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 (PAR theory), 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- Children who are rejected by parents are likely to be socially anxious or withdrawn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, 1996):
  - 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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>687</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>327</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>360</td>
<td>T1 Age</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.27</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.48</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s Rejection (Mother-report)</td>
<td>Elliott’s Parental Rejection Scale (Brennen, 1974) – 5 items</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s Rejection (Father-report)</td>
<td>Elliott’s Parental Rejection Scale (Brennen, 1974) – 5 items</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Climate</td>
<td>Family Environment Scale (Moos &amp; Moos, 1985) – 3 items</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Anxiety</td>
<td>Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (La Greca &amp; Lopez, 1998) – 18 items</td>
<td>T1 = .93</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friendship Quality (Adolescent-report)</td>
<td>Friendship Quality Questionnaire (Parker &amp; Asher, 1993) – 8 items</td>
<td>T1 = .78</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness (Adolescent-report)</td>
<td>Children’s Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (Asher et al., 1994) – 3 items</td>
<td>T1 = .92</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Control variables: Parent Education, Family Income, Adolescent Ethnicity, Adolescent Sex

Results

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

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

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

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For more information on similar studies, visit the Family POWER Lab website: http://gregfosco.weebly.com