Mothers’ Management of Peer Relationships and Children’s Social Competence

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Introduction

• Peer competence is associated with healthy adjustment in adolescence and adulthood and examining processes by which peer competence can be enhanced is important for adolescents’ future outcomes (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

• A parent may use guiding as a management style, which consists of expressing control over the child’s choices (Mounts, 2010).

• Support consists of parents’ displaying less control over the child’s choices and instead expresses support for child’s autonomy (Mounts, 2010).

• Restricting management style consists of controlling and limiting social interactions.

• Guiding and support are more effective strategies for younger, compared to older, adolescents (Mounts, 2010).

Methods

Participants

• N=119

• Adolescents in 8th, 9th, or 10th grade (Mage = 13.99, SD = 1.11; 51% female).

• Parents (89% mother; 94% married).

Procedures

• Participants completed questionnaires lasting approximately two hours.

Measures

• Participants reported their social competence using the Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 1982).

• Parents reported on peer management strategies (guiding supporting, restricting) using the Parents’ Management of Peer Relationships scale (Mounts, 2001).

• Cronbach’s alphas were above .80.

Data Analyses

• We conducted hierarchical regression analyses to test our goals. In the first step, we entered adolescent gender as a control variable. In the second step, we entered our main effect variables (i.e., adolescent age, guiding, supporting, and restricting management styles). In the third step, we entered our interaction variables (age X guiding, age X support, and age X restrict). All independent variables were centered and interactions were probed using procedures by Aiken and West (1991).

• The first step in the model was not significant, $F(1,101)=2.66, p=.11,$ revealing that gender was not a significant predictor of social competence.

• The second step in the model reached trend level, $F(5,97)=1.967, p=.09.$ Age was a significant predictor of social competence ($b=-.23, SE=.11, p<.05$).

• The third step in the model was significant, $F(8,94)=2.02, p<.05.$ The interactions between age X guiding ($b=-.23, SE=.11, p<.05$) and age X support ($b=.27, SE=.13, p<.05$) were significant.

• The interaction between age X guiding (see Figure 1) revealed that for older adolescents, there was a negative association (at trend level) between guiding and social competence. The association was not significant for younger adolescents.

• The interaction between age X supporting (see Figure 2) revealed that for older adolescents, there was a significant and positive association between supporting and social competence. The association was not significant for younger adolescents.

Discussion

• Parents, particularly mothers, use many strategies to manage their adolescents’ peer relationships (Mounts, 2010).

• The importance of peer relationships increases in adolescence as time spent with peers increases; therefore, it is important to explore predictors of adolescents’ social competence, such as parents’ management of peer relationships, during this critical social period (Brown & Larson, 2009).

• Our findings revealed that for older adolescents, there is less of a need for guidance and more of a need for support.

• The interaction between age X guiding (see Figure 1) revealed that for older adolescents, there was a negative association (at trend level) between guiding and social competence. The association was not significant for younger adolescents.

• The interaction between age X supporting (see Figure 2) revealed that for older adolescents, there was a significant and positive association between supporting and social competence. The association was not significant for younger adolescents.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research consisted of mostly white, middle class participants from one geographic area.

• Future research should work to include a more diverse population because there is research suggesting cultural differences in the effectiveness of peer management strategies.

• Future research should study fathers’ management of peer relationships to further understand the role of both parents in the development of children’s social competence.