



Maternal and paternal resources across childhood and adolescence as predictors of young adult achievement

Xiaoran Sun ^{a,*}, Susan M. McHale ^a, Kimberly A. Updegraff ^b

^a The Pennsylvania State University, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, 114 Henderson, University Park, PA 16802, United States

^b Arizona State University, T. Denny Sanford School of Social and Family Dynamics, Program in Family and Human Development, Tempe, AZ 85287-3701, United States

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ABSTRACT

Family experiences have been linked to youth's achievements in childhood and adolescence, but we know less about their long term implications for educational and occupational achievements in young adulthood. Grounded in social capital theory and ecological frameworks, this study tested whether mothers' and fathers' education and occupation attainments, as well as the mean level and cross-time consistency of parental warmth during childhood and adolescence, predicted educational and occupational achievements in young adulthood. We also tested interactions between parental achievement and warmth in predicting these young adult outcomes. Data were collected from mothers, fathers, and firstborn and secondborn siblings in 164 families at up to 11 time points. Predictors came from the first nine annual points (youth age $M = 10.52$ at Time 1) and outcomes from when young adults averaged 26 years old (firstborns at Time 10, secondborns at Time 11). Results from multilevel models revealed that both mothers' and fathers' educational attainment and warmth consistency from childhood through adolescence predicted young adults' educational attainment. Fathers' occupational prestige predicted sons', but not daughters', prestige. An interaction between mothers' warmth consistency, occupational prestige, and youth gender revealed that, for sons whose mothers' prestige was low, warmth consistency positively predicted their prestige, but this association was nonsignificant when mothers' prestige was high. Conversely, for daughters with mothers high in prestige, warmth consistency was a trend level, positive predictor of daughters' prestige, but was nonsignificant when mothers' prestige was low. Thus, maternal resources appeared to have a cumulative impact on daughters, but the process for sons was compensatory. Discussion focuses on the role of family resources in the gender gap in young adult achievement.

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1. Introduction

Educational and occupational achievements in young adulthood lay critical foundations for well-being across adulthood (IOM & NRC, 2015). The family of origin provides important resources that impact young adults' achievements in education (Gordon & Cui, 2012; Melby, Conger, Fang, Wickrama, & Conger, 2008) and occupation (Gordon & Cui, 2015). Consistent with social capital theory, among these family resources, parent-youth relationships and parents' own levels of achievement are two forms of family capital that have been linked to children's and adolescents' academic achievement and career development (Bryant, Zvonkovic, &

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: xbs5014@psu.edu (X. Sun), x2u@psu.edu (S.M. McHale), kimberly.updegraff@asu.edu (K.A. Updegraff).

Reynolds, 2006; Coleman, 1988; Parcel, Dufur, & Zito, 2010). Much less is known, however, about the implications of these family resources over the longer term for women's and men's educational and occupational achievements in young adulthood. Accordingly, the first goal of this study was to test the main effects of these two forms of family capital on young adults' educational and occupational achievements.

Parent-youth relationship and socioeconomic resources traditionally have been studied separately as predictors of achievement (Gordon & Cui, 2012, 2015; Hoffman, 2003), and an important step is to examine their potential interactive effects (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010). A focus on such interaction effects is consistent with social capital theory (Parcel et al., 2010) as well as an ecological perspective, which directs attention to the interactive effects of family process and context as fuel for youth development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). To advance understanding of *how* forms of family capital operate together in youth achievement, our second study goal was to test the interaction effects of parental warmth and achievement-parental warmth across childhood and adolescence, as a family process resource, and parents' education and occupation attainments as markers of family socioeconomic context.

Recent research on young adults' education and occupation highlights secular changes in patterns of young women's and men's achievements: In 1982, a reversal of a gender gap in U.S. college graduation rates emerged, such that women began to outperform men in attainment of bachelor's degrees (Buchmann, DiPrete, & McDaniel, 2008). From 1972 to 2009, occupational gender segregation for young adults (ages 25 to 34) declined substantially (Hegewisch, Liepmann, Hayes, & Hartmann, 2010), as did the gender wage gap that has favored men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Such changes in gender inequalities can be shaped, at least in part, by family experiences and socialization (Buchmann et al., 2008; Lawson, Crouter, & McHale, 2015). To address this possibility, in this study we tested the role of youth gender in the links between family resources and young adult achievement. Specifically, consistent with an ecological perspective, which directs attention to the role of Person \times Process \times Context interactions in youth development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), our third goal was to test whether gender moderated the effects of mothers' and fathers' educational and occupational attainments and their relational warmth on education and occupational achievement in young adulthood.

1.1. The role of parent-youth relationships in youth education and career development

According to the social capital perspective, positive parent-youth relationships are a form of social capital provided by the family that can affect youth's academic achievement (Coleman, 1988; Parcel et al., 2010). From an ecological perspective as well, these relationships constitute family processes that affect the development of youth competencies (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Indeed, extant literature has shown that parent-youth relationships, as reflected in processes such as parenting style, parental warmth/acceptance, and parental support, are clearly linked with youth's academic achievement across childhood and adolescence. For example, authoritative parenting style, characterized by high levels of warmth, behavioral supervision, and autonomy granting, were linked with children's and adolescents' academic performance (Spera, 2005; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). As in much of the research on youth achievement, in these studies, the parental behaviors of mothers and fathers were not distinguished, and thus it was unclear whether relationships with mothers and fathers were linked in similar or distinct ways to youth achievement.

Beyond research on children and adolescents, researchers have begun to examine the concurrent associations between parenting and academic performance in young adulthood, the developmental period from 18 to late 20s that has garnered increasing research attention (Arnett, 2000; IOM & NRC, 2015). For example, authoritative parenting was positively associated with grade point average (GPA) among college students (Turner, Chandler, & Heffer, 2009), but parental warmth emerged as the sole predictor of college students' academic motivation, a correlate of GPA (Fulton & Turner, 2008). Longitudinal research on the role of early parent-youth relationships in young adults' educational achievement is relatively rare, but, based on a nationally representative sample, one study found that parental processes reported by youth in grades 7 to 12, including school-specific parenting, general parental support, and parental expectations, predicted educational attainment 13 years later (Gordon & Cui, 2012). As in studies of youth, in this research, relationships with mothers and fathers were not distinguished, and whether these were similarly linked to achievement in young women and young men remains unknown. This research, however, provided the foundation for a central hypothesis of the current study: that mother- and father-youth warmth in middle childhood and adolescence would predict *educational achievement* in young adulthood. We focused on warmth to reflect the emotional climate of the parent-youth relationship and because it is a fundamental dimension of parenting that reflects positive parental processes such as parental support and involvement (Steinberg, 2001).

Parent-youth relationships also have been linked to career development and occupational achievement in young adulthood. For example, parental support in adolescence is linked to youth's career exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009), career self-efficacy (Turner & Lapan, 2002), and career aspirations (Wall, Covell, & MacIntyre, 1999). Among college students, attachment to parents was associated with their career exploration and career decision-making (Felsman & Blustein, 1999; Ketterson & Blustein, 1997), and family emotional climate was associated with career decision-making self-efficacy (Hargrove, Creagh, & Burgess, 2002).

In this area of study, longitudinal research is also rare, but one study documented positive links between daughters' attachment to parents and their occupational outcomes five years later, at about age 22 years (O'Brien, Friedman, Tipton, & Linn, 2000). Using a nationally representative sample, Gordon and Cui (2015) found that positive parenting in adolescence, including parental involvement with school-related activities, support, and achievement expectations in grades 7–12, predicted young adults' (age range = 24 to 32 years) career satisfaction, career autonomy, and career commitment. Importantly, these associations remained significant when family demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, parents' education, and family

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