Perceptions of Family Functioning and Sibling Relationship Characteristics as Predictors of Adolescent Self-Competence

Bethany Willis Hepp – Human Development and Family Studies, University of Delaware
Christine McCauley Ohanianess – Human Development and Family Studies, University of Delaware

Abstract

The relationship between family functioning, sibling relationship characteristics, and adolescent perceptions of self-competence across five domains (social, academic, athletic, physical appearance, and global self-worth) was examined in a sample of 441 high school students. Relationships were examined by the gender of the respondent and his or her sibling. Multiple regression analysis results indicated that more positive family functioning predicted higher levels of self-competence for adolescent boys and girls among family members. The impact of sibling relationship characteristics on adolescent self-competence varied by gender of the adolescent and the gender of the sibling.

Research Questions

• Do adolescents’ perceptions of family functioning and sibling relationship characteristics predict self-reported perceptions of self-competence across five domains (social, academic, athletic, physical appearance, and global self-worth)?
• What role, if any, does gender play in this relationship?

Measures

Family Adaptability and Cohesion

The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II (FACES II; Olson & Wilson, 1982) was used to measure perceived levels of family functioning. The FACES II measure consists of one 10-item Adaptability scale and one 10-item Cohesion scale. A 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5 is used to measure perceptions of these items using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = “almost never” to 5 = “almost always”. Both have demonstrated good psychometric properties (Olson & Wilson, 1982; Olson et al., 1983). The α coefficients for family cohesion and family adaptability were .83 and .79 in this sample, respectively.

Sibling Hostility-Coercion and Warmth-Support

Hostility-coercion and warmth-support (hereafter referred to as hostility and warmth) in sibling relationships were assessed using twelve items. Using a seven-point scale, respondents reported how often their siblings behaved in an angry manner and in a warm manner during the previous months. “never” behaved that way” and “always behaved that way”.

Results

Hierarchical regression models were conducted regressing adolescent competence scores on family functioning and sibling relationship characteristics. Block one was comprised of the family functioning variables (family cohesion and adaptability) entered simultaneously into the analysis. Block two included the sibling relationship variables (hostility and warmth), entered simultaneously as well. Separate regression models were conducted for each of the five measures of self-competence. Models were also separately conducted for respondents with brothers and with sisters. This approach yielded 10 separate models.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables Predicted</th>
<th>Total R²</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
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Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine whether adolescents’ self-reported perceptions of family functioning across five domains could be predicted by their perceptions of family functioning and sibling relationship characteristics; an additional goal of this study was to examine the role of the gender of the respondent and the gender of the sibling. Sibling relationship characteristics predicted self-competence exclusively among girls, regardless of the gender of the sibling; these findings are in accordance with prior research indicating that girls have stronger emotional ties to their close relationships (Bylly et al., 1982) in comparison to boys.

Participants and Procedures

Participants were drawn from a larger longitudinal study (The Adolescent Adjustment Project). The sample size was equal to the number of students who filled out a self-report survey that took approximately 40 minutes to complete. At the time of the study, the sample included 1,036 10th- and 11th-grade adolescent boys (47.4%) and girls (52.6%). For the purposes of this study, only adolescents reporting one brother and one sister households were included. The details are as follows:

- 441 adolescent high school boys (41.9%) and girls (58.1%)
- Age range = 15 to 18 years; mean = 16.1 years (SD = 0.69)
- 41% Caucasian; 26% Hispanic; 22% African American; 5% Asian
- 52% lived with a biological parent, 40% lived with their biological mother, 60% lived with their biological father, 12% lived with a step-father, 3% lived with a step-mother, 1% lived with an adoptive mother and father

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