

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Journal of Adolescence

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jado

Brief report

A brief randomized controlled intervention targeting parents improves grades during middle school

Mesmin Destin ^{a,*}, Ryan C. Svoboda ^b^a Department of Psychology, School of Education & Social Policy, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, USA^b School of Education & Social Policy, Northwestern University, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 September 2016

Received in revised form 15 February 2017

Accepted 16 February 2017

Keywords:

Parents

Academic achievement

Intervention

Motivation

Adolescence

ABSTRACT

Despite a growing number of brief, psychosocial interventions that improve academic achievement, little research investigates how to leverage parents during such efforts. We designed and tested a randomized controlled intervention targeting parents to influence important discussions about the future and responses to academic difficulty experienced by their adolescent during eighth grade in the United States. We recruited experienced parents to convey the main messages of the intervention in a parent panel format. As expected, current parents who were randomly assigned to observe the parent panel subsequently planned to talk with their adolescents sooner about future opportunities and to respond more positively to experiences of academic difficulty than parents who were randomly assigned to a control group. The intervention also led to a significant increase in student grades, which was mediated by parents' responses to academic difficulty. We suggest an increase in experimental research that utilizes parents to influence student achievement.

© 2017 The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

A long tradition of research has documented associations between parents' beliefs, styles, and practices and their children's academic outcomes (for reviews, see [Darling & Steinberg, 1993](#); [Fan & Chen, 2001](#); [Spera, 2005](#)). Surprisingly, however, almost no experimental studies have evaluated the potential effect of brief interventions targeting parents on their children's academic achievement during middle school (for effects on high school course-taking and test scores, see [Harackiewicz, Rozek, Hulleman, & Hyde, 2012](#); [Rozek, Svoboda, Harackiewicz, Hulleman, & Hyde, 2017](#)). At the same time, a growing body of research demonstrates the effectiveness of brief, psychosocial interventions that target students directly in improving academic achievement, especially for students from groups that are at risk of academic underperformance (for reviews, see [Lazowski & Hulleman, 2016](#); [Wilson, 2006](#); [Yeager & Walton, 2011](#)). Therefore, in the current study, we designed an intervention to influence parents' key beliefs and practices and examined whether it led to improvements in their children's academic achievement during adolescence.

To develop our theoretical approach for the intervention, we drew from prior studies illustrating that students experience increases in academic motivation during adolescence if they receive information about how investment in education will yield future rewards ([Destin & Oyserman, 2010](#)) and how higher education can be financially accessible ([Destin, in press](#); [Destin & Oyserman, 2009](#)). We also drew from research showing that when people embrace experiences of academic

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: m-destin@northwestern.edu (M. Destin).

difficulty and interpret them as a sign of a task's importance, they are more likely to persist and succeed in the task at hand (Oyserman, Destin, & Novin, 2015; Smith & Oyserman, 2015). Further, the way that parents respond to difficulties that their children face in school is an important predictor of academic outcomes (Cimpian, Arce, Markman, & Dweck, 2007; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994), and parents who perceive difficulty as an important opportunity are more likely to support their children's success than those who fear failure (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016). As a whole, our approach integrates these insights that build from decades of research across psychology and are grounded within experimental social psychology.

Studies have not yet evaluated whether an intervention can experimentally target the messages that parents convey to their adolescents about future opportunities and parents' responses to their adolescents' experiences of academic difficulty in order to improve their academic achievement. In the current study, we developed and tested such an intervention directed at parents of current eighth grade students, a critical year as students approach the transition to high school. Instead of attempting to influence parents as outsiders, we recruited a small group of experienced parents (whose children had already progressed beyond 8th grade from the same school) to convey our experimental meta-messages as part of a parent panel program. We expected that the intervention messages would be more likely to influence current parents if received from members of their community who have faced similar circumstances rather than adopting an outside "consultation" approach (e.g., Brown, Pryzwansky, & Schulte, 2010; Holcomb-McCoy & Bryan, 2010), which can encounter issues of cultural misunderstanding and requires more in-depth relationship building.

We expected to observe positive effects on parents' planned discussions, parents' responses to academic difficulty, and adolescents' academic achievement across the school year for parents of current eighth grade students who were randomly assigned to watch the parent panel program compared to parents who were randomly assigned to a control group.

1. Method

1.1. Sample and procedure

We recruited a diverse panel of six experienced parents as facilitators of a 45 min panel presentation where they discussed 1) ways that they helped their adolescents think about future opportunities and 2) how they responded positively to their adolescents' unexpected experiences of academic difficulty. The panelists were recommended by current teachers and administration. They were male and female, racially and socioeconomically diverse, and had children of various achievement levels and pathways, from special education to athletes to honors students who had all recently graduated from the middle school.

We also recruited 45 parents of current eighth grade students as participants in the study (12 White, 13 Black, 7 Latino/a, 2 Asian, 11 Other or no response; 35 mothers, 8 fathers, 2 grandparents). Toward the beginning of the school year, we recruited all parents who came to the school during one evening as part of a school-sponsored event. As they entered the building, parents were randomly assigned to the parent panel treatment condition where they observed the facilitators' parent panel discussion and received a take-home handout ($N = 26$) or the control condition where they participated in a neutral "get to know you" discussion ($N = 19$). All study procedures were approved by university and school district Institutional Review Boards, and all parents involved in the study provided informed consent. For more details regarding the parent panel development, procedures, and successful randomization to experimental condition, see [Supplemental materials](#).

1.2. Measures

Immediately following the program, participants in both conditions completed an evaluation survey, where we embedded two key measures: a two-item measure of planned discussions with their adolescents and a four-item measure of responses to academic difficulty experienced by their adolescents, adapted from Oyserman et al. (2015). From school administration, we also received grades from the previous school year and at the end of the current school year of the adolescents whose parents participated in the study (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1
Dependent variables.

	Items/sample items	Response scale	M (SD)	α
Planned discussions	"When is the next time that you plan to talk with your child about college [college financial aid]?"	1 = Tonight, 2 = This week, 3 = This month, 4 = This semester, 5 = This school year, 6 = Next school year, 7 = After next school year, 8 = Never	3.96 (1.54)	0.85
Responses to difficulty	"When my child is working on a school task that feels difficult, it means that the task is important."	1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree	4.13 (1.92)	0.92
Grades	Average grade at end of 8th grade ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.86$) minus average grade at end of 7th grade (4.08 , $SD = 0.67$)	1 = F, 5 = A	0.17 (0.53)	

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5033927>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5033927>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)