



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 (PARTtheory), 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 - ❖ Children who are rejected by parents are likely to be socially anxious or withdrawn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

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%

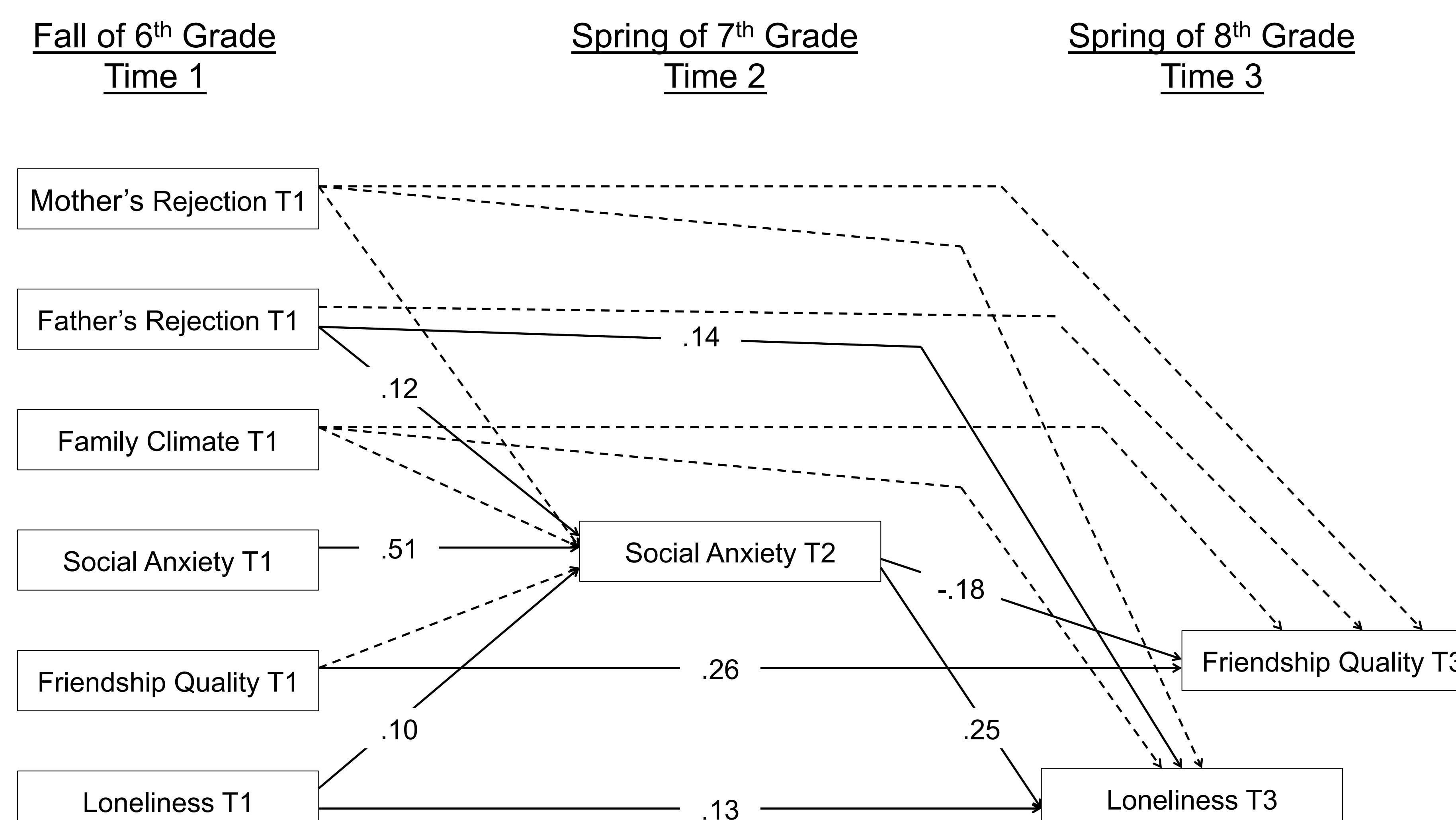
Method

Measures

Variables	Measures	α	Mean	SD
Mother's Rejection (Mother-report)	Elliott's Parental Rejection Scale (Brennen, 1974) – 5 items	.76	1.56	0.55
Father's Rejection (Father-report)	Elliott's Parental Rejection Scale (Brennen, 1974) – 5 items	.78	1.65	0.59
Family Climate (Parent-report)	Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994) – 13 items	.81	3.74	0.45
Social Anxiety (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
Friendship Quality (Adolescent-report)	Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Parker & Asher, 1993) – 8 items	T1 = .78 T2 = .82 T3 = .82	4.19 4.25 4.25	0.63 0.62 0.62
Loneliness (Adolescent-report)	Children's Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (Asher et al., 1984) – 3 items	T1 = .92 T2 = .92 T3 = .92	1.56 1.56 1.56	0.86 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