

# Family Influences on Successful Adolescent Peer Relationships: Examining a Social Anxiety Mechanism

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## Introduction

- The formation and maintenance of supportive peer relationships is a key developmental task in adolescence (Brown & Larson, 2009)
- Past research generally showed a positive link between the quality of family relationships and the quality of peer relationships (Clark & Ladd, 2000)
- According to the parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory), children who felt rejected by attachment figures tend to view interpersonal relationships as untrustworthy, unsafe, hostile, and threatening
  - ❖ Children who are rejected by parents are likely to be socially anxious or withdrawn
- Social anxiety in adolescence is defined as (La Greca & Lopez, 1998):
  - ❖ Fear of negative evaluation from peers
  - ❖ Feelings of distress and avoidance in new social situations
  - ❖ Avoidance, feelings of distress, and inhibition in general social situations

## The Present Study

### Aim:

- To examine how mother's rejection, father's rejection, and family climate prospectively predict adolescents' level of social anxiety, which in turn predicts subsequent friendship quality and loneliness

### Hypotheses:

- Higher levels of mother's and father's rejection at T1 will predict an increase in adolescent social anxiety at T2
- Family climate (less cohesion, less organization, and more conflicts) at T1 will predict an increase in social anxiety in adolescents at T2
- Higher levels of social anxiety at T2 will in turn predict lower friendship quality and stronger sense of loneliness at T3

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

- 687 two-parent household sample drawn from the Promoting School-Community-University Partnerships to Enhance Resilience (PROSPER) project
- Sixth graders and two parents in the household
- A household roster interview
- Paper questionnaires completed separately by adolescent, mother, and father

### Demographic Information

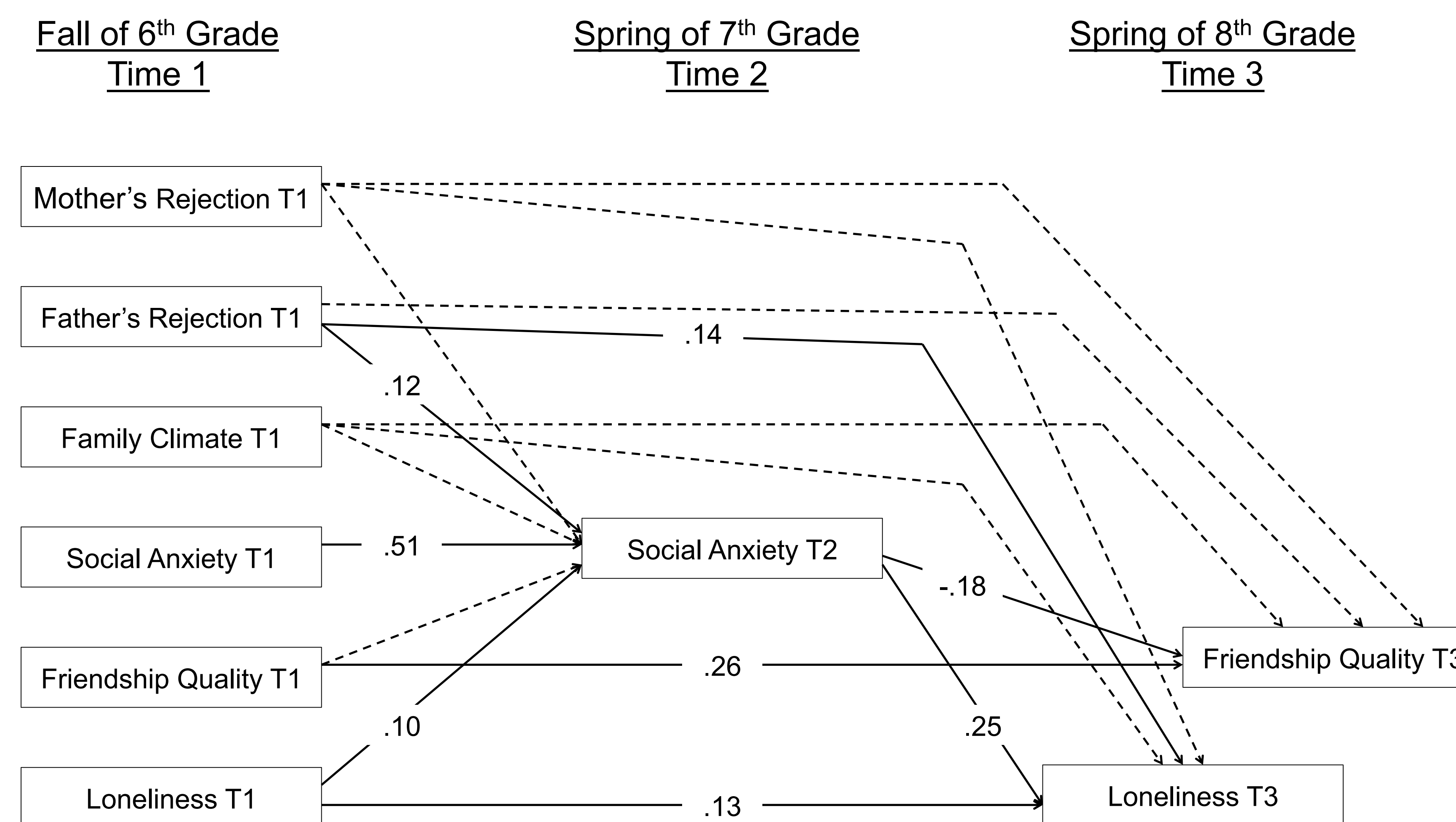
N	687
Male	327
Female	360
T1 Age	$M = 11.27$ , $SD = 0.48$
Ethnicity:	
White	90%
Hispanic	6.3%
African American	1.2%
Asian	0.6%
Others	1.9%

### Measures

Variables	Measures	$\alpha$	Mean	SD
<b>Mother's Rejection</b> (Mother-report)	Elliott's Parental Rejection Scale (Brennen, 1974) – 5 items	.76	1.56	0.55
<b>Father's Rejection</b> (Father-report)	Elliott's Parental Rejection Scale (Brennen, 1974) – 5 items	.78	1.65	0.59
<b>Family Climate</b> (Parent-report)	Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994) – 13 items	.81	3.74	0.45
<b>Social Anxiety</b> (Adolescent-report)	Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (La Greca & Lopez, 1998) – 18 items	T1 = .93 T2 = .94	2.24 2.15	0.77 0.78
<b>Friendship Quality</b> (Adolescent-report)	Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Parker & Asher, 1993) – 8 items	T1 = .78 T3 = .82	4.19 4.25	0.63 0.62
<b>Loneliness</b> (Adolescent-report)	Children's Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (Asher et al., 1984) – 3 items	T1 = .92 T3 = .92	1.56 1.56	0.86 0.81
Control variables: Parent Education, Family Income, Adolescent Ethnicity, Adolescent Sex				

## Results

**Figure 1. Family Influences on Friendship Quality and Loneliness Through Social Anxiety**



Note. Path coefficients reflect standardized betas. Solid lines reflect statistically significant paths ( $p < .05$ ); dotted lines are not statistically significant. Family income and parental education were included as covariates.

**Model fit:**  $\chi^2(4) = 8.259$ ,  $p = .08$ ; CFI = .991; TLI = .951; RMSEA = .04 (90%: .000 – .078), SRMR = .01.

## Discussion

- Father plays an important role in adolescents' social development
- Social anxiety has significant impact on adolescents' interpersonal functioning
- Father's rejection predicted adolescents' development of social anxiety, which in turn influences their friendship quality and loneliness
- Father's rejection also directly predicted adolescents' feeling of loneliness
- Previous research has demonstrated the significance of mother's acceptance/rejection
  - ❖ Mothers may play a more important role in the development of social anxiety when children were young
- Loneliness and social anxiety have bi-directional influence in adolescence
- The model is consistent across gender

## Future Research

- Other ethnic populations
- High-risk families characterized by high levels of parental rejection
- Adolescents with clinical social anxiety