

**Background for the Community-Level Work on
Social Competency in Adolescence:
Reviewing the Literature on Contributing Factors**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The transition to adolescence is characterized as a time of dramatic change for youth including puberty, a search for a sense of self, expansion of cognitive abilities, increased social and academic expectations (Eccles & Midgley, 1990; Hair, 1999; Harter, 1999; Keating, 1990; Lapsley, 1990; Larson & Richards, 1994; Simmons & Blythe, 1987; Steinberg, 1993; Zaff & Hair, in press), coupled with evolving peer and family relationships (Bukowski, in press; Cox, in press; Csikszentmihaly & Larson, 1984; Hair, Jager, & Cochran, 2001; Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990). As they develop and change, youth must develop the skills or the competence to maintain quality relationships. Social competence is defined as “the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations” (K. H. Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992). Inherent in this definition of social competence are two related, but separate constructs that will be addressed in this report: good social skills and quality social relationships.

The social relationships that this report will focus fall into two domains: family and non-family. Family relationships include those with parents, siblings, grandparents, and other family members. Non-family relationships include other adults and peers. The social skills described in this chapter fall into two domains, as well: interpersonal skills and individual attributes. The interpersonal skills domain includes conflict resolution, intimacy, and prosocial behaviors. The individual attributes domain includes skills such as self-control, social confidence, and empathy/sympathy.

The aim of this report is to identify the antecedents in adolescents’ lives that predict quality social relationships and good social skills. We limited our comprehensive review to rigorous research studies that are 1) experimental studies (those in which subjects are randomly assigned to either a treatment/program group or to a control group); or 2) multivariate longitudinal studies. In cases where these rigorous designs are limited or do not exist, we present findings from large-scale cross-sectional studies in order to illustrate our current knowledge base.

WHAT ARE THE ANTECEDENTS OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS?

Family Relationships

Parent

Adolescents’ quality relationships with their parent(s) have implications for development of social skills, the development of other social relationships, and the development of psychological and psychosocial well-being of youth (e.g., Engels, Finkenauer, Meeus, & Dekovic, 2001; Franz, McClelland, & Weinberger, 1991; Jacobsen & Hofmann, 1997; Kim,

Conger, Lorenz, & Elder, 2001; Madsen, Patterson, & Hennighausen, 2001; Moller & Stattin, 2001).

There are mixed findings on the stability of the parent-child relationship. For example, qualities such as conflict and closeness are found not to change over time in certain studies (Aquilino, 1997; Crockett & Losoff, 1984), while they are both found to increase in other studies (Cox, in press; Rice & Mulkeen, 1995).

Individual characteristics are related to the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship. For instance, the degree of respect in the relationship enhances the quality of the relationship (Hightower, 1990). In addition, both the gender of the parent (Rice, Cunningham, & Young, 1997), and the gender of the youth (Rice & Mulkeen, 1995) are related to the quality of the relationship – for instance, boys have closer relationships with their fathers than do girls. The youth’s personality (i.e. anxiety, quick temper) is related to poorer quality relationships (Barber, 1994). The youth’s dating experience also plays a role in the quality of the relationship with youth who have dated frequently having poorer relationships with their parents than youth who are dated infrequently (Quatman, Sampson, Robinson, & Watson, 2001).

Similarly, high levels of negative affect from the parents are related to poorer quality relationships (Paley, Conger, & Harold, 2000). However, a warm and responsive parenting style enhances the quality of the relationships (Barber, 1994; Hightower, 1990). In addition, characteristics of the family as a whole, such as family discord influence the quality of the parent-child relationship (Aquilino, 1994; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999; Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000).

There is evidence that intervention programs may positively influence the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship. For instance, there is some evidence that participation in social skills development programs (Noble, Adams, & Openshaw, 1989; Openshaw, Mills, Adams, & Durso, 1992) and mentoring programs (Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995) may enhance the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship. However, most have not been evaluated experimentally or on representative populations and therefore we cannot make definitive conclusions about causality.

It is important to emphasize that many of these studies are cross-sectional, or longitudinal in design. These study designs make it impossible to determine definitively the direction of causation between the variables we have characterized as antecedents of parent-youth relationships and the relationship, itself.

Siblings

Sibling relationships serve an important role in adolescent development by influencing adolescent relationship style and delinquent behavior, by protecting against family stressors and by enhancing adolescent cognitive ability (Conger, Conger, & Scaramella, 1997; Dunn, Slomkowski, & Beardsall, 1994; Jenkins, 1992; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Wu, 1991; Slomkowski, Rende, Conger, Simons, & Conger, 2001).

There is some evidence that sibling relationship quality is stable from early childhood through adolescence (Dunn et al., 1994; Stillwell & Dunn, 1985; Stocker & Dunn, 1994). Furthermore, a number of individual- and family- level factors are associated with quality sibling relationships. For instance, an individual’s temperament, such as sociability and low frequency of upset increase the quality of the relationship, while characteristics such as high emotionality and low persistence lead to poorer quality relationships (Brody, Stoneman, & Burke, 1987;

Stocker, Dunn, & Plomin, 1990). Sibling behaviors, such as alcohol use, can strain the relationship (Stevenson & Lee, 2001). Other characteristics, such as age, and gender, have also been found to influence the quality of the sibling relationship. Girls tend to have better relationships with their siblings than boys (Dunn et al., 1994), and, older adolescents are less likely to report conflict with their siblings than younger adolescents and children (Brody et al., 1987; Stocker et al., 1990)

In addition, family characteristics, such as poor family functioning can decrease the quality of the sibling relationship (Conger, Conger, & Elder, 1994; Dunn, Deater-Deckard, Pickering, Golding, & England, 1999; Erel, Margolin, & John, 1998). There is also very limited evidence that programs can decrease sibling conflict (Allison & Allison, 1971; Leitenberg & et al., 1977; O'Leary, O'Leary, & Becker, 1967; Vickerman, Reed, & Roberts, 1997). For example, programs that trained parents on how to deal with siblings during and after a sibling conflict showed a decrease in sibling conflict as compared to parents who did not receive the training (Vickerman, Reed, & Roberts, 1997).

The vast majority of these studies are correlational, and many are cross-sectional. From these types of study designs it is impossible to determine the direction of causality or whether the findings are consistent across socioeconomic and ethnic groups, age ranges, and other individual characteristics, and therefore any conclusion should be read with caution.

Grandparents and Other Family members

Grandparents and other extended family members may serve a crucial role in adolescent development by serving as role models, teachers, supporters, and as a source of family history and culture (Blyth, Hill, & Thiel, 1982; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Hagestad, 1985; Hendry, Roberts, Glendinning, & Coleman, 1992; Sanders & Trygstad, 1993; Scales & Gibbons, 1996; Updegraff, 1968).

The research on the stability of the relationships with grandparents is unclear. Researchers contend that this is a complicated relationship that requires constant maintenance and upkeep and changes over time (Baranowski, 1982; Hagestad, 1985). There is very little research on the quality of adolescent relationships with other extended family members, such as aunts, uncles or cousins.

A number of factors at the individual, family, and societal level are associated with non-parent familial adult relationships. Individual level factors, such age are predictive of both the quantity and quality of relationships with non-parent familial adults (Benson, 1993; Hoffman, 1980) and gender (Blyth et al., 1982; Coates, 1987; Creasey, 1993; Dubas, 2001). For instance, the gender of the adolescent and the grandparent influence the quality of the relationships – granddaughter – grandmother relationships are the closest and grandson – grandfather relationships are next closest.

Research has also been conducted on family level factors that influence quality relationships with grandparents. Factors, such as the a poor quality relationship between the parents and the grandparents (Hodgson, 1992; King & Elder, 1995; Robertson, 1976) and parental divorce (Clingempeel, Colyar, Brand, & Hetherington, 1992; Creasey, 1993; Hilton & Macari, 1997) can decrease the quality of the adolescent-grandparent relationships and the ability of the adolescent to maintain a relationship with their grandparents.

In addition, there is some evidence that cultural factors may influence the quality of non-parent familial adult relationships. For instance, children in African American families report

higher levels of non-parent familial adult relationships than Caucasian families (Coates, 1987). Further, several non-experimental programs have been documented to enhance the quality of the non-parent familial adult relationship (Bratton, Ray, & Moffit, 1998; Kelley, Yorker, Whitley, & Sipe, 2001; Strom, Collinsworth, Strom, Griswold, & et al., 1992).

There is still a need for considerably more research in this area. The majority of the antecedents were examined using correlational designs, usually cross-sectional. As noted before, these studies do not allow researchers to determine definitively the causal nature of the association.

Non-Family Relationships

Non-Familial Adults

Relationships with non-familial adults--- such as teachers, mentors, neighbors, and fictive¹ aunts and uncles--- have the potential to positively change an adolescent's social development by transmitting social skills, modeling behaviors, introducing youth to diverse social contexts, and providing the supports and socialization opportunities that may be absent at home (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Larkin, 1999; Rhodes et al., 2000; Schirm, Ross-Alaolmolki, & Conrad, 1995; Wills & Cleary, 1996). Furthermore, these relationships are related to increased prosocial behaviors, lower levels of depression, improved relationships with parents, and overall better social skills (Rhodes, Contreras, & Mangelsdorf, 1994; Rhodes et al., 2000; Zahn-Waxler & Smith, 1992).

Individual factors seem to influence the quality and likelihood of certain adolescent-other adult relationships, though these findings are not supported experimentally. Females seem to have more and closer relationships with other adults during adolescence (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Rhodes & Davis, 1996) and African American adolescents appear more likely to participate in natural mentoring and fictive kin relationships than other ethnicities (Rhodes et al., 1994).

Similarly, family characteristics appear to affect adolescent unions with “other adults.” Findings from cross-sectional research suggests that close parent-child bonds during childhood are associated with the development of social relationships with other adults in adolescence (Rhodes et al., 1994; Rhodes & Davis, 1996; Wills & Cleary, 1996). Youth who are deprived of close parental relationships, however, may seek out close relationships with other adults to satisfy this deficiency (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992). Female-headed households appear to embrace fictive kin relationships more often than those headed by males (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994).

Even the adolescent's neighborhood and region are associated with such relationships. Youth appear to engage in relationships with adults who reside in their neighborhood or who are otherwise geographically accessible (Blyth et al., 1982). Regionally, African Americans from the South are more likely to engage in fictive kin relationships than African Americans from the North (Chatters et al., 1994).

There are many programs throughout the country that encourage and even organize relationships between youth and non-related adults, most often mentors. Evaluations of these programs suggest that certain characteristics optimize adolescents' relationships with other adult

¹ Fictive aunts and uncles refers to those individuals who function as an aunt or uncle but are not related by blood or by marriage to the youth.

mentors. Matching based on similar interests, regular meeting times, participation in social activities, responsive youth-driven mentoring, and comprehensive training before and after the initiation of the match all appear to encourage successful relationships (Jekielek, Moore, & Hair, 2002). However, these characteristics of the programs were not tested experimentally. Experimental evaluation of different program components would be needed to determine if they are the actual cause of better relationships between the youth and mentors.

There is a need for considerably more research on youth relationships with non-familial adults. Very little is known about the types of adults to whom youth turn for social and emotional support, as well as the quality of those relationships. The majority of the limited research conducted on the quality of youth relationships with non-familial adults is cross-sectional and occasionally longitudinal. As with the research on the other relationships types, these study designs do not allow for causality to be established.

Peer relationships

Social relationships between peers--- romantic or platonic--- have the potential to promote social skills in adolescents. Findings from longitudinal and cross-sectional research indicate associations between peer adolescent relationships and the development of positive interpersonal skills (Bender & Loesel, 1997; Hansen, Christopher, & Nangle, 1992; Wentzel, 1998), autonomy (Dowdy & Kliever, 1998), mental health (Hightower, 1990), self-confidence (O'Connor, Allen, Bell, & Hauser, 2002; Quatman et al., 2001; Tokuno, 1986), satisfaction with social support (Bender & Loesel, 1997), joint decision-making, empathy, and more sophisticated perspective-taking and reasoning skills (Kruger, 1992; Tokuno, 1986; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). These relationships also appear to discourage aggression (Bender & Loesel, 1997), emotional distress (Burks, Dodge, & Price, 1995), and antisocial behaviors (Bender & Loesel, 1997; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Peers can also provide models of successful social relationships (Feiring, 1996; Hansen et al., 1992). Some studies on romantic relationships have found an association between frequent dating and poor academic performance and depressive symptoms, but not with the decrease of any particular social skill (Quatman et al., 2001).

On the individual level, females appear to participate in more and closer relationships with their peers than males do, though this trend becomes much less pronounced as adolescents age into adulthood (Blyth et al., 1982). Other individual behaviors, such as socioemotional support and displays of affection from the youth, for example, also appear to promote successful peer relationships (Gavin & Furman, 1996). Adolescents who have been exposed to models of successful social interactions, and who are physically attractive, appear most likely to develop romantic peer relationships (Hansen et al., 1992). Deviant adolescents appear to experience the effects of peer relationships differently than non-deviant adolescents; if they pursue relationships with other deviant adolescents, they are likely to maintain or increase their own antisocial behavior (Bender & Loesel, 1997).

The family also appears to influence greatly the quality of adolescent peer relationships. Various studies suggest that a warm, communicative, and strongly connected relationship with parents is associated with more positive exchanges and closer relationships between the youth and his or her peers (Fenzel, 2000; Mounts & Steinberg, 1995). Communicative relationships with mothers, in particular, seem to be related to higher quality relationships with dating partners (Madsen et al., 2001). Conversely, negative qualities in the parent-youth relationship, such as hostility, may be replicated in peer relationships and, subsequently, lead to their deterioration

(Paley et al., 2000). Youth with insecure relationships with parents seem to invest in, and rely a great deal on, their romantic relationships with peers (Freeman & Brown, 2001).

The location of the adolescent's residence may influence the likelihood of such relationships. Youth appear to engage in relationships with peers who reside in their neighborhood, go to their school, or who are otherwise geographically accessible (Blyth et al., 1982).

There are very few programs that endeavor to establish and develop relationships between adolescents. There are certain programs, however, which teach various social skills that are necessary for the development and maintenance of peer friendships (Heldman, 2001). Some of these programs have been experimentally evaluated, and appear to improve relationships between adolescents (Tierney et al., 1995). There is a paucity of programs that encourage the development of dating relationships between adolescents, the majority of relevant literature having been written in the 1970's (Curran, 1977; Curran & Gilbert, 1975). However, there has recently been a surge in anti-violence dating programs. An experimentally evaluated program changed perceptions about gender roles and the perpetration of violence which, in turn, improves peer relationships (Foshee, 1998).

While we have identified a number of antecedents for quality relationships with peers, there is still a need to expand the research in this area. For instance, the majority of the research on peers has focused on children in school. There is little to no research on the quality of peer relationships or even the composition of peer networks for older adolescents or for networks that form outside of the school environment. In addition, the majority of the studies used cross-sectional and occasionally longitudinal designs to address their research question. As noted before, the causal nature of the associations for peer relationships and antecedents cannot be determined with these types of study designs. However, from the available research, it would appear that the adolescents most at risk are those least likely to have the characteristics associated with positive peer relationships.

WHAT ARE THE ANTECEDENTS OF SOCIAL SKILLS?

Interpersonal Skills

Conflict Resolution Skills

Although the majority of the research on conflict resolution skills is either cross-sectional or longitudinal, there is some evidence that development of these skills is key to an adolescent's social success and development (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). For instance, an adolescent's ability to communicate successfully and resolve conflicts has been linked to peer acceptance and the development of friendships (Allen, Weissberg, & Hawkins, 1989; Kurdek & Krile, 1982).

The predictors of conflict resolution skills extend beyond individual characteristics to include family, peer, and societal level factors. The development of conflict resolution skills may be associated with individual characteristics of the adolescent such as gender (Allen et al., 1989; Chung & Asher, 1996) and an agreeable disposition (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001; Jensen-Campbell, Graziano, & Hair, 1996). For instance, youth who perceive themselves as warm, considerate, and trusting use positive conflict resolution strategies, such as negotiation (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996).

Furthermore, development of conflict resolution skills may be associated with family level characteristics, such as parents' conflict resolution tactics during marital disputes (Katz & Gottman, 1993) which models conflict resolutions strategies and conflicts with siblings which allow youth to "practice" techniques that can be used with a broader group (Rinaldi & Howe, 1998).

Conflict resolution skills have been linked to both peer social status and peer dominance hierarchies. For example, youth who are perceived as popular are more likely to use constructive conflict resolution strategies such as negotiation (Bryant, 1992; Chung & Asher, 1996; French & Waas, 1987). All of this work is cross-sectional and therefore we do not, for instance, whether youth are more popular because of their skills or if they learn good conflict resolutions skills once they are popular .

There is some evidence that conflict resolution skills may be associated with societal level characteristics, such as cultural differences (Fry, 1988; Kagan, Knight, Martinez, & Santana, 1981; Verbeek, Hartup, & Collins, 2000). Youth from more individualistic cultures, such as the United States, tend to use tactics such as power assertion more often than youth from other cultures (Andrews, Soberman, & Dishion, 1995; Kagan & Madsen, 1971).

Experimental evaluations of youth programs provide strong evidence that adolescents who lack the appropriate skills necessary to negotiate conflict can attain those skills through skill training interventions aimed at increasing conflict resolution skills (Caplan et al., 1992; Eddy, Reid, & Fetrow, 2000; Feindler, Ecton, Kingsley, & Dubey, 1986; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Tierney et al., 1995).

Intimacy Skills

Intimacy skills in youth are associated with academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). For instance, youth with good intimacy skills are more interested in school, perform better academically, and have higher quality relationships with parents and peers (Field, Lang, Yando, & Bendell, 1995). In addition, these youth have higher self-esteem and are less likely to be depressed or participate in risk-taking behaviors (Field et al., 1995). Youth without intimacy skills are more likely to be anxious, depressed, lonely, and isolated (Hymel, Rubin, Rowden, & LeMare, 1990; K.H. Rubin, Chen, McDougall, Bowker, & McKinnon, 1995; K.H. Rubin & Mills, 1988).

A number of characteristics from the family and peer antecedent levels appear to be important predictors of an adolescent's intimacy skills. Family level characteristics, such as responsive and consistent parenting (Aquilino & Supple, 2001), a quality parent-youth relationship (Engels et al., 2001; Estrada, Arsenio, Hess, & Holloway, 1987), close relationships with siblings (Cole & Kerns, 2001), and siblings close in age (Bigelow, Tesson, & Lewko, 1999) all are associated with intimacy skills in youth. Furthermore, being accepted by peers appears to cultivate intimacy skills in adolescents (Morison & Masten, 1991).

There is evidence that program interventions may promote the development of intimacy skills in youth. Specifically, interventions aimed at increasing youth interpersonal skills have been found to be successful at improving adolescent peer and family interactions (Berner, Fee, & Turner, 2001; Openshaw et al., 1992).

As with other aspects of social relationships, there is a scarcity of quality research on the development of intimacy skills for adolescents. More research needs to be conducted that expands this area into other antecedent levels such as the individual or the neighborhood. The

majority of the studies reviewed were correlational and not experimental and, therefore, it is not possible to definitively state whether the antecedents cause the development of intimacy skills.

Prosocial Behaviors²

Children with prosocial behaviors are likely to have other positive socio-emotional outcomes. Specifically, prosocial children are viewed as, good social problem solvers (Marsh, Serafica, & Barenboim, 1981), considerate, and low in aggression (Eisenberg, Carlo, Murphy, & Van Court, 1995).

Antecedents from the individual, family, neighborhood, and societal levels are predictive of youth prosocial behaviors. Youth who are resilient (Strayer & Roberts, 1989), warm, considerate (Graziano, Hair, & Finch, 1997), sociable, assertive (Hampson, 1984; Midlarsky & Hannah, 1985), and not easily distracted are more likely to help others. In addition, family level antecedents, such as warm and supportive parenting style (Dekovic & Janssens, 1992), positive parental discipline styles (Krevans & Gibbs, 1996), and parental prosocial values (Eisenberg et al., 1992) are all associated with youths' prosocial behavior.

There is some evidence that the structure of the classroom may promote prosocial behaviors. For instance, children in classrooms that emphasize cooperation tend to be more prosocial (Hertz-Lazartowitz, Fuchs, Sharabany, & Eisenberg, 1989). Cultural expectations may influence the development of prosocial behaviors, as well. Several cross-sectional studies indicate that youth from different cultural backgrounds, such as those within an urban culture, may be less cooperative and less prosocial than youth in a rural culture (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989; Kagan, Knight, & Martinez-Romero, 1982; Shapira & Lomranz, 1972).

Most of the studies reviewed were cross-sectional, therefore only allowing us to make tentative statements about the association between the antecedents and the development of prosocial behaviors. Quite a bit of research exists on the prosocial behaviors of younger children (see Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998), however the research on prosocial behaviors in adolescent is more scarce. Additional longitudinal research on adolescent prosocial development would greatly enhance this area by allowing an examination of behaviors over time. In addition, there is a lack of experimental program evaluations for prosocial behaviors. However, a longitudinal study provides some initial evidence that youth programs may be able to influence youth's prosocial behaviors (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Schaps, & Solomon, 1991).

Individual Attributes

Self-Control/Behavior Regulation

Self-control and behavioral regulation are related to the success of relationships with peers, adults and parents (Murphy, Shepard, Eisenberg, Fabes, & Guthrie, 1999). For example, youth who can regulate their behaviors and emotions are more likely to be viewed positively by peers (Melnick & Hinshaw, 2000) and adults (Murphy et al., 1999) and less likely to have difficulties with their social relationships (Pope & Bierman, 1999).

The research literature on the development of self-control or behavior regulation suggests that a developmentally appropriate level of self-control is dependent on or reflects the quality of

² Additional information on this topic can be found in the Positive Citizenship report (Zaff & Michelsen, 2001).

relationships an adolescent has with those around him or her. Positive relationships with parents (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983) and peers (Zeman & Shipman, 1998) lead to appropriate levels of self-control, whereas negative relationships with parents (Collins, Laursen, Mortensen, Luebker, & Ferreira, 1997; Straus & Yodanis, 1996) and peers (King & Young, 1981; Lahey, Green, & Forehand, 1980) lead to a lack of self-control. Furthermore, it appears that the ability to self-regulate is not solely dependent on present relationships, but possibly the consequence of past relationships with parents and peers during early and middle childhood (Burton & Krantz, 1990) which suggests that early interventions might be an effective strategy for promoting self-regulation in adolescence. Most adolescents, through adaptive relationships, develop the ability to self-regulate their behavior, but it is important to recognize that, the association between self-control and quality relationships may be recursive. That is, self-control may promote quality relationships and quality relationships may foster self-control in adolescents as well (Burton & Krantz, 1990; Murphy et al., 1999; Pope & Bierman, 1999).

In addition, neighborhood characteristics such as poverty, unemployment, and public assistance are associated with the development of self-control (Sampson, 1997).

It is important to note again that the majority of the studies on self-control are correlational and cross-sectional or longitudinal. However, for those adolescents who lack a positive source of influence for the developmental tasks of developing self-regulation and control, it appears that training programs may succeed, at least partially, at teaching the youth methods of self-control and behavior regulation. More specifically, programs that teach youth coping and monitoring strategies and social problem solving skills, and teach youth to consider the consequences of behavior have been shown experimentally to be effective (Eddy et al., 2000; Etscheidt, 1991; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Lochman, Coie, Underwood, & Terry, 1993; Schinke et al., 1988).

Social Confidence: Assertiveness/ Social Initiative/Social Self-Efficacy

Social confidence (i.e., social assertiveness, social self-efficacy, and social initiative) in adolescents is positively related to feelings of social acceptance (Barber & Erickson, 2001; McFarlane, Bellissimo, & Norman, 1995) and adversely related to levels of loneliness (Moore & Schultz, 1983; Young & Bradley, 1998) and social discomfort (Galanaki & Kalantzi-Azizi, 1999).

Adolescents with moderate to high levels of self-esteem show higher levels of each of the three social confidence constructs (Barber & Erickson, 2001; Connolly, 1989; Filsinger & Anderson, 1982). Additionally, the ability to be socially assertive, to feel social self-efficacy, and to exhibit social initiative has largely been found to be predicated on a quality relationship with parents and/or siblings, which serve as developmental resources that fosters a healthy and confident relational/interpersonal style (Barber & Erickson, 2001; McFarlane et al., 1995).

Experimentally evaluated programs, such as Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT) (Eddy et al., 2000; Ralph et al., 1998), Say it Straight (SIS) (Englander-Golden, Elconin, Miller, & Schwarzkopf, 1986), and Structured Learning Training (SLT) (Pentz, 1980), that teach adolescents those behaviors and skills that foster communication and problem solving with both peers and parents also seem to foster social assertiveness, social self-efficacy, and social initiative.

Empathy/Sympathy

Empathetic response, or the ability to induce the emotional state or reaction of others (Eisenberg, in press), has been established as key to relational success with peers, family members, and others (Adams, Schvaneveldt, & Jenson, 1979; Murphy et al., 1999). Empathetic response is predicated upon cognitive and affective processes (Adams et al., 1979; Henry, Sager, & Plunkett, 1996; Pecukonis, 1990). The degree to which certain individual characteristics and relationships with peers, family members, and others foster or hinder these processes, they also foster or hinder the adolescent's empathy development.

For instance, individual characteristics such as a healthy ego³ (Pecukonis, 1990), religiosity (Francis & Pearson, 1987), and social cooperativeness (Adams et al., 1979) promote the development of empathetic responses in adolescents. In addition, family characteristics, such as older siblings (Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2001), a cohesive, supportive family, and parents who engage in logical reasoning (Henry et al., 1996), foster empathy development in adolescents. Research suggests that peer interactions may cultivate the development of empathy (Miller, 1990; Ritter, 1979).

Experimental evaluations of training programs centered in lecture and role-play have shown that these programs are successful in fostering the cognitive and affective processes relevant to empathetic response, and are therefore, also, successful at increasing the level of empathetic response in their trainees (Avery, Rider, & Haynes-Clements, 1981; Pecukonis, 1990).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary for the Antecedents of Quality Social Relationships

We found individual, familial, and neighborhood level variables to be antecedents of quality social relationships.

- *Individual characteristics of the youth such as gender, age, and personality were found to be important.* The quality of relationships with parent, sibling, non-familial adults, and peers are predicted by characteristics such as the adolescent's gender and age. In addition, the aspects of the adolescent's personality or temperament are associated with the quality of relationships with the parent, sibling, and peer relationships.
- *Several family level characteristics are important for predicting quality relationships.* A positive relationship between the parent and youth, parenting style, and low family discord/parental divorce are associated with quality social relationships.
- *Neighborhood characteristics are important for predicting quality relationships.* Accessibility and proximity are important factors for predicting quality relationships with non-familial adults and peers.
- *There is some evidence that programs can increase the quality of adolescent relationships.* Experimentally evaluated programs that have attempted to increase the quality of adolescents' social relationships are scarce. However, some non-

³ A healthy ego is a personality trait characterized as a person's ability to monitor his/her own needs and wants against the needs of others in order to maximize relationship success (Pecukonis, 1990).

experimental studies suggest that programs, such as mentoring, have been able to promote quality social relationships (i.e., with parents, mentors, or peers) for adolescents. In addition, education and skill training programs appear to be effective at increasing adolescents' skills when a deficit has been detected (i.e., conflict management skills with siblings).

Summary for the Antecedents of Good Social Skills

We found individual, family, peer, and neighborhood level to be important predictors for good social skills.

- *Individual characteristics of the youth are important for gaining good social skills.* Youth who are warm, considerate, and friendly are likely to use more positive conflict resolution strategies and behave in a prosocial manner. Other individual characteristics (sociability, non-verbal intelligence, self-esteem) have been found to be important predictors of specific social skills.
- *Family-level antecedents can promote good social skills.* The most consistent family level characteristic for predicting good social skills is warm and responsive parenting. In addition, youth with siblings typically have better social skills.
- *Peer-level antecedents may be important, but more research needs to be done.* Peer acceptance was found to be an important predictor of many social skills; however since most of the research is cross-sectional, it is equally likely that the social skills could be antecedents to the quality of the peer relationships.
- *Programs can enhance an adolescent's social skills.* Experimentally evaluated programs have been successful in increasing adolescents' social skills. When a program has targeted a specific skill (i.e., conflict management skills, self-control/behavioral regulation, or self-confidence) that an adolescent may be lacking, there is strong evidence that the programs can improve these deficits. However, programs targeted at two other important social skills -- intimacy skills and prosocial behaviors -- need to be evaluated.

Next Steps

- *More longitudinal studies of the antecedents of social relationships and social skills are needed.* Most of the research on the predictors of quality social relationships and good social skills is cross-sectional. Throughout this report we have mentioned that quality social relationships and good social skills are interrelated. It is possible for good social skills to be listed as antecedents for quality social relationship, and for quality social relationships to be listed as antecedents for good social skills. It is not clear whether one develops first, whether they develop in parallel, whether they develop in phases or sequences with each influencing the other's development, or whether they share another common antecedent. Longitudinal studies from childhood to adolescence would provide a clearer picture of the antecedents for quality social relationships and good social skills, as well as provide the context to examine how social relationships and social skills are related.
- *More research is needed on the development of extended family, non-familial adult and peer relationships.* Although there is a rich and diverse literature on the quality

of adolescent relationships with parents and siblings, research on the development of adolescent relationships with extended family members, non-familial adults, and peers is lacking. Additional research on the predictors for quality relationships across relationship types would be beneficial for understanding how adolescents develop.

- *More research is needed on the development of intimacy, prosocial behaviors, and self-control.* While some social skills, such as conflict resolution, are key topics for research in adolescence, other social skills are not. For instance, most of the research on prosocial behaviors has focused on younger ages. Similarly, research on the development of intimacy skills and self-control/behavioral regulation in adolescents is lacking. In addition, most research has used social skills as a predictor rather than as an outcome for the youth. Therefore, research on the antecedents of good social skills needs to be expanded to encompass social skills as a dependent variable.
- *More research is needed on societal or cultural antecedents.* There are few quality studies that have examined the role that societal or cultural differences play in the development of quality social relationships or good social skills. Research in other areas (i.e. academics/cognitive) has demonstrated that the environment in which youth live can influence their own development (Eccles, Midgeley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, & MacIver, 1993). Most of the current research on cultural differences, however, has focused on the strategies employed within different cultures as a whole, and not on the processes by which these cultures transmit these skills to the youth in their communities.
- *More experimental evaluations of youth programs are needed.* There is a lack of experimental evaluations of programs that have targeted increasing the quality of social relationships for adolescents. Cross-sectional and longitudinal designs limit our ability to determine the direction of causation between the variables that have been documented as antecedents and quality social relationships or good social skills. It is equally likely that the social relationship or social skill predicts the antecedents, as the antecedent predicts the social relationship or skill. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this paper must be interpreted with an appropriate amount of caution. In-depth research on programs that directly target these skills would benefit those interested in successful adolescent development. Although there have been numerous experimental evaluations examining good social skills in adolescence, programs aimed at increasing several social skills including intimacy and prosocial behaviors have not been evaluated. Evaluations of programs targeting these skills would inform the development of interventions to promote good social skills.