



Adolescent Social Relationships: An Exploration of Classes

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INTRODUCTION

- Research indicates that adolescents' experiences in relationships with parents, peers, and siblings are important for a variety of developmental and adjustment outcomes (Padilla-Walker et al., 2010).
- Girls and boys also may be differentially influenced by social relationship experiences (Rose & Rudolph, 2006).
- Studies suggest that adolescents' social relationships may be driven by specific relational styles (Furman et al., 2002).
- Despite this, the multidimensional nature of the social experiences has been overlooked and studies have yet to explore potential subgroups of individuals.
- Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore and describe a potential latent class structure that represents differences in adolescents' social relationships with parents, peers, and siblings.

SAMPLE

Sample

- 372 adolescents from the Adolescent Adjustment Project (Ohannessian, 2009).
- Adolescents were 16.02 (*SD* = .69) years old (55% female; 60% White).
- Only adolescents who reported having one sibling were included.
- Most participants had a younger sibling (65%) and 50% were from same-gender dyads.

Procedure

- In the Spring of 2007, surveys were administered to adolescents in seven public high schools from DE, MD, and PA. Parental consent and adolescent assent were obtained prior to data collection. Data were collected in schools by trained research staff. Adolescents were informed that they could leave the study at any time and their responses would be kept confidential. The survey took approximately 40 minutes to complete and participants were compensated for their time with a movie pass.

MEASURES

Adolescent-Parent Communication

- Both adolescent-mother ($\alpha = .91$) and adolescent-father ($\alpha = .91$) communication were assessed using the 20-item Adolescent-Parent Communication Scale (Barnes & Olson, 2003).

Close Friend Support

- Support from a close friend ($\alpha = .88$) was assessed using the 6-item Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 1988).

Sibling Warmth & Hostility

- The 12-item Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Slomkowski et al., 2001) was used to measure warmth ($\alpha = .89$) and hostility ($\alpha = .87$) within the adolescent-sibling dyad.
- Birth order, the age-gap between siblings, and sibling gender were included as controls.

RESULTS

- Latent class analysis was used to explore subgroups or classes of adolescents based on the following indicators: adolescent-mother (A-M) communication, adolescent-father (A-F) communication, close friend support, sibling warmth, and sibling hostility. Indicators were dichotomized into low (below average) and high (above average) levels. Sibling dyad structural characteristics were included as controls.
- Models ranging from two to five classes were tested (Table 1). The lowest *AIC* and *BIC* values as well as the substantial drop in the *LL* between the two- and three-class models indicated the three-class model was the best fit to the data.

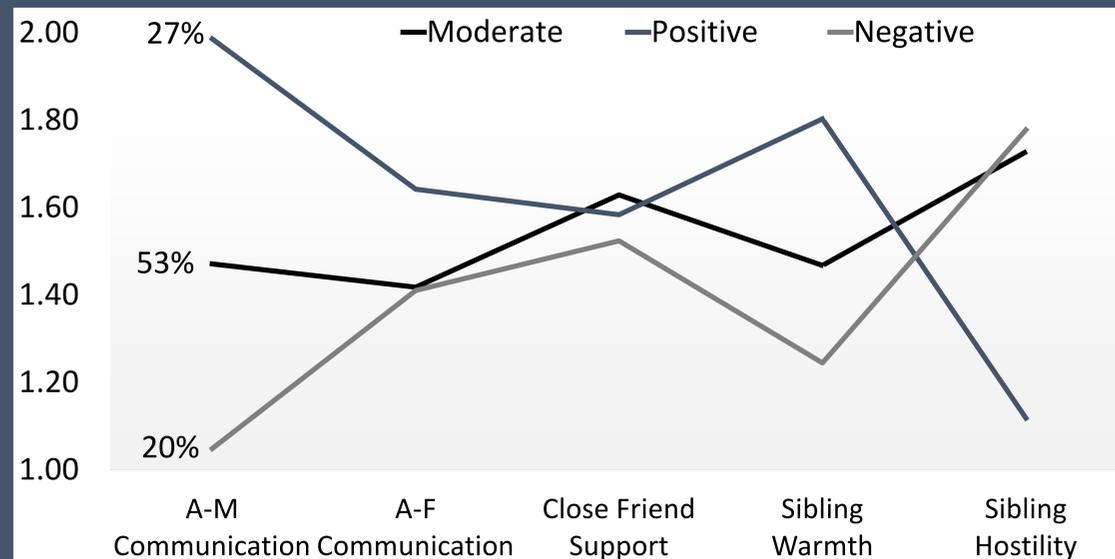


Figure 1. Three-class model of adolescent social relationships with mothers, father, peers, and siblings.

RESULTS

Table 1. Fit Statistics for Latent Class Models

Number of classes	LL	AIC	BIC	SSA-BIC	Entropy
2	-1814.18	331.53	397.50	343.57	0.60
3	-1793.18	307.52	408.41	325.93	0.64
4	-1784.78	308.72	444.54	333.50	0.57
5	-1776.54	310.25	480.99	341.40	0.66

Note. Boldface type indicates the selected model. LL = Log-Likelihood, AIC = Akaike Information Criterion, BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion, and SSA-BIC = Sample-size adjusted BIC.

- The following social relationship classes emerged: 1) moderate (53%), 2) positive (27%), 3) negative (20%) (Figure 1).
- Examination of these classes by adolescent gender suggested that there were approximately equal numbers of girls and boys in the negative and moderate social relationships classes (50% and 53% female, respectively). However, girls represented 63% of the positive social relationship class.

DISCUSSION

- Findings from the current study suggest that there are subgroups of the adolescents based on their social relationship experiences with parents, peers, and siblings.
- The largest group of adolescents was characterized by moderate relationship experiences across social contexts, except for sibling hostility which was high.
- However, there also were adolescents whose relationships were characterized by both overall positive (i.e., more positive parental communication, friend support, sibling warmth, and less sibling hostility) and negative (i.e., less positive parental communication, friend support, sibling warmth, and more sibling hostility) experiences.
- Results have implications for understanding adolescents' relational styles across social contexts. Further, given that positive relationship experiences are important for development, findings may be used to identify and support youth at risk for adjustment problems.

