“She’s Not a Guy”: Exploring Gender and Perceived Social Support in Non-Parental Youth-Adult Relationships

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Background

- Significant non-parental adult/VIP:
  “...persons you can count on, are there for you, care deeply about you, inspire you to do your best and influence what you do and the choices you make.” (Hirsch, Deutsch, & DuBois, 2011)

- Five types of social support provided to adolescents:
  - Emotional, Instrumental, Informational, Companionship, Validation (Wills & Shinar, 2000)

- Differences in type of support provided by VIP based on gender:
  - Social role theory (Eagly, 1987)
    - Women: provide more emotional support; caring and nurturing roles
    - Men: provide more instrumental support; tangible, practical assistance

- Same gender mentor dyads possess greater interpersonal comfort than cross gender mentor dyads (Ragins, 1997)
Purpose & Goals

- Purpose:
  - To better understand the ways in which VIPs of both genders provide support to youth.

- Goals:
  - RQ1: In what ways, if at all, do youth’s perception of emotional and instrumental support vary by VIP gender?
  - RQ2: What are the differences in the strength of relationship between same-gender versus cross-gender youth-VIP dyads?
Methods

- Participants (Time 1 Data):
  - Larger longitudinal study across multiple time points (mixed-methods)
  - \( N = 39 \) (ages 12-17)
  - Participants chose pseudonyms to de-identify themselves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Dyad</th>
<th>Amount of Dyads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same Gender Dyad</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Gender Dyad</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Procedure:
  - RQ1: Social Support Code (Wills & Shinar, 2000); Thematic Analysis
  - RQ2: VIP Strength of Relationship Scale (Rhodes, J. 2012)
In what ways, if at all, do youth’s perception of emotional and instrumental support vary by VIP gender?

Youth Perception of Emotional and Instrumental Support Based on VIP Gender

* = There is a significant difference in instances that youth talk of emotional support from female/male VIPs, with females providing more instances: p = .02
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes provided by both male and female VIPs:</th>
<th>Male VIPs</th>
<th>Female VIPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commonality</td>
<td>Time (age 13): “...I feel like I can talk to him easier...it’s not such a dominating relationship.”</td>
<td>Scooter (age 14): “I don’t know—we can just relate to each other...we have similar ideas.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide comfort/care</td>
<td>Poncho (age 16): “He won’t freak out...he’ll keep you calm and walk you through whatever problem...”</td>
<td>John (age 13): “Like when my grandma died, she was always comforting...she was just trying to act cheerful...and saying...’I know this is a hard time for you...’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme provided by female VIPs only:</td>
<td>No judgment</td>
<td>Rachel (age 17): “I feel like she will listen and not judge me...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Instrumental Support: Qualitative Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme provided by both male and female VIPs:</th>
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<th>Female VIPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homework help</td>
<td>Bob (age 16): “...he’s really helped me out and just made me better at Spanish...”</td>
<td>Skylar (age 13): “Yeah she does help us with homework if we don’t get it...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Provide practical knowledge</th>
<th>Female VIPs Only</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Claire (age 14): “Like just random stuff that she taught – she would teach me how to cook...if I’m at her house...we just like different things...She taught me how to make crepes.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Provide hands on help</th>
<th>Male VIPs Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McMolnakerson (age 16): “He helps me if I can’t get something, like if I’m not physically strong enough to—like today I couldn’t put this tire on a rim...he helped me do that.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What are the differences in strength of relationship between same-gender versus cross-gender youth-VIP dyads?

- **Independent samples T-Test**
  - Comparing: the strength of relationship across same-gender and cross-gender youth VIP dyads.

- There were no significant differences in strength of relationship for same-gender (M=4.58, SD=.314) and cross-gender (M=4.41, SD=.272) youth VIP dyads; t(37)=1.706, p=0.09.
No significant differences in strength of relationship for same-gender/cross-gender youth-VIP dyads but approaching significance, \( p=.09 \)

Future Studies
- Compare data across multiple time points
- Use the other types of social support (companionship, validation, informational)
Acknowledgements

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- Youth-Nex Lab at the University of Virginia