Is Peer Support a Venue for African-American Adolescents' Academic Success?

Erika D. Taylor
University of Michigan

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Abstract

The present study examines the relation between peer support, school value and academic achievement in a normative sample of African-American adolescents (N=341). We used structural equation modeling techniques to, first, examine this relation for the entire group of adolescents. Second, we investigated gender differences in this relation. Findings for the entire group indicated that peer support is indirectly related to academic achievement (grade point average) through the adolescents’ perception of the importance of academic skills. However, after examining gender differences in this relation, we found an indirect relation between peer support and academic achievement to exist for the males only, partially supporting our second hypothesis.
Methods

Participants

- The participants in this study are part of the Maryland Adolescent Growth in Context Study (MAGICS), an ongoing, longitudinal investigation of adolescents' development and the contexts (family, schools, peers) that may have an impact upon that development. The principal investigators are Jacquelynne Eccles and Arnold Sameroff at the University of Michigan.

- The 1067 adolescents and their families were asked to complete face-to-face interviews and self-administered questionnaires beginning with their seventh grade year.

- Importantly, the African-American and European-American adolescents' families who are participating in this study represent a wide range of socioeconomic status.

- The data used in this study are taken mostly from the second wave of data collection (1993), and comprise an entirely African-American subsample (n=341; 178 male, 163 female).

Measures

Peer Support  \( \alpha = .68 \)
4-item scale that captures adolescent perceptions of the frequency with which they are able to depend on friends or other students for help with problems in school, e.g., When you have a social or personal problem at school, how often can you depend on your friends to help you out (1=almost never; 5=almost always).

School Utility Value  \( \alpha = .69 \)
4-items; Assesses how important the adolescent believes school to be for his or her future e.g., I have to do well in school if I want to be a success in life (1=strongly agree; 5=strongly disagree).

Importance of Academic Skills  \( \alpha = .81 \)
2-item scale that captures how important specific academic skills are to the adolescent, e.g. Compared to other students, how important is math to you? (1=much less important to me than other kids; 7=much more important to me than other kids).

Grade point average (GPA).
School record data. (5=A; 1=F).
Results

Hypothesis #1 (see Figure 1)

◆ Hierarchical regression analyses indicate that peer support not related to either measure of school value (i.e., school utility value and perception of the importance of academics).

◆ Therefore, our first hypothesis is not supported.

Hypothesis #2 (see Figures 2 and 3)

◆ Examination of the entire group of African-American adolescents yielded no relation between peer support and school value.

◆ However, after examining males and females separately, we found that there is an indirect relation between support and academic achievement via the perception of the importance of academic skills for males.

◆ Therefore, our second hypothesis was partially supported.

Note: Only statistically significant paths are shown in models. All values are Beta coefficients.

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001
Discussion

- Examination of the entire group of African-American adolescents yielded no relation between peer support and school value.

- However, after examining males and females separately, we found that there is an indirect relation between support and academic achievement via the perception of the importance of academic skills for males.

- These results are consistent with previous research which has found support to be positively related to outcomes for males.

- However, these findings are somewhat inconsistent with previous research that has found peer support to be negatively related to academic outcomes.

- Perhaps the inconsistencies exist as a result of variations in the measurement of support, as well as differential conceptualizations of academic outcomes.

- Therefore, future research should consider both the positive aspects of peer interaction for African-American adolescents.

- Furthermore, future research should investigate the relation between specific types of support and specific outcomes.
References


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Note: Gender Differences in Peer Support, School Value, and Academic Achievement

Table 1
Figure 1. The relation between peer support, school value and academic achievement for African American adolescents (N=341).
Figure 2. The relation between peer support, school value, and academic achievement for African American females (n=163).
Figure 3. The relation between peer support, school value and academic achievement for African American males (n=178).