

Associations Between Interpersonal Relationships in Organized Leisure Activities and Youth Adjustment

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This study examined (a) the unique contribution of mothers' involvement in their children's organized activity, fathers' involvement in the activity, social integration in the activity peer group, and social support from the activity leader on youth adjustment and (b) the moderating effects of youths' gender and prior adjustment on these associations. The dimensions of adjustment included academic achievement, problem behaviors, depressive symptoms, and persistence of participation. Study participants were 115 youths (59% girls; *CHARI* = 13.39). Participation in organized activities and the interpersonal relationships within these activities were assessed in the 7th grade. The dimensions of adjustment were measured both in Grades 6 and 7. Altogether, the findings revealed few main effects of the activity-related interpersonal relationships on youth adjustment. Rather, the results highlighted that boys and youths with prior difficulties were especially sensitive to the interpersonal components of their activity participation.

Keywords: *organized leisure activities; interpersonal relationships; adjustment; adolescence*

Author's Note: This study was supported by research grants to the second author from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and from the Fonds Québécois pour la Recherche sur la Société et la Culture. The authors wish to thank the teachers and the children of the Commission scolaire de Laval. They also thank Sara Pedersen for helpful comments on previous versions of this manuscript. This research was conducted as part of the first author's doctoral dissertation. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Anne-Sophie Denault, Département de Psychologie, Université du Québec à Montréal, Case postale 8888, Succursale Centre-ville, H3C 3P8, Montréal, Canada; e-mail: denault.anne-sophie@courrier.uqam.ca.

Adolescent development is influenced by interpersonal relationships formed with significant others. These relationships take place in diverse ecological niches, such as the family, the peer group, and the school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Another social system in which many adolescents choose to engage and experience interpersonal relationships is organized leisure. Organized leisure consists of free-time activities at school or in the community and usually involves an adult leader, a peer group, rule-guided engagement, and regular participation (Larson, 2000; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). Examples of such activities include sports, performing arts, and youth clubs. The developmental significance of these activities has been illustrated in a series of studies demonstrating that participation is associated with lower rates of school dropout (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; McNeal, 1995), better educational performance and higher attainment (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003), as well as low levels of antisocial behaviors (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000) and depressed mood (Mahoney, Schweder, & Stattin, 2002). However, participation has also been linked to risky behaviors, such as drinking alcohol and skipping school (Eccles & Barber, 1999).

Researchers have proposed different explanations to account for the various outcomes associated with participation in organized activities. At the individual level, developing identity, initiative, and specific skills, and dealing with challenges have been suggested as processes that could explain why participating youths are better adjusted than nonparticipants (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson, 2000). At the interpersonal level, participation in organized activities may entail the development of new or deepening of existing interpersonal relationships with parents, peers, and adult leaders, and these relationships might explain why youths benefit from their participation (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks et al., 2002; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson, 2000; Mahoney et al., 2002). Larson and colleagues have promoted the importance of looking at various developmental experiences youths have in organized activities, including both personal and interpersonal experiences (Dworkin et al., 2003; Hansen et al., 2003; Pearce & Larson, 2006). However, few studies have empirically verified these theoretical propositions. This study focused specifically on the interpersonal relationships developed in the context of youth activity participation. Four relationships were especially of importance: (a) mothers' involvement in the activity, (b) fathers' involvement in the activity, (c) social integration in the activity peer group, and (d) support from the activity leaders. The goals of this study were to examine the associations between these interpersonal relationships and youths' adjustment and to examine possible moderators of these

associations. Each of the four relationships is described in the next sections followed by the description of potential moderators and the study objectives.

Mothers' and Fathers' Involvement in the Activity

Parents are likely to be involved in various ways in their child's activities and this contribution might in turn improve the quality of parent-child relationships (Eccles & Gootman, 2002, p. 750; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). For example, parents may provide him or her with support. Parent support and reinforcement of organized activities has been positively linked to youth activity participation (Anderson, Funk, Elliott, & Smith, 2003; Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000; Huebner & Mancini, 2003; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; Simpkins, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2005). Parents may speak with the child about the activity or have direct contact with the activity leader. As a result, youths may feel supported in their participation efforts and this may foster further positive interactions between youths and their parents. Although the importance of parents in the context of organized activities has received recent empirical support less is known about the unique contributions of mothers and fathers. As emphasized by Updegraff, McHale, Crouter, and Kupanoff (2001), fathers may assume a more active role than mothers in spending time with youths and their peers, such as participating in extracurricular activities. Early adolescence is also a period particularly sensitive to same-sex socialization (Crouter, Manke, & McHale, 1995). Therefore, mothers' and fathers' involvement could bring unique contributions to participating youth adjustment.

Social Integration in the Activity Peer Group

The activity peer group gives youths the opportunity to make new friends and relate with peers who would normally be outside of their network (Dworkin et al., 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks et al., 2002; Patrick et al., 1999). These peers are considered a positive source of influence for youth adjustment. Researchers have suggested that organized activities may serve as a gateway to conventional (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997) and academically oriented peers (Barber, Stone, Hunt, & Eccles, 2005; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003). Moreover, because most activities involve group interactions, being part of that group and liked by the other members may be a key dimension of the adolescent social experience in organized activities. In their qualitative studies, Fredricks et al. (2002) and Patrick et al. (1999) found that the opportunity to see friends was decisive

for adolescents' persistence in participating over time. Thus, social integration in the activity peer group could provide youths with positive interpersonal experiences that may impact adjustment.

Support From the Activity Leaders

Youths interact with nonrelated adults when they participate in organized activities. Developing new connections with these adults can provide youths with an additional source of support and guidance (Dworkin et al., 2003; Rhodes & Spencer, 2005). Moreover, adolescents involved in extracurricular activities have access to a broader range of supportive adults than noninvolved peers (Eccles et al., 2003). Research on mentoring has found that supportive relationships with nonfamilial adults can act as a protective factor for youth development, especially for youths living in risky neighborhoods (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). In addition, Mahoney et al. (2002) found that perceived support from an activity leader, specifically, was associated with lower levels of depressed mood among participating youths. Therefore, the additional support from a caring adult that participating youths receive may contribute to their adjustment.

The previous review suggests that parents and activity peers and leaders are all likely to be part of the activity social ecology and contribute to the association between participation and youth adjustment. Few studies, however, have empirically tested the effects of these relationships on youth participation and adjustment. Moreover, no known studies have examined the unique contributions of each of these activity-related interpersonal relationships. Adolescents' multiple social relationships should be considered simultaneously because each of them meets different social needs (Vandell, 2000). Therefore, we examined whether mothers' and fathers' involvement in the activity, social integration in the activity peer group, and support from the activity leader could uniquely contribute to adjustment among participating youths.

Potential Moderators

Examining the unique contribution of the activity-related interpersonal relationships to youth adjustment may provide a limited understanding of the socialization experiences associated with participation in organized activities. Participating youths do not constitute a homogeneous group. Therefore, the association between the interpersonal relationships and youth adjustment may vary as a function of youths' characteristics. Accordingly,

we focus on gender and prior adjustment as potential youth-related moderators of this association. First, in their review on the effects of school-based activities for adolescent development, Feldman and Matjasko (2005) highlighted the importance of considering gender as an important moderator. Gender has usually been included as a control in previous studies. However, differences between boys and girls have recently been documented on participation outcomes (Denault & Poulin, 2006; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Gore, Farrell, & Gordon, 2001; Mahoney et al., 2003). In addition, participation in organized activities implies both dyadic (e.g., adult leader) and group (e.g., peers in the activity) interactions. Boys and girls may evolve differently in these levels of social interaction (Maccoby, 1990, 1998). Second, youths' adjustment prior to participation may also be important. Several researchers suggest that youths at risk for psychosocial maladjustment might be especially likely to benefit from organized activities (Darling, 2005; Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Mahoney et al., 2003). In line with this idea, youths with academic, externalizing, or internalizing problems prior to participation may benefit even more from the activity-related interpersonal input than youths without such difficulties.

Multiple dimensions of psychosocial adjustment were considered in this study. First, because previous studies (Barber et al., 2001; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Mahoney et al., 2002, 2003; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000) documented an association between activity participation and the following dimensions of adjustment, we investigated academic achievement, problem behaviors, and depressive symptoms. In addition, we examined the associations between these interpersonal relationships and youth participation persistence over time. Persistence is an important outcome since activity-related benefits might be augmented when youths participate for several years (Mahoney et al., 2003; Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003).

Study Goals

Two research questions were investigated in this study. First, we examined the unique contributions of mothers' and fathers' involvement in the activity, social integration in the activity peer group, and support from the activity leader to youth adjustment. Second, we verified whether these associations were moderated by youths' gender and prior adjustment. In addition, because sociodemographic characteristics have been linked to youth activity participation (Huebner & Mancini, 2003; McNeal, 1998; Pedersen, 2005), we included family income as a covariate in all analyses. We also adjusted for prior participation during the previous year since it is likely to

affect both the interpersonal relationships and the outcomes related to participation. We expected that the higher the activity-related interpersonal relationships would be the better participating youths' adjustment would be (i.e., better grades, less problem behaviors, less depressive symptoms, and longer persistence). In addition, because of same-sex socialization, we expected mothers' involvement to be more significant for girls' adjustment and fathers' involvement to be more significant for boys' adjustment. We also expected that social integration in the activity peer group would be more important for boys' adjustment (group), whereas support from the activity leader would be more important for girls' adjustment (dyad). Finally, youths with prior adjustment difficulties were expected to benefit more from these interpersonal experiences than youths without such difficulties.

Method

Participants

Participants were part of an ongoing longitudinal study on adolescent social development that started in Grade 6 ($n = 390$). Youths were drawn from eight elementary schools from four distinct districts representing different socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds of a city of 350,000 residents in the province of Quebec, Canada, where criminality and unemployment rates are slightly lower than the provincial mean level. The data used in this article were collected in Year 1 (spring of the 6th grade) and Year 2 (fall and spring of the 7th grade) of this longitudinal study. A subsample of 115 youths and their parents were included in the current study (59% girls; $\bar{X}_{\text{age}} = 13.39$, $SD = 0.43$). Seventy percent of these families had an income over Can\$55,000 before taxes and 78% of mothers and 99% of fathers had at least a part-time job. Mothers and fathers had similar levels of education ($\bar{X} = 13.50$, $SD = 2.45$; $\bar{X} = 13.77$, $SD = 3.40$, respectively). The sample was ethnically homogeneous. Most youths were White and French speaking (95%).

The 115 participating families were recruited from the larger sample size as follows. First, because the focus of this study was on the interpersonal relationships within youth activity participation, only youths who participated in at least one organized activity in the 7th grade were selected ($n = 271$). Among these participating youths, 68% had available parent data ($n = 185$). However, because part of our assessment was based on mothers' and fathers' reports, only families for which both parents reported on their

involvement in the activity were selected. The participating youths in the final sample ($n = 115$) differed from the participating youths without complete parent data ($n = 156$) on three of the four outcomes. They had higher school grades, less problem behaviors, and they persisted in their activity for a higher number of years, that is, $t(267) = 4.42, p < .001$; $t(270) = -2.28, p < .05$; $t(210) = 2.51, p < .05$, respectively.

Procedure and Design

A trained team of research assistants carried out data collection in the classrooms. In elementary school (Grade 6), measures were administered to youths in the classroom. In high school (Grade 7), youths had to leave their classroom to complete the questionnaires in small groups. During the assessment period, teachers left the room and filled out questionnaires. For parents' data, the measures were sent home with a prepaid self-addressed return envelope.

Participation in organized activities was measured during the school year of the 7th grade (fall and spring). In the fall of the 7th grade, youths were provided with a list of organized activities and asked to indicate all the organized activities in which they were currently involved. A target activity was selected for each participating youth (see selection criteria in the Measures section). In the spring of the 7th grade, we asked youths and their parents to report on the interpersonal relationships for this target activity over the school year. Youths' academic achievement, problem behaviors, and depressive symptoms were measured in the spring of the 7th grade. For the persistence of participation variable, the longitudinal design of this study allowed us to assess it until Grade 10. The dimensions of adjustment were also measured in the 6th grade and these data were used to create the prior adjustment moderators. For these moderators, youths were divided in two groups, *less adjusted* and *better adjusted*, on each dimension of adjustment. The decision to create groups was based on the work of Mahoney and colleagues (Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Mahoney et al., 2003).

Measures

Participation in the target activity. For youths simultaneously involved in more than one activity, we assessed the interpersonal relationships for only one activity. The selection of this target activity was done in three steps. In the first step, youths were provided with a list of activities and asked to identify all the organized activities in which they were participating. In the second step, youths had to complete a brief questionnaire regarding each activity. The items tapped the frequency of participation (from *once a week*

to *less than once a month*), the number of hours of participation (from *less than 1 hour* to *more than 10 hours*), the presence of an adult activity leader (*yes* or *no*), the presence of rules (*yes* or *no*), and the number of youths in the activity. In addition, adolescents who were involved in more than one activity were asked to indicate the order of preference of their activities. To determine if the activities listed met the definition of an organized activity, the following criteria were applied: (a) regular frequency of participation (*at least once a month*), (b) presence of an adult activity leader, and (c) rule-guided engagement (Larson, 2000; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). Only the activities that met these criteria were considered *organized* activities in the current study. After applying these criteria, 54% of youths in our sample reported participating in more than one organized activity. For these youths, a target activity was identified according to the following criteria: (a) the target activity was the activity in which the youth participated most intensely (i.e., for the greatest number of hours per week), (b) the youth engaged in the target activity with other peers, and (c) if more than one activity met these two criteria, the youth's preferred activity was chosen. Youths and their parents then filled out a detailed questionnaire referring to this activity. The most frequent activities were dance (16%), ice hockey (10%), scouts (9%), band (5%), and soccer (5%).

Interpersonal Relationships Within the Target Activity

Mothers' and fathers' involvement. This measure was based on the work of DeJong and Walker (2002) and Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2001). Mothers and fathers received a questionnaire on which their child's target activity was identified. They were asked to think specifically about that activity in answering the questions. Mothers and fathers completed the measure separately. The five involvement items were rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale. Response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*once a week*). The items were, "I talked about this activity with my child," "I talked with my child's activity leader about my child's participation in this activity," "I helped my child practice the skills related to this activity," "I encouraged my child to practice skills related to this activity at home," and "I contacted the adult activity leader if I had questions about this activity." Values were averaged across items and within raters ($\bar{X} = 3.48$, $SD = 1.26$ for mothers; $\bar{X} = 3.33$, $SD = 1.40$ for fathers; $r = .36$, $p < .001$). The reliability coefficient assessed by Cronbach's alpha was .77 for mothers and .85 for fathers.

Youth report on the activity peer group and leaders. Youths received a questionnaire on which their target activity was identified. They were asked to think specifically about that activity in answering the questions. A first series of eight questions assessed youths' *social integration in the activity peer group*: "I knew some of the kids in the group before participating in this activity," "I would like to continue hanging out with some of these kids when the activity is over," "Sometimes, I hang out with some of these kids outside the activity," "I sometimes talk with some of these kids on the phone," "Participating in this activity helped me make new friends," "I am rather alone and don't talk to anyone (reverse coded)," "I feel appreciated by the other kids," and "I get the impression that the other kids don't really like me (reverse coded)." These items were generated for the purpose of this study and were designed to capture both the dyadic (i.e., friendship) and group levels of social integration in the activity. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale with response options ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Mean scores were used in the analyses ($\bar{X} = 3.86$, $SD = 0.82$) and Cronbach's alpha was .74.

A second series of four questions assessed youths' *support from the activity leader*. The items were drawn from the work of Mahoney and colleagues (Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney et al., 2002): "I know my activity leader well," "If I had a problem, I would not hesitate to go talk with my activity leader," "I trust my activity leader," and "The activity leader cares about me and considers me an important person." Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale with response options ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Mean scores were used in the analyses ($\bar{X} = 3.75$, $SD = 1.02$). Cronbach's alpha was .79.

Outcomes

Academic achievement. Academic achievement in Grades 6 and 7 was based on final grades in mathematics and French in students' official school records. In the 6th grade, grades were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*). In the 7th grade, grades were rated as percentages. Mean scores were used in the analyses. Sample means in Grades 6 and 7 were 3.44 ($SD = 0.56$; $r = .61$) and 76.23 ($SD = 9.93$; $r = .77$), respectively. To create the moderating variable representing *prior academic achievement*, youths' grades in the 6th grade were split into two groups based on standard deviations. Youths were classified in the "less adjusted" group if they were below $-0.5 SD$ from the mean ($n = 36$). They were classified in the *better adjusted* group if they were above or equal to $-0.5 SD$ from the mean ($n = 79$).

Problem behaviors. Teachers completed nine items assessing students' problem behaviors in Grades 6 and 7. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*almost always*). Teachers who rated youths' behaviors in the 6th grade were different from those who evaluated youths' behaviors in the 7th grade. Three items assessed proactive aggression and 3 items assessed reactive aggression (Dodge & Coie, 1987). The other 3 items measured delinquent activities, such as "This student has stolen things one or more times." The mean score on these items was computed ($\bar{X} = 1.42$, $SD = 0.60$ in the 6th grade; $\bar{X} = 1.35$, $SD = 0.60$ in the 7th grade). Cronbach's alpha was .94 in both grades. To create the moderating variable representing *prior problem behaviors*, youths' scores in the 6th grade were split into two groups based on standard deviations. Youths were classified in the *less adjusted* group if they were above 0.5 SD from the mean ($n = 26$). Those who were below or equal to 0.5 SD from the mean were classified in the *better adjusted* group ($n = 88$).

Depressive symptoms. Scores on the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1981) were used to assess the level of depressive symptoms among adolescents in Grades 6 and 7. This 27-item questionnaire covers a range of depressive symptoms such as sadness, irritability, sleep, guilt, self-confidence, loneliness, and preoccupation. Each item consists of three choices. The item choices are coded from 0 to 2 in the direction of increasing severity. The respondent chooses the options that best describe his or her feelings over *the past 2 weeks*. The Children's Depression Inventory has been shown to be reliable and valid in large representative samples of youths (Kovacs, 1983). In the current study, the item tapping suicidal ideation was removed from the questionnaire, resulting in 26 items and a range of 0 to 52. Mean scores in Grades 6 and 7 were 10.30 ($SD = 6.74$) and 8.13 ($SD = 5.69$), respectively. Cronbach's alpha was .85 in the 6th grade and .82 in the 7th grade. To create the moderating variable representing *prior depressive symptoms*, youths' scores in the 6th grade were split into two groups based on standard deviations. Youths were classified in the *less adjusted* group if they were above 0.5 SD from the mean ($n = 29$) and in the *better adjusted* group if they were below or equal to 0.5 SD from the mean ($n = 86$).

Persistence of participation in the target activity. In each subsequent year of the study (Grades 8-10), we asked youths about their participation in organized activities. We were thus able to verify whether youths were still participating in the target activity identified in the 7th grade. The mean number of years in which youths participated in the target activity was 2.80 ($SD = 1.23$; range = 1-4).

Control Variables

Family income. The total family income before taxes was used as an indicator of the families' economic situation. Parents responded to a single item: "In which of the following categories is your total family income before taxes for the year 2000," ranging from 1 (*less than \$5,000*) to 13 (*\$60,000 and more*). The mean response represented approximately Can\$55,000 ($\bar{X} = 11.76$, $SD = 2.13$).

Prior participation in the target activity. In the 6th grade, youths were asked to list all the activities in which they had participated during the school year. In order to verify whether or not youths were already involved in their target activity before Grade 7, we used the information reported in the Grade 6 questionnaires. If the target activity was mentioned as part of the Grade 6 activities, youths received a score of "1" on this variable. If not, they received a score of "0." Seventy-three percent of youths were already involved in their target activity in the 6th grade.

Analytical Strategy

First, correlations were computed to examine the associations between the interpersonal relationships and the dimensions of youth adjustment. Gender was also included in the correlation matrix (0 = *girls*, 1 = *boys*). Second, we computed a series of hierarchical regression analyses to examine the unique contribution of each of the interpersonal relationships on youth adjustment and the moderating effect of gender and prior adjustment on these associations (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Three distinct models were identified for each dimension of adjustment (i.e., academic achievement, problem behaviors, depressive symptoms, and persistence of participation). In Model 1, the unique contributions of the four interpersonal relationships (i.e., mothers' involvement in the activity, fathers' involvement in the activity, social integration in the activity peer group, and support from the activity leader) were tested, after controlling for family income and prior participation (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*). The nonsignificant control variables in the first model were removed from the subsequent models to increase the power of the analyses. In Model 2, the moderating effect of youths' gender on each interpersonal relationship was tested. To do so, the significant control variables were entered in the first step; the four interpersonal relationships and the main effect of gender were entered in the second step; and the four interactions between the interpersonal relationships and gender were entered in the third step. In Model 3, the moderating

effect of prior adjustment on each interpersonal relationship was tested using the same steps as in Model 2. The moderating effects of gender and prior adjustment were thus tested separately.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

Correlations between the study variables appear in Table 1. As shown in this table, beginning with the control variables, family income is positively related to prior participation in the activity, fathers' involvement in the activity, and academic achievement. In addition, prior participation in the activity is positively linked to mothers' involvement in the activity and persistence of participation. Among the interpersonal relationships, mothers' and fathers' involvement in the activity are positively correlated. In addition, youths' social integration in the activity peer group and support from the activity leader are positively related. For the associations between the interpersonal relationships and the dimensions of adjustment, inspection of the table suggests that mothers' involvement, fathers' involvement, and social integration in the activity peer group are positively related to youths' participation persistence. In addition, fathers' involvement in the activity and support from the activity leader are both negatively linked to depressive symptoms.

With respect to gender differences, the positive correlations reveal that fathers' involvement in the activity and problem behaviors are higher among boys. To disentangle the effects of parent and youth gender, a repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted, with mothers' and fathers' involvement as the within-subjects factor and youths' gender as the between-subjects factor. The interaction term was significant, that is, $F(1, 113) = 16.73, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$. To break down the interaction, we conducted two one-way ANOVAs for mothers' and fathers' involvement separately. Results revealed that, whereas mothers were equally involved in their sons' and daughters' activity ($\bar{X} = 3.32$ and $\bar{X} = 3.59$, respectively), fathers were more involved in their sons' than their daughters' activity ($\bar{X} = 3.82$ and $\bar{X} = 2.99$, respectively).

Academic Achievement

As can be seen in the first part of Table 2, none of the interpersonal relationships brought a unique contribution to academic achievement, after controlling for family income and prior participation (Model 1). Only family

Table 1
Correlations Between the Control Variables,
the Interpersonal Relationships, and
the Various Dimensions of Adjustment

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Control variables											
1. Gender	—										
2. Family income	.04	—									
3. Prior participation in the activity	-.05	.26*	—								
Interpersonal relationships											
4. Mothers' involvement in the activity	-.11	.15	.19*	—							
5. Fathers' involvement in the activity	.29*	.27*	.15	.36*	—						
6. Social integration in the activity	-.14	.02	.07	.15	.11	—					
7. Support from leader in the activity	-.03	-.18	.00	.06	.01	.29*	—				
Dimensions of adjustment											
8. Academic achievement	-.13	.27*	.15	.02	.05	-.15	-.17	—			
9. Problem behaviors	.25*	-.14	-.11	-.05	.03	.12	-.04	-.42*	—		
10. Depressive symptoms	-.16	-.09	-.14	-.09	-.21*	-.04	-.19*	-.15*	.27*	—	
11. Persistence of participation	-.06	.16	.52*	.37*	.30*	.21*	.09	.08	.02	.05	—

* $p < .05$.

income was positively associated with youths' school grades, so this variable was kept in the subsequent models. The results for the moderating effects of gender (Model 2) and prior adjustment (Model 3) are also shown in Table 2. For simplicity, only the interaction terms are presented, even though the significant control variables and the main effects of the interpersonal relationships were included in the regression analyses. As revealed by this table, the link between the four interpersonal relationships and academic achievement was moderated by gender, but not prior academic achievement, that is, Model 2: $\Delta R^2 = .11$, $F(4, 98) = 3.50$, $p < .05$; Model 3: $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $F(4, 98) = 0.56$, $p > .05$. For the moderating effect of gender, the interaction with social integration in the activity peer group was found to be significant. Follow-up analyses revealed that greater social integration was associated with lower grades, but only among boys. In other words, the more boys perceived they were socially integrated in the activity peer group, the lower their school grades were.

Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Analyses for the Contribution of the Interpersonal Relationships to Youth Adjustment and for the Moderating effects of Youths' Gender and Prior Adjustment

Variables	Academic Achievement		Problem Behaviors		Depressive Symptoms		Persistence of Participation	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Model 1: Main effects of the relationships								
Controls								
Family income	.25*		-.11		-.06		.05	
Prior participation in the activity	.08		-.11		-.10		.53***	
		.08*		.03		.02		.29***
Interpersonal relationships								
Mothers' involvement in the activity	-.03		-.06		.03		.22*	
Fathers' involvement in the activity	.01		.10		-.22*		.10	
Social integration in the activity peer group	-.13		.16		.07		.11	
Support from the activity leader	-.09		-.13		-.20		.07	
		.03		.04		.08		.11**
Model 2: Moderating effects of gender								
Main effect of gender	-.19		.29**		.12		-.08	
Mothers' involvement \times Gender	.22*		-.12		-.03		-.06	
Fathers' involvement \times Gender	-.09		.01		.09		.29**	
Peer integration \times Gender	-.34**		.37**		-.08		-.14	
Leader support \times Gender	.15		-.24**		-.06		.03	
		.11*		.11**		.02		.08*
Model 3: Moderating effects of prior adjustment								
Main effect of prior adjustment	.58***		-.29**		-.47***		—	
Mothers' involvement \times Prior adjustment	.06		.01		.05		—	
Fathers' involvement \times Prior adjustment	.08		-.02		-.10		—	

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Variables	Academic Achievement		Problem Behaviors		Depressive Symptoms		Persistence of Participation	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Peer integration \times Prior adjustment	-.05		-.15		-.25**		—	
Leader support \times Prior adjustment	.07		.08		.29**		—	
		.01		.02		.08*		—

Note: To test the moderating effect of gender in Model 2, the significant control variables were entered in the first step, the four interpersonal relationships and the main effect of gender were entered in the second step, and the four interactions between the interpersonal relationships and gender were entered in the third step. The moderating effect of prior adjustment on each interpersonal relationship in Model 3 was tested using the same steps as in Model 2. The moderating effects of gender and prior adjustment were thus tested separately.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Problem Behaviors

As shown in the second part of Table 2, the interpersonal relationships did not explain a significant portion of the variance in youths' problem behaviors (Model 1). In addition, none of the control variables were significant, so they were removed from the subsequent models. Model 2 and Model 3 revealed that some links between the interpersonal relationships and problem behaviors were moderated by youths' gender, that is, Model 2: $\Delta R^2 = .11$, $F(4, 99) = 3.53$, $p < .01$, but not prior problem behaviors, that is, Model 3: $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(4, 99) = 0.45$, $p > .05$. For simplicity, only the interaction terms are presented in the table, even though the main effects of the interpersonal relationships were included in the regression analyses. For the moderating effect of gender, interactions with social integration in the activity peer group and support from the activity leader were found to be significant. Follow-up analyses for these interaction effects revealed that youths' social integration in the activity peer group was positively associated with problem behaviors, but only among boys. In contrast, support from the activity leader was negatively linked to boys' problem behaviors. In other words, the more boys perceived they were socially integrated in the activity peer group, the greater their problem behaviors were; but the more they perceived support from the activity leader, the lesser their problem behaviors were.

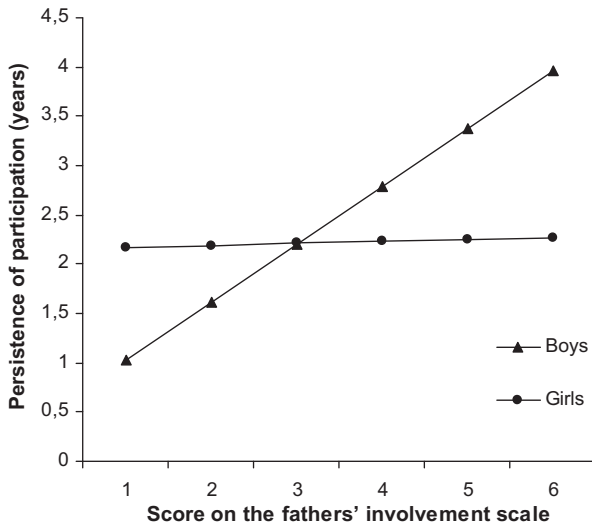
Depressive Symptoms

As can be seen in the third part of Table 2, here again, the four interpersonal relationships did not explain a significant portion of the variance in depressive symptoms (Model 1). However, fathers' involvement in the activity remained significantly and negatively linked to this outcome. In addition, none of the control variables were significant, so they were removed from the subsequent models. Models 2 and 3 revealed that there was no significant moderating effect of youths' gender, that is, Model 2: $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(4, 104) = 0.50$, $p > .05$, but the link between the interpersonal relationships and depressed mood was moderated by youths' prior depressive symptoms, that is, Model 3: $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $F(4, 104) = 3.33$, $p < .05$. For simplicity, only the interaction terms are presented in the table, even though the main effects of the interpersonal relationships were included in the regression analyses. Interactions with social integration in the activity peer group and support from the activity leader were found to be significant. Follow-up analyses for these interaction effects revealed that social integration in the activity peer group was positively associated with depressive symptoms, but only among *less adjusted* youths (i.e., those reporting higher levels of depressive symptoms in the 6th grade). In other words, the more youths with higher levels of depressive symptoms in the 6th grade thought they were socially integrated in the activity peer group, the greater their depressive symptoms were in the 7th grade. The opposite was found for support from the activity leader. The more youths with higher levels of depressive symptoms in the 6th grade perceived support from the activity leader, the lesser their depressive symptoms were in the 7th grade.

Persistence of Participation

As shown in the fourth part of Table 2, the interpersonal relationships explained a unique portion of variance in participation over time (Model 1). The control variables explained 30% of the variance in persistence, that is, $F(3, 96) = 13.45$, $p < .001$. Only prior participation was significant and thus, only this variable was kept in the subsequent model. The interpersonal relationships explained an additional 11% of the variance in persistence, that is, $F(4, 92) = 4.24$, $p < .01$. The only significant effect was with mothers' involvement in the activity, revealing that the more mothers were involved, the more youths were likely to persist in their participation over time. In addition, Model 2 reveals that gender had a moderating effect on fathers' involvement in the activity, that is $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $F(4, 95) = 3.31$, $p < .05$.

Figure 1
The Contribution of Fathers' Involvement in the Target Activity to Boys' and Girls' Persistence of Participation Over Time.



Note: These are the regression lines for boys and girls already involved in their target activity in the 6th grade.

Follow-up analyses revealed that fathers' involvement was positively associated with persistence of participation, but only among boys. These results are illustrated in Figure 1.¹

Discussion

Organized leisure activities are social settings in which youths engage in interpersonal interactions. Even though participating in these activities has generally been linked to positive outcomes, not every youth may benefit from participation. We tested the hypothesis that interpersonal components of leisure activities might explain the extent to which adolescents benefit from activity participation. Specifically, we investigated the unique contributions of mothers' and fathers' involvement in the activity, social integration in the

activity peer group, and support from the activity leader to adolescent adjustment. In addition, youths' gender and prior adjustment were explored as moderators of these associations. The findings revealed few main effects of the interpersonal relationships on youth adjustment. Rather, the results highlighted the importance of considering moderators. To facilitate comprehension, the results for mothers' and fathers' involvement in the activity will be summarized and discussed first, followed by the results for social integration in the activity peer group and support from the activity leader.

Mothers' and Fathers' Involvement: Positive Contributions on Persistence of Participation

A positive association between parental involvement in the activity and youths' persistence of participation over time was found. Whereas mothers' involvement had a main effect, fathers' involvement was moderated by youths' gender. Indeed, fathers' involvement was positively linked to the number of years of participation in the activity, but only among boys. Overall, these findings are in line with previous research showing that parent support and reinforcement of organized activities is positive for youth participation (Anderson et al., 2003; Fletcher et al., 2000; Huebner & Mancini, 2003; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000; Simpkins et al., 2005). This is important since activity-related benefits are likely to be formed over time and may require sustained participation (Mahoney et al., 2003; Zaff et al., 2003). However, fathers may have a stronger tendency for same-sex socialization than mothers. Indeed, mothers' involvement was not influenced by the child's gender. This supports, in part, the findings of Crouter et al. (1995) and Updegraff et al. (2001) who both found increased levels of parental involvement in monitoring and peer-related activities with their same-sex adolescents. However, Simpkins et al. (2005) found few differences between maternal and paternal self-reports of their involvement in their child's participation in math and science out-of-school activities. Few studies have specifically examined parents' direct involvement in their child's principal organized activity. In their qualitative study on why youths persist in their commitments to athletics and arts, Fredricks et al. (2002) found that parents were both seen as *people to please* and positive motivators to continue. The impact of whether youths persist in their participation because they feel supported or because they want to fulfill their parents' expectations should be further examined.

Mothers' and fathers' involvement made few contributions to youths' academic and behavioral outcomes. This may stem from the highly specific

behaviors assessed in this study. More general indicators of parental involvement, such as a positive parent-child relationship quality, might be more likely to be associated with these dimensions of youth adjustment.

Activity Peers and Leaders: Negative and Positive Contributions to Youth Adjustment

Overall, perceived social integration in the activity peer group tended to be negatively related to youth adjustment, as opposed to perceived support from the activity leader. Researchers have noted that some activities might involve negative peer group dynamics, especially sports (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Hansen et al., 2003; Lansford, 2006). In contrast, Rhodes (2002) noted that youths' emotional well-being is likely to be enhanced by the internalization of their mentors' positive appraisals of them. In addition, mentors can act as role models, and help adolescents select more socially desirable peer groups and improve their relationships with parents and peers (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). However, this was not true for all youths. Boys and *less adjusted* youths were more affected by these two interpersonal components of activity participation, than were girls and *better adjusted* youths. The moderating effect of gender will be discussed first, followed by prior adjustment.

We found that the more boys perceived they were socially integrated in their activity peer group, the lower their grades were and the greater their problem behaviors were. Organized activities are mostly group activities, which may explain why boys' adjustment, and not girls', is associated with social integration in activities. Girls tend to form close, intimate relationships with one or two other girls, whereas boys' friendships are more oriented toward shared activities and interests (Maccoby, 1990, 1998). In addition, boys are more concerned with their status in the peer group (Benenson, 1990). Even though we aimed to assess both dyadic and group processes with our measure, organized activities remain a group context. Still, looking at each dimension separately might have given further insights into these results.

These findings also highlight the importance of assessing the behavioral characteristics of the activity peer group. Indeed, some youths in the activity may show problem behaviors. Since boys showed more problem behaviors than girls and since participation is, in most cases, voluntary, then problematic boys may have chosen to participate in activities where they were likely to meet similar peers and connect with them. It might also be possible that boys who are overinvolved with peers in the activity peer group are peer-oriented and thus willing to sacrifice things like schoolwork

to be popular with friends (Fuligni, Eccles, Barber, & Clements, 2001). Some have suggested that peers in the activity are likely to be conventional (e.g., Mahoney et al., 2003). However, whether problem behaviors are endorsed or not by the peer cultures in organized activities clearly needs further attention. In any case, our findings suggest that the integration of boys with problem behaviors in the context of organized activities should be highly structured and strongly supervised by the activity leaders.

With respect to the moderating effect of prior adjustment, the results were only found among *less adjusted* as opposed to *better adjusted* youths and only applied to depressive symptoms. This is consistent with the notion that organized activities are more likely to impact youths at risk for school and interpersonal difficulties (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Mahoney et al., 2003). However, our results suggest that the interpersonal components of activity participation might be both positive and negative for these youths. Indeed, we found that the more youths with higher levels of depressive symptoms in the 6th grade thought they were socially integrated in the activity peer group, the greater their depressive symptoms were in the 7th grade. As for problem behaviors, this finding stresses the importance of assessing who the peers are in the activity and what can explain their negative contribution. It would also be important to know more about these youths' peer relations outside of the activity. Perhaps they want to compensate for peer difficulties experienced in other contexts of their lives. Nevertheless, this unexpected result clearly needs to be further examined in future studies.

In contrast, we found that the more youths with higher levels of depressive symptoms in the 6th grade perceived support from the activity leader, the lesser their depressive symptoms were in the 7th grade. Mahoney et al. (2002) found that support from the activity leaders was beneficial for participating youths' depressive symptoms, especially for those who had detached relationships with their parents. Similarly, youths dealing with internalized symptoms might be particularly likely to benefit from a supportive and positive relationship with a significant adult.

Overall, these results might reflect a greater need for peer affiliation in leisure activities for low-achieving and problematic boys, perhaps because of difficulties they might experience in other areas of their lives. Similarly, the presence of activity leaders might serve as a safe haven for boys and youths with prior difficulties. Unlike parents, the activity peers and leaders had no effect on youths' persistence of participation over time. Still, spending time with friends was identified in other studies as an important motivation for youths to persist in their activity (Fredricks et al., 2002; Patrick et al., 1999). This may reflect a more consistent influence of parents over

time. In this study, youths had to report on one specific peer group and activity leader in one specific year. However, the activity peers and leaders are likely to change from year to year, whereas parents retain a constant influence on their child's participation.

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

Given the methodological challenges of studying interpersonal relationships in youth activity participation, we decided to focus on only one activity. However, some youths were involved in more than one activity and these youths probably had different social experiences in each activity setting. The limited sample size is another methodological concern. On the one hand, given the large number of analyses computed, replication of the results will be important. On the other hand, only a limited sample of participating youths was included in the current study and there were significant differences between them and youths without complete parent data. Two factors accounted for this limited sample size. First, in order to strengthen our measurement and limit perception biases, we decided to use mothers' and fathers' own reports of their involvement in their child's activity. Second, because the distinction between mothers' and fathers' involvement was central in this study, we looked only at families in which both parents completed the assessment. It should be noted that 26% of the participating youths were not living with their two parents, which added to the difficulty of reaching both mothers and fathers for the purpose of this study. The generalizability of the results is also clearly limited given that participants were predominantly White, middle-class youths. As suggested by Pedersen and Seidman (2005), the associations between out-of-school activity participation and youth development need to be further examined among youths from different ethnic backgrounds or in urban, under privileged neighborhoods.

Another limitation is that social integration and support from the activity leaders were based on youths' self-reports, which are prone to perception biases. Alternative measurement strategies could include collecting sociometric data within the activity peer group and having leaders report on their interpersonal relationships with the youths. In addition, for conceptual clarity, we decided to create grouping variables for the moderator variables. One disadvantage of this choice is the potential loss of information. The study is also basically cross-sectional. The focus was on the moderating effect of prior behavior on the association between the interpersonal relationships and youth adjustment. Yet controlling for prior behavior would bring more confidence in the interpretation of the results. Finally, since the sample is culture-specific, it

is important to consider the extent to which the findings reported in this study can be generalized to other settings. For instance, both in the United States and in Canada, organized activities are voluntary, have regular schedules and adult leaders, and promote the development of various skills. However, in the school system where the current data were collected, the transition from elementary to high school occurs after the 6th grade, with no other transition during the high school years. In addition, youths mostly participate in community-based activities, whereas in the United States organized activities are often held within the school system.

Nevertheless, this study has several strengths. Following the work in this area, we considered four possible social processes by which participation in organized activities could be linked to youths' adjustment and commitment to their activities. In doing so, we found different contributions of the family and the activity peers and leaders to youth adjustment. Mothers' and fathers' involvement were only moderately related, as were social integration in the activity peer group and support from the activity leader. Moreover, the amount of parental involvement was not related to what youths were experiencing with the activity peers and leaders, suggesting that, as mentioned by Vandell (2000), youths' multiple interpersonal relationships meet different social needs. In addition, we examined the contributions of both mothers and fathers, and their direct involvement in the adolescent's activities. Finally, the design was multisource, including youths', mothers', fathers', and teachers' reports, as well as official school records.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

In sum, the quality of the interpersonal relationships youths maintain in the context of organized activities can be associated with their adjustment and long-term participation. Positive interpersonal input within activity participation might be especially important in early adolescence, when youths experience multiple transitions in school settings, parent-child relationships, and peer networks. New directions for future research include the examination of activity-related interpersonal relationships together with other relationships outside of the activities. The significant relationships for youth development take place in diverse ecological niches (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, questions remain as to whether the interpersonal relationships in youth participation are unique to the activity or whether they reflect interpersonal relationships that youths experience in other contexts, such as the quality of their relationships with their parents, their social acceptance outside of the activity, or their support from their schoolteachers. This study focused on

social aspects of youth activity participation. Still, the personal aspects and their interactions with the social climate of the activities need to be investigated to better understand the mechanisms behind the positive, and potentially negative, effects of participation. Further insights into why and how youths benefit from their participation in organized activities is important, especially if we hope to use these activities as positive socialization contexts for youths. Based on our findings, we could advise school administrations and community-based organizations to get parents involved in their children's activities, to provide training for the activity leaders—given the positive role they are likely to play in youths' lives—and to stay alert to interactions within the activity peer group, in order to ensure that participation remains a positive context for youth development.

Note

1. It should be noted that the same analyses were computed with the complete sample ($n = 185$) to see whether there were differences with the set of results presented in the text computed with the reduced sample ($n = 115$). Accordingly, we computed the regression analyses on the four outcomes with the complete sample. The results were exactly the same as the ones reported in the text, except for the moderating effect of gender in the link between mothers' involvement and academic achievement, which was no longer significant. Given the instability of this moderating effect across the two subsamples, we decided not to present and discuss this finding in the text.

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