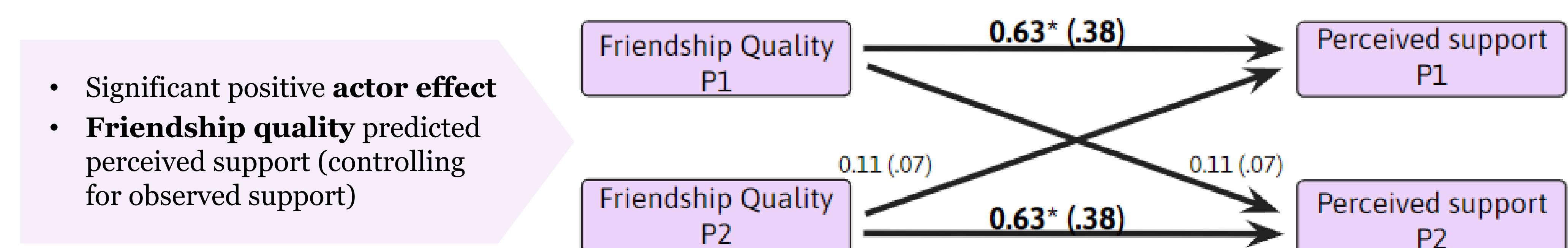
\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

Note. Within-dyad correlations for each variable are presented bolded on the diagonal, actor correlations (actor-actor) are reported above the diagonal, and partner correlations (actor-partner) are reported below the diagonal

### Associations between observed support and participant perceived support



### Associations between friendship quality and participant perceived support



## Discussion

- Consistent with initial hypotheses, higher ratings of both **observed support** and **friendship quality** predicted feeling more supported (actor effects)
- Friendship quality predicted perceived support **above and beyond** what could be accounted for by the observable support behaviours happening during the supportive interaction task
- Findings suggest that emerging adult friends, similarly to married couples, might feel supported by their interaction partner as a function of positive global relationship evaluations **regardless** of specific supportive behaviours
- This research could inform the development of future interventions to help young people establish strong support within their friendships and social networks