



Peer relations, parental social coaching, and young adolescent social anxiety



Shu Su, Gregory S. Pettit*, Stephen A. Erath

Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Auburn University, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 January 2015

Received in revised form 16 November 2015

Accepted 22 November 2015

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Peer relationship difficulties

Social anxiety

Parental social coaching

Early adolescence

ABSTRACT

Links between peer relationship difficulties, parental social coaching, and social anxiety were examined among young adolescents ($N = 80$). In a lab protocol simulating peer stress, adolescents led a 3-min conversation, while ostensibly being evaluated by (fictitious) peer judges. Parental coaching was measured via observed cognitive framing and advice-giving; parents also reported on their facilitation of access to peers, and their adolescent's peer victimization and rejection. Social anxiety was measured through both global- and context-specific reports. More socially anxious youths (1) experienced more peer rejection and (2) had parents who engaged in poorer quality coaching (i.e., lower prosocial advice, benign interpretation, and facilitation). Evidence of additive effects of peer problems and parenting was found, and the pattern of findings was similar after controlling for adolescent social skills. Results suggest that both negative peer experiences and parental coaching may need to be targeted to reduce social anxiety during early adolescence.

© 2015 Published by Elsevier Inc.

Childhood and adolescent social anxiety has received increasing attention in recent years because of its concurrent correlates and long-term consequences, such as loneliness, depression, peer victimization, poor academic and occupational achievement, and avoidance of social activities (Beidel & Turner, 2007; Kingery, Erdley, Marshall, Whitaker, & Reuter, 2010; Morris, 2001). Social anxiety refers to feelings of anxious anticipation and distress in social situations as well as intense fears of negative evaluation (Beidel & Turner, 2007; Leary & Kowalski, 1997). The prevalence of social anxiety peaks during the early to middle adolescent years, when there is an increased amount of time spent with peers in a diverse array of structured and unstructured activities (Beidel, Turner, & Morris, 1999; Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Westenberg, Gullone, Bokhorst, Heyne, & King, 2007). Further, social novelty increases as young adolescents move into a larger and less familiar school environment in middle school (Duchesne, Ratelle, & Roy, 2012). Moreover, rates of peer victimization climb around the transition to adolescence and may further contribute to increasing social anxiety. Approximately 10–15% of young adolescents report at least weekly peer victimization experiences, and 50% report at least occasional peer victimization (Nansel et al., 2001; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009; Williams & Guerra, 2007). Thus, pressures to manage peer relations and independently cope with increasingly complex peer situations might amplify social fears around the transition to adolescence (Parker, Rubin, Erath, Wojslawowicz, & Buskirk, 2006).

Although several studies have shown that negative peer experiences are concurrently associated with social anxiety in children and adolescents (e.g., Flanagan, Erath, & Bierman, 2008), very few studies have investigated whether multiple dimensions of peer relations (e.g., peer rejection, peer victimization) are associated with social anxiety in early adolescence. It is important to examine multiple aspects of peer relations simultaneously since it is unclear if these different aspects contribute uniquely to social anxiety (Tillfors, Persson, Willén, & Burk, 2012). Similarly, two key domains of parental socialization—parental social coaching about peer problems and parental facilitation of peer contact—have not been examined as independent predictors of social anxiety during early adolescence to our knowledge, despite the fact that peer interactions and peer maltreatment are common sources of social anxiety (Rao et al., 2007). Studies focused on parenting have mainly examined more general parenting styles (e.g., warmth, controlling) and social anxiety (e.g., McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2007).

The current study is designed to illuminate the role that negative peer experiences and peer-related parenting play in young adolescents' social anxiety. The first aim is to explore whether parent-reported peer victimization and rejection are associated with self-reported social anxiety during a lab-based peer evaluative stress task (context-specific social anxiety), as well as self-reported global social anxiety (i.e., via questionnaires). The second aim is to examine associations linking observed parental coaching (i.e., behavioral advice and cognitive framing about peer evaluation) and parent-reported parental facilitation (e.g., drive your child to parties or activities with other kids) with self-reported global and context-specific social anxiety among young adolescents. The last aim is to test whether negative peer experiences and peer-related parenting serve as additive or redundant predictors of

* Corresponding author at: Human Development and Family Studies, 203 Spidle Hall, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849-5214, USA. Tel.: +1 334 844 3228; fax: +1 334 844 4515.

E-mail address: gpettit@auburn.edu (G.S. Pettit).

social anxiety. Observed social skill is controlled due to the possibility that lower social skill accounts for associations between social experiences and social anxiety.

Links between peer problems and social anxiety

Individual differences in social anxiety during early adolescence may stem from earlier and ongoing interaction experiences with peers. Young adolescents who have generally negative experiences in their peer relationships may develop negative expectations for future social situations that amplify their social anxiety. Two aspects of poor peer relationships that may be particularly germane in the development of social anxiety are peer rejection and peer victimization. Peer rejection generally refers to high levels of disliking and low levels of liking by the peer group (Bukowski, Sippola, Hoza, & Newcomb, 2000). The experience of peer rejection might undermine feelings of comfort and competence in social situations and limit opportunities for positive social interaction. Research consistent with this premise has shown that higher levels of social anxiety are associated with lower peer acceptance scores for children and adolescents (e.g., Erath, Flanagan, & Bierman, 2007; La Greca & Lopez, 1998).

Peer victimization involves exposure to abusive processes and negative treatment by others (Ladd, 1999; Storch & Ledley, 2005). These experiences might foster feelings of humiliation and exacerbate social fears and avoidance (La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Storch, Nock, Masia-Warner, & Barlas, 2003). Evidence of both concurrent and longitudinal relations between peer victimization and social anxiety has been reported. For instance, one cross-sectional study found that higher rates of peer victimization were associated with higher levels of social anxiety among high school students (Gren-Landell, Aho, Andersson, & Svedin, 2011), and findings from a longitudinal study suggest that adolescents' peer victimization predicts an increase in social anxiety over 9 months (Siegel, La Greca, & Harrison, 2009).

Although peer rejection and peer victimization tend to be correlated, each has been found to make unique contributions to children's and adolescents' developmental outcomes (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997). However, few studies have examined multiple dimensions of peer experiences simultaneously as predictors of social anxiety (Flanagan et al., 2008; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; Tillfors et al., 2012). Thus, to better understand the impact of peer group experiences on social anxiety, the influence of both dimensions were examined in the present study.

Links between peer-related parenting and social anxiety

As noted by Ladd and Pettit (2002), parental influence on children's and adolescents' social-emotional development can be distinguished in terms of parental style (i.e., the general quality of the parent-child relationship, captured by such concepts as parental responsiveness) and in terms of "direct" (deliberate and intentional) parenting practices. In the domain of socialization of children's peer relationships, a number of different "direct" parenting strategies have been studied, including parents as instructors (McDowell & Parke, 2009) and as managers (Ladd, Profilet, & Hart, 1992). Ladd et al. further distinguished aspects of parents' management behavior into four roles: designer, mediator, supervisor, and advisor or consultant. In the early adolescent years, two of these roles—designing (in terms of facilitating access to peers) and advising (in terms of helping teens think through and respond to challenging peer situations; i.e., "social coaching") may be especially salient. Each of these parenting approaches was a focus of the present study.

Parental social coaching

Parental social coaching is defined as parental behavioral guidance or cognitive framing about peer-related challenging situations (e.g., trouble making new friends, difficulty gaining peer acceptance) (Abaied &

Rudolph, 2011; Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Mize & Pettit, 1997). Parents who engage in effective parental social coaching would confirm adolescents' social competence, support their independent decision-making about social challenges, minimize imagined threat, offer prosocial strategies, and communicate warmth and sensitivity to the adolescents' own desires or feelings (Gregson, Erath, Pettit, & Tu, in press).

During the transition into middle school, social cues between peers are often ambiguous and open to distorted interpretations. Whereas benign and nonthreatening social interpretations are linked with various indices of positive peer relationships (Ladd, 2005), negative interpretations of ambiguous situations are associated with social avoidance and increased social anxiety (e.g., Lau, Pettit, & Creswell, 2013; Mathews & MacLeod, 2005). Children may adopt an anxiety-associated processing style through social learning mechanisms, for example, by modeling of parents' style (Reuland & Teachman, 2014). Thus, parental negative or threatening interpretations in ambiguous situations might amplify adolescents' social fears. Consistent with this premise, Hane and Barrios (2011) found that mothers' expansion of threat-related themes during mother-child discussions about neutral and ambiguous situations was associated with higher anxiety in their 8–10 year-old children.

Explicit instruction or prosocial advice from parents regarding the ways in which children handle problematic social situations also is related to children's social competence and behavior with peers (e.g., McDowell, Parke, & Wang, 2003; Mize & Pettit, 1997; Poulin, Nadeau, & Scaramella, 2012), and therefore may influence social anxiety. Prosocial behavioral advice instructs an adolescent about friendly behaviors that are sensitive to social and situational cues, and thereby presumably provides concrete ideas for peer interactions, strengthens a sense of social competence, and allays fears about novel peer stress situations (Ladd & Pettit, 2002). In contrast, parental social coaching that contains vague prosocial or few strategies might be viewed by children as ineffective and unhelpful, potentially undermining self-confidence and increasing social anxiety.

Parental facilitation

A second way in which parents may directly shape young adolescents' social-emotional development involves regulating children's opportunities for social interactions as a designer (Ladd & Pettit, 2002), or a provider (McDowell & Parke, 2009). Parents can do this by choosing or promoting certain contexts for children's peer interaction (Vernberg, Beery, Ewell, & Absender, 1993), providing children with a wider variety of social interactions and potential friends and opportunities to practice peer interaction skills and build friendships, and thus possibly lower social anxiety. However, empirical evidence is limited due to the lack of research directly examining the link between parental facilitation and social anxiety.

Assessing social anxiety in young adolescents

Several well-known instruments assess anxiety across a range of times and situations, such as the Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A; La Greca & Lopez, 1998). Although feelings of social anxiety are somewhat generalizable, real-time assessments of social anxiety in challenging social situations may be an important complement to global assessments. Social information-processing theory suggests that social information is context-specific, that is, a particular kind of perceived slight or threatening situation sets into motion a chain of cognitive and emotional processes that lead to scripted pattern of interpreting and reacting to such experiences (Pettit & Mize, 2007; Pettit, Polaha, & Mize, 2001). For example, Dodge and Somberg (1987) found that aggressive boys displayed cognitive biases and deficits relative to normal boys, especially under conditions of threat. Extrapolating from these findings, situational factors may play important roles in triggering social anxiety. That is, it is possible that the social anxiety level for certain children may be exacerbated under real-time challenging situations, and this individual difference in the intensified level of anxiety cannot easily

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6842866>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6842866>

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