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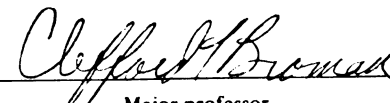
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**Perceived Parental Support and Adolescents' Psychological  
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Pressure and General Attitude Toward School on this  
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presented by

**Corey Elizabeth Ray**

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**PERCEIVED PARENTAL SUPPORT AND ADOLESCENTS'  
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING:  
EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED PEER PRESSURE  
AND GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL ON THIS RELATIONSHIP**

**By**

**Corey Elizabeth Ray**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**Department of Sociology**

**2002**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **PERCEIVED PARENTAL SUPPORT AND ADOLESCENTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED PEER PRESSURE AND GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL ON THIS RELATIONSHIP**

By

Corey Elizabeth Ray

This study examines the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being. It seeks to determine whether perceived peer pressure and adolescents' general attitude toward school function as moderators of this relationship. The present study also examines differences in perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being based on age, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and mother's employment status. Multiple OLS regressions were conducted using data from the 1990 *Survey of Parents and Children*. Results demonstrate that perceived peer pressure and adolescents' general attitude toward school significantly moderate the relationship between perceived parental support and psychological well-being. Evidence of differences based on age, gender, race/ethnicity, and SES was also found.

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## **Introduction**

Most researchers agree that social support is a complex and multidimensional construct. However, there is great diversity in the terms used to define social support and in how it is measured. Cobb (1976) developed an often-cited conceptualization of the construct (Turner and Turner 1999). He defines social support as:

Information belonging to one or more of the following three classes:

1. Information leading the subject to believe that he (or she) is cared for and loved.
2. Information leading the subject to believe that he (or she) is esteemed and valued.
3. Information leading the subject to believe that he (or she) belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation. (Cobb 1976:300)

Implicit in this conceptualization of social support is the significance of the subject's perceptions. Research has consistently demonstrated that perceived social support is more strongly correlated with psychological well-being than are measures of actual supportive behaviors. For this reason, the present study will focus on perceived social support as an indicator of psychological well-being.

The complexity of this construct has led some researchers to develop sophisticated, multidimensional measurements of perceived social support. For example, the 60-item *Student Social Support Scale* (SSSS) was designed to measure several types of children and adolescents' perceived social support from multiple sources (Malecki and Elliott 1999). In an examination of this instrument, Malecki and Elliott (1999) conclude that the SSSS is a highly reliable measurement of perceived social support for children and adolescents and is particularly useful for this population, as it is sensitive to developmental differences. However, even studies that rely on less-comprehensive measures of perceived social support have demonstrated that this construct has significant effects on adolescents' well-being.

## Sources and Effects of Perceived Social Support

Several studies have sought to identify the most important sources of social support for adolescents. Although support from friends and teachers is central to adolescents' development, research suggests that parents are the most important source of perceived social support. Helsen, Vollebergh, and Meeus (2000) found that, for adolescents, perceived social support from friends depends somewhat upon the degree of perceived parental support. They argue that adolescents' relationships with their parents are imperative both for the development of friendships and for psychological well-being. Beest and Baerveldt (1999) observed that a lack of perceived parental support cannot be compensated for by social support from friends, suggesting that perceived parental support is more important for adolescents' development.

Past research has demonstrated that perceived parental support affects adolescents' development in several ways. First, it is associated with academic performance for high school students at risk of failure. Richman, Rosenfeld, and Bowen (1998) found that, for this population, parents were the primary source of the type of social support associated with academic grades. Perceived parental support was also shown to affect school attendance, school self-efficacy, and time spent studying. Second, perceived parental support is negatively correlated with alcohol and substance abuse. That is, adolescents that perceive high levels of parental support are less likely to have problems associated with drinking and are at lower risk for substance abuse (Barrera and Li 1996). Third, perceived parental support is associated with adolescents' psychological well-being. Helsen et al. (2000) found that degree of perceived parental support is the

best indicator of emotional problems during adolescence. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of many researchers who have observed an association between level of perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being (Sim 2000; Helsen et al. 2000; Barrerra and Li 1996).

#### Influences of Age, Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and SES

It should not be assumed that the relationship between perceived parental support and psychological well-being is the same for all adolescents. Researchers have attempted to address this question by examining differences in the association between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being based on gender, age, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Several studies have shown that this relationship may not be the same for boys and girls. In general, perceived parental support is believed to be more important for girls than for boys (Helsen et al. 2000). For girls, it has also been demonstrated to be more strongly related to psychological distress than support from friends. (Barrera and Li 1996).

Past research has shown that the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being varies with age. In general, older adolescents report less parental support than younger adolescents (Malecki and Elliott 1999). This reduction in perceived parental support, between the ages of 12 and 18, appears to be greater for boys than for girls. (Helsen et al. 2000) When examining patterns of perceived parental support from preadolescence through college, researchers have found a U-shaped curve in which perceived parental support decreases from preadolescence (4<sup>th</sup> grade) through middle adolescence (10<sup>th</sup> grade), and then slightly increases for college students (Barrera and Li 1996). It should be noted, however, that the majority of studies

examining changes in perceived parental support throughout adolescence have relied on cross-sectional rather than longitudinal data.

In addition to gender and age differences, several studies have explored the role of race/ethnicity in the association between perceived social support and adolescents' psychological well-being. Most studies have observed no racial/ethnic differences in self-reported social support (Malecki and Elliott 1999; Franco and Levitt 1998; MacNeil, Stewart, and Kaufman 2000). However, only a limited number have even included race/ethnicity in their analyses (Barrera and Li 1996).

Fortunately, several researchers have examined the effects of perceived social support for specific populations of minority adolescents. Coates (1987) studied gender differences in African-American adolescents' perceived social support networks. She found that both males and females were more likely to turn to a friend for emotional support, rather than a parent. For those adolescents who reported that they would first rely on a parent for social support, mothers were cited more often than fathers. When asked to select a person with whom they feel the closest, 27% of males and 37 % of females chose a parent (Coates 1987). Based on her findings, Coates (1987) concludes that parents and peers serve distinct social support functions for African-American adolescents.

The effects of perceived social support have also been examined in East Asian adolescent populations. Using the *Social Support Appraisals Scale*, Cheng (1998) found that high levels of perceived social support were associated with lower levels of depression for both male and female Chinese adolescents. She also observed a reduction in depression over time for adolescents who reported high levels of perceived social

support. Similar results were found in Sim's (2000) analysis of the relationship between perceived social support and depression among Korean adolescents.

Additionally, some researchers have focused on perceived social support among economically disadvantaged adolescents. Seidman et al. (1999) observed significant variation in perceived social support among low-income urban adolescents. Following a systems approach, they found support for six types, or clusters, of family support (Dysfunctional, Functional-Involving, Detaching, Hassling, Enmeshing, and Functional-Uninvolving) (Seidman et al. 1999). Adolescents whose family support systems were consistent with the "Dysfunctional" category reported the greatest number of depressive symptoms. As expected, Seidman et al. (1999) found that adolescents in the "Functional-Involving" category reported the least amount of depressive symptoms. The study demonstrated that different types of support systems, and levels of perceived support within them, could have different effects on "at-risk" populations, such as economically disadvantaged adolescents.

#### Identifying Mediating and Moderating Variables

Several researchers have sought to explain the association between perceived social support and adolescents' psychological well-being by identifying possible mediating variables of this relationship. Yarcheski, Mahon, and Yarcheski (2001) demonstrated that hopefulness and self-esteem mediate the relationship between perceived social support and general well-being for early adolescents. Short, Sandler, and Roosa (1996) also found support for self-esteem as a mediator for this relationship among older adolescents. While these findings help explain the relationship between perceived social support and adolescents' psychological well-being, little is known about

which factors serve as moderators of this relationship. Therefore, the present study seeks to identify possible moderating variables of the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being.

It is important to contextualize the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being when examining possible moderating variables. What factors in an adolescent's life would strengthen or weaken the effects of parental support on his or her psychological being? Similarly, for which adolescents is the relationship between perceived parental support and psychological well-being stronger or weaker?

In addition to perceived social support from parents, studies have shown that peers and school-related circumstances influence adolescents' general well-being. Santor, Messervey, and Kusumar (2000) found that peer pressure is a strong predictor of adolescent risk behaviors. Duncan-Ricks (1992) also observed that peer pressure strongly influences adolescent girls' decisions to become sexually active. However, little is known about the extent to which perceived peer pressure affects the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being.

In addition to peer pressure, researchers have demonstrated that adolescents' general attitudes toward school can affect their well-being. Baumeister, Flores, and Marin (1995) found that, among Latina adolescents, having a positive attitude toward school was a significant predictor of not being pregnant. Mancher and Miller (1999) have also observed an association between general attitudes toward school and stealing behavior among adolescents. Little is known about the relationship between general attitudes toward school, adolescents' psychological well-being, and the social support

they perceive from their parents. Therefore, the present study will examine how perceived peer pressure and general attitudes toward school might affect the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being. These issues will be addressed through the following research questions:

- 1) How does the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being differ by age, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and mother's employment status?
- 2) How does perceived peer pressure affect the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being?
- 3) How does general attitude toward school affect the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being?



## **Methods**

### **Sample**

The data used in this study are from the 1990 *Survey of Parents and Children* conducted by the *National Commission on Children* and distributed by the *Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research* (ICPSR). The original sample includes 1,738 parents living with their children in the continental United States. One parent and one child (if the household contained a child 10-17 years old) completed telephone interviews. For this reason, households with children 10-17 years of age were oversampled. Households with Black and Hispanic children were also oversampled. Parents were asked questions about their concerns and attitudes regarding parenting and their children. Children were asked questions about their daily activities, friends, school, parents, and their general well-being.

The present study focuses on adolescents and their parents and, therefore, only includes the sub-sample of 1131 households with children ages 10-17 that completed an interview. Since certain populations were deliberately oversampled, it was necessary to weight the data according to specifications provided by ICPSR. Additionally, all statistical tests of significance in the present study account for the design effect calculated by *Princeton Survey Research Associates* for the original survey. The combination of the sample weights and design effect allow the results of this study to be generalized to the population of all households in the continental United States that own a telephone and contain children ages 10-17.

## Measures

The sociodemographic variables included in this study are child's age, gender, race/ethnicity, family income, mother's education, and mother's employment status. Age was measured as a continuous variable from 10-17. A binary variable was created for gender (1 = female, 0 = male). Race/Ethnicity was coded into three categories (White, Black, and Hispanic) and then represented by two dummy variables (*Hispanic*: 1 = Hispanic, 0 = Black, non-Hispanic or White, non-Hispanic; and *Black*: 1 = Black, non-Hispanic, 0 = Hispanic or White, non-Hispanic). Family income was measured by six categories (less than \$10,000; \$10,000-\$20,000; \$20,000-\$30,000; \$30,000-\$40,000; \$40,000-\$60,000; and \$60,000 or greater). Mother's education was coded as 0-8 years, 9-11 years, high school graduate, some college, and college graduate.<sup>1</sup> Mother's employment status was categorized as not employed, employed part-time, or employed full-time and represented by two dummy variables (*part-time*: 1 = employed part-time, 0 = employed full-time or not employed; and *full-time*: 1 = employed full-time, 0 = employed part-time or not employed).

The dependent variable in this study is adolescents' psychological well-being. This variable represents a scale based on nine questions that assess how often the adolescent feels sad, nervous, happy, etc. (See Appendix 1.) Possible scores range from 0 to 27 and the Chronbach's alpha for this scale is .631.

The primary independent variable in this analysis is perceived parental social support. Consistent with Cobb's (1976) definition of social support, a scale was created

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the terms "mother" and "father," as used in this study, include biological, step, adoptive, and foster parents or anyone identified as the parent of the child or the spouse of the parent.

using the following four questions that collectively address the three components of his framework.

- 1) When something is bothering you, are you able to talk it over with your mother (always, usually, sometimes, or never)?
- 2) Would you say that your mother respects your ideas and opinions about the important things in life (always, usually, sometimes, or never)?
- 3) When something is bothering you, are you able to talk it over with your father (always, usually, sometimes, or never)?
- 4) Would you say that your father respects your ideas and opinions about the important things in life (always, usually, sometimes, or never)?

Possible scores on the perceived parental social support scale range from 0-12 and the Chronbach's alpha is .735.

Measures of two possible moderating variables in the association between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being were also included in this analysis. First, the adolescents' general attitude toward school was assessed by the following question: *Which of the following tells how you feel about going to school...Do you like it a lot, like it somewhat, like it just a little, or don't you like it at all?* Second, perceived peer pressure was measured by a scale that includes questions about whether the adolescent feels pressure from his/her peers to try cigarettes, marijuana, drink alcohol, have sex, skip school, or commit a crime. Possible values range from 0-6 and the reliability analysis resulted in a Chronbach's alpha of .603.

Descriptive statistics were obtained for each of the variables in the unweighted and weighted samples. Three OLS regressions were performed using the weighted sample. The first model regressed adolescents' psychological well-being on perceived parental support and the sociodemographic variables to demonstrate that the two constructs are significantly associated, controlling for age, gender, race/ethnicity, SES, and mother's employment status. The second model regressed psychological well-being on perceived parental support, the sociodemographic variables, and their interactions with

perceived parental support. This analysis was conducted to determine how the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being varies by age, gender, race/ethnicity, SES, and mother's employment status. Finally, a third regression (which included all of the items in Models 1 and 2 plus perceived peer pressure, general attitude toward school, and their interactions with perceived parental support) was conducted to determine whether perceived peer pressure and general attitude toward school significantly moderate the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being.

## **Results**

The descriptive characteristics of the unweighted and weighted samples are presented in Table 1. The mean age of respondents is 13.53 in the unweighted sample and 13.60 in the weighted sample. The weighted sample reflects a more equitable gender distribution than the unweighted sample. However, the racial/ethnic distribution of the weighted sample is less equitable than the unweighted sample, but more closely represents the characteristics of the population examined in the present study. A greater percentage of respondents in the weighted sample have mothers with higher levels of education and have families with greater incomes than in the unweighted sample. Reflecting the characteristics of the U.S. adolescent population, a greater portion of the respondents in the weighted sample have working mothers, as compared to the unweighted sample. Unlike the sociodemographic variables, there were few differences in the distributions of perceived parental support, general attitude toward school, perceived peer pressure, and psychological well-being when comparing the unweighted and weighted samples. In general, these four variables are more normally distributed in the weighted sample than in the unweighted sample.

Table 2 presents the results of regressing psychological well-being on perceived parental support and the sociodemographic variables. These results demonstrate that perceived parental support has a significant positive effect on adolescents' psychological well-being, controlling for age, gender, race/ethnicity, SES, and mother's employment status. This regression also shows that age has a significant negative effect on psychological well-being, controlling for the other variables in the model. Similarly, being male or having a mother who works full-time has a significant negative effect on

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of the Unweighted and Weighted Samples

Variable	<u>Unweighted</u>	<u>Weighted</u>
	%	%
<b>Age</b>		
10	12.4	10.2
11	10.7	12.4
12	14.1	14.4
13	12.6	12.7
14	11.6	10.2
15	13.6	13.8
16	12.6	12.5
17	12.4	13.7
Mean = 13.53 (uw), 13.60 (w)		
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	53.8	49.0
Female	46.2	51.0
<b>Race</b>		
White	41.3	85.2
Black	28.6	10.4
Hispanic	30.2	4.4
<b>Family Income</b>		
Less than \$10,000	12.5	6.5
\$10,000-\$20,000	23.2	13.8
\$20,000-\$30,000	15.9	15.2
\$30,000-\$40,000	15.2	18.1
\$40,000-\$60,000	19.8	27.6
\$60,000 or greater	13.5	18.8
<b>Mother's Education</b>		
0-8 years	9.8	3.2
9-11 years	11.0	7.6
High school graduate	33.5	34.4
Some college	24.8	27.5
College graduate	20.8	27.2
<b>Mother's Employment Status</b>		
Not Employed	28.3	20.8
Employed Part-time	16.8	19.2
Employed Full-time	54.9	60.0

Table 1 (cont'd).

Variable	<u>Unweighted</u>	<u>Weighted</u>
	%	%
<b>Perceived Parental Support</b>		
0-3	3.1	2.6
4-6	20.9	21.5
7-9	31.4	42.1
10-12	34.5	33.6
Mean = 8.32 (uw), 8.32 (w)		
<b>General Attitude Toward School</b>		
Like it a lot	43.6	38.9
Like it somewhat	39.6	45.5
Like it just a little	14.3	12.5
Do not like it at all	2.4	3.0
<b>Perceived Peer Pressure</b>		
0	27.7	29.8
1	49.8	50.7
2	12.2	10.0
3	5.0	5.3
4	2.3	2.5
5 - 6	3.0	1.8
Mean = 1.14 (uw), 1.05 (w)		
<b>Psychological Well-Being</b>		
0-6	2.3	1.9
7-13	32.8	35.0
14-19	62.2	61.3
20-27	2.8	1.8
Mean = 13.70 (uw), 13.51 (w)		

(uw = unweighted sample, w = weighted sample)

an adolescent's psychological well-being, controlling for the other sociodemographic variables and level of perceived parental support. Thus, older male adolescents whose mothers are employed full-time are most likely to have low levels of psychological well-being, as compared with other adolescents. This analysis demonstrates a curvilinear relationship between mother's employment status and adolescent's psychological well-being in that adolescents whose mothers are employed part-time have the highest levels of psychological well-being, followed by those whose mothers are not employed, and, finally, adolescents whose mothers are employed full-time. Interestingly, a similarly shaped relationship was observed between SES, as measured by family income and mother's education level, and adolescents' psychological well-being, although the regression coefficients suggest a simple negative linear relationship. Converting family income and mother's educational level into dummy variables (not shown) revealed that adolescents with moderate levels of SES had the highest psychological well-being, followed by those with low SES, and, finally, adolescents with high levels of SES. It should be noted that race/ethnicity was not significantly associated with psychological well-being in this model.

Table 3 presents the results of including the interactions between perceived parental support and the sociodemographic variables in the regression model. These results demonstrate that perceived parental support exerts a greater positive effect on psychological well-being for older adolescents than it does for younger adolescents. Although race/ethnicity was not significantly associated with psychological well-being in the first model, it became significant when controlling for perceived parental support, the sociodemographic variables, and their interactions. Specifically, Black adolescents had



**Table 2. Regression of Psychological Well-Being on Perceived Parental Support  
and Sociodemographic Variables**

Psychological Well-Being		
Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	12.756	.000
Perceived Parental Support	.748***	.000
Age	-.153***	.000
Gender		
Female	.367***	.000
Race		
Black	-.100	.318
Hispanic	.054	.624
Family Income	-.077***	.000
Mother's Education	-.133***	.000
Mother's Employment Status		
Full-time	-.334***	.000
Part-time	.579***	.000
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.203	

(*b* = unstandardized regression coefficient, \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001)

**Table 3. Regression of Psychological Well-Being on Perceived Parental Support,  
Sociodemographic Variables, and Interactions**

Psychological Well-Being		
Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	17.711	.000
Perceived Parental Support	.417**	.005
Age	-.530***	.000
Sex		
Female	.134	.393
Race		
Black	-3.151***	.000
Hispanic	.063	.873
Family Income	-.380***	.000
Mother's Education	.226*	.010
Mother's Employment Status		
Full-time	-.489*	.010
Part-time	2.293***	.000
Age * Perceived Support	.045***	.000
Female * Perceived Support	.035	.057
Black * Perceived Support	.413***	.000
Hispanic * Perceived Support	-.013	.776
Income * Perceived Support	.032***	.000
Mother Edu * Perceived Support	-.042***	.000
Full-time * Perceived Support	.016	.484
Part-time * Perceived Support	.207***	.000
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.226	

(*b* = unstandardized regression coefficient, \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001)

lower levels of psychological well-being than their White or Hispanic counterparts. Race also significantly interacted with perceived parental support in its effects on psychological well-being, with perceived parental support exerting a greater positive effect on adolescents' psychological well-being for Blacks, as compared to Whites and Hispanics. Finally, the curvilinear relationship between SES and adolescents' psychological well-being is further demonstrated by the seemingly contradictory interactions between mother's education, family income, and perceived parental support.

The results of the final model are presented in Table 4. Adolescents' general attitude toward school, level of perceived peer pressure, and their interactions with perceived parental support are introduced in this model. As shown in the table, perceived peer pressure negatively affects adolescents' psychological well-being. A positive attitude toward school, as indicated by a higher score on this item, has a positive effect on an adolescent's psychological well-being. The results of this analysis also demonstrate that perceived peer pressure and adolescents' general attitudes toward school are significant moderators of the association between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being. Perceived parental support has a greater positive effect on psychological well-being for adolescents who perceive high levels of peer pressure. Similarly, perceived parental support has a greater positive effect on adolescents who have a negative attitude toward school.

The moderating effects of perceived peer pressure and general attitude toward school on the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being are also demonstrated in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 presents the mean psychological well-being for each level of perceived peer pressure across the range

**Table 4. Regression of Psychological Well-Being on Perceived Parental Support, Sociodemographic Variables, Perceived Peer Pressure, General Attitude Toward School, and Interaction Terms**

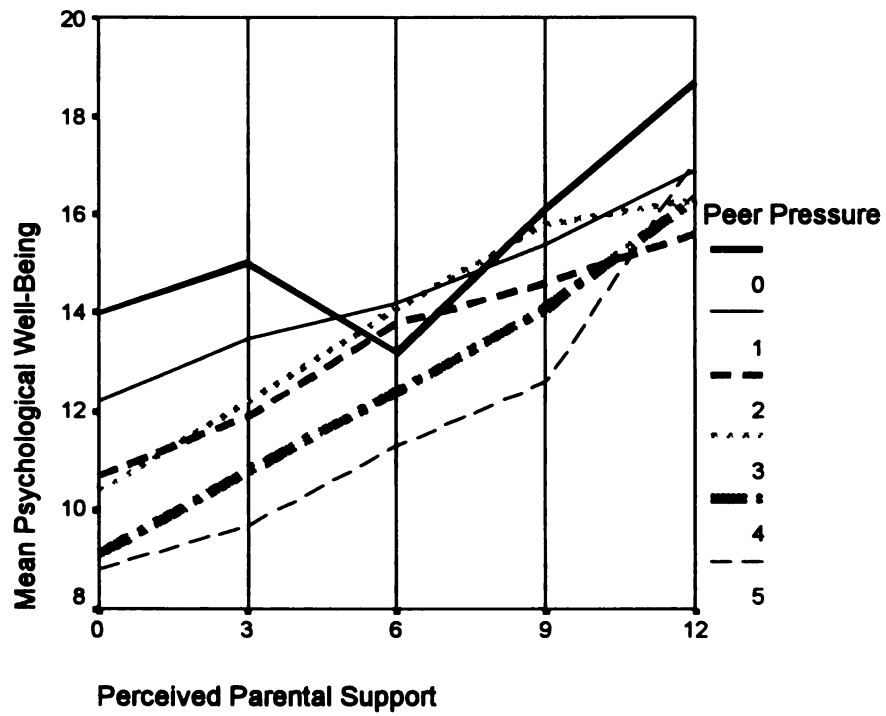
Psychological Well-Being		
Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	17.156	.000
Age	-.454***	.000
Sex		
Female	-.318*	.045
Race		
Black	3.356***	.000
Hispanic	.492	.217
Family Income	-.374***	.000
Mother's Education	.387***	.000
Mother's Employment Status		
Full-time	-.334	.078
Part-time	2.247***	.000
Perceived Parental Support	.634***	.000
General Attitude Toward School	.518***	.000
Perceived Peer Pressure	-.572***	.000
Age * Perceived Support	.085***	.000
Female * Perceived Support	.162***	.000
Black * Perceived Support	.425***	.000
Hispanic * Perceived Support	-.047	.297
Income * Perceived Support	-.124***	.000
Mother Edu * Perceived Support	.064***	.000
Full-time * Perceived Support	-.004	.846
Part-time * Perceived Support	.522***	.000
Peer Pressure x Perceived Support	.100***	.000
School Attitude x Perceived Support	.154***	.000
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.233	

(*b* = unstandardized regression coefficient, \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001)

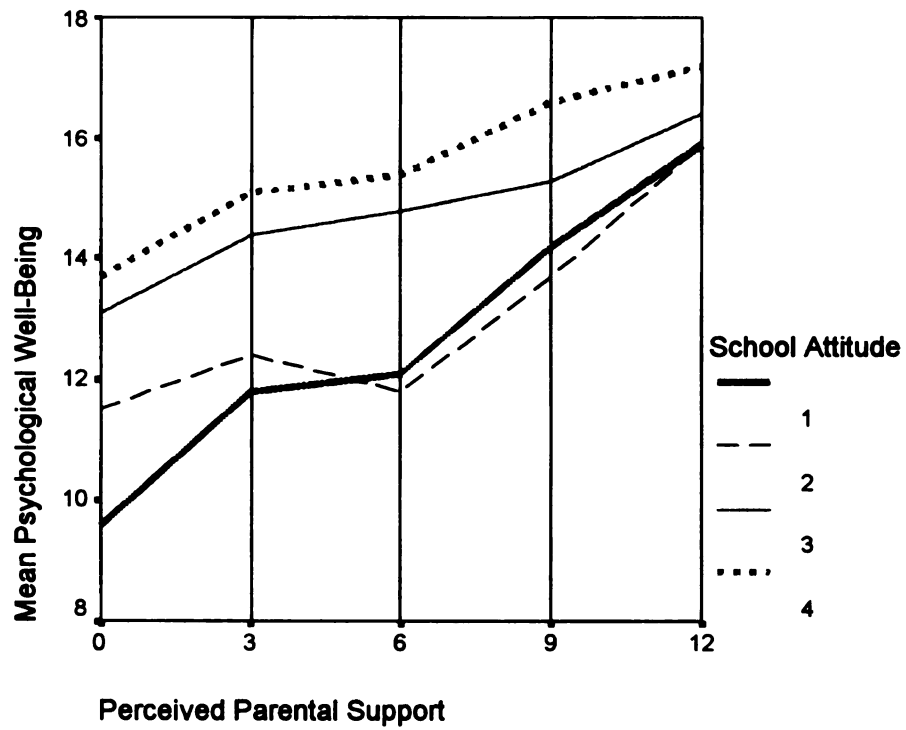
of values for perceived parental support. This graph shows that, in general, the greater level of perceived peer pressure an adolescent experiences, the greater positive effect that perceived parental support has on the adolescent's psychological well-being. Both the negative association between perceived peer pressure and psychological well-being and the positive association between perceived parental support and psychological well-being are also evident in this graph.

The positive interactions between general attitude toward school and perceived parental support on adolescents' psychological well-being are presented in Figure 2. This graph demonstrates that a positive attitude toward school and a high level of perceived parental support are associated with a higher mean score on the psychological well-being scale. Additionally, it is evident that perceived parental support exerts the greatest positive effect on psychological well-being for adolescents with a negative attitude toward school.

**Figure 1. Interactive Effects of Perceived Parental Support and Perceived Peer Pressure on Adolescents' Psychological Well-Being**



**Figure 2. Interactive Effects of Perceived Parental Support and General Attitude toward School on Adolescents' Psychological Well-Being**



## **Discussion**

### **Sociodemographic Differences**

The present study demonstrates that the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being differs by certain sociodemographic variables. Specifically, age, race/ethnicity, family income, mother's educational attainment, and mother's employment status significantly interact with perceived parental support in their effects on adolescents' psychological well-being. Perceived parental support has a greater positive effect on psychological well-being for older adolescents, Black adolescents, and those whose mothers are employed part-time.

Additionally, perceived parental support has a greater positive effect for adolescents from families with high incomes and adolescents whose mothers have a low level of educational attainment. This finding suggests that it is adolescents from relatively high SES families and those from relatively low SES families that benefit the most from a high level of perceived parental support. One explanation for this is that parents with lower-paying jobs and those with very high-paying jobs are possibly more likely to have work-related stress and to spend the most time away from their children while on the job. Low-wage jobs usually require employees to work long hours to minimally meet their families' economic needs. These jobs can also be physically demanding and require employees to perform unpleasant tasks that lead to work-related stress. Similarly, very high-paying jobs often have great intellectual and/or political demands and can cause parents to be away from their children for long periods. Thus, it may be especially important for adolescents on both ends of the SES continuum to perceive high levels of parental support.



### Perceived Peer Pressure

The results of this study show that adolescents' perceived peer pressure moderates the relationship between perceived parental support and psychological well-being. The positive effects of perceived parental support on adolescents' psychological well-being are stronger for those who perceive high levels of peer pressure. This finding is significant for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that not only does the relationship between perceived parental support and psychological well-being have mediators, such as hopefulness and self-esteem (Yarcheski, Mahon, and Yarcheski 2001), but it also has moderating variables, upon the value of which the nature of the relationship depends. Second, the finding that perceived parental support has a greater positive effect on the psychological well-being of adolescents who perceive high levels of peer pressure can help direct social programs or interventions for adolescents and their parents. Specifically, educators and psychologists can provide further research evidence to parents of the importance of social support in the family.

### General Attitude Toward School

This study also demonstrates that adolescents' general attitudes toward school moderate the relationship between perceived parental support and psychological well-being. For adolescents who do not like going to school, perceived parental support has a greater effect on the adolescent's well-being than for those who enjoy going to school. The underlying reasons for an adolescent's negative attitude toward school are probably responsible for this association. For example, if an adolescent does not like going to school because he or she is bullied or has problems with peer or teacher relations, the

adolescent may need greater perceived parental support to avoid feelings of depression or anxiety. This finding contributes to our understanding of the contexts in which perceived social support is especially important for adolescents' well-being and can be of use to educators and psychologists who develop interventions for adolescents and their parents.

## **Conclusion**

### **Research and Social Implications**

The present study has identified two important moderators of the association between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being. Future research should examine other moderators such as family, peer, and community relationships. Investigating these factors may further demonstrate that age, socioeconomic status, and racial/ethnic differences exist in the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being. It is also important for future research to examine the effects of mother's employment status on the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being, as the results of the present study are somewhat unclear.

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

This study has several limitations that should be addressed. First, it did not use a sophisticated measurement of perceived parental social support. Several extensive social support scales exist for adolescents and may better reflect the complexity of this construct. Therefore, future research should examine moderating variables on the association between perceived parental support and adolescents' psychological well-being using a scale such as the SSSS, which has been demonstrated to be a highly-reliable assessment of perceived social support for adolescents (Malecki and Elliott 1999). Second, the racial/ethnic categories used in this study were limited to White, non-Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; and Hispanic. This may oversimplify the effects of race/ethnicity on the relationship between perceived parental support and adolescents'

psychological well-being. It is important for future research to consider this relationship for Asian American and Native American adolescents also. Finally, the present study relied on cross-sectional data to examine developmental differences in perceived parental support and psychological well-being. A longitudinal study would be able to better assess the effects of age on these variables. Despite these limitations, this study contributes to our understanding of the effects of perceived parental support on adolescents' psychological well-being by identifying two important moderating variables and demonstrating that this relationship is not the same for all adolescents.

## Appendix

People have many different moods and sometimes feel differently from day to day. As I read some descriptions of different feelings, please tell me how often you have days when you feel this way – either often, sometimes, or hardly ever<sup>2</sup>. How often do you feel...

- A. Sad and Blue
- B. Nervous, tense or on edge
- C. Happy
- D. Bored
- E. Lonely
- F. Tired and worn out
- G. Excited about something that you're looking forward to<sup>3</sup>
- H. Too busy to get everything done
- I. Pressured by your parents

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<sup>2</sup> Respondents were given a score of 3 for each “never” answer, 2 for “hardly ever,” 1 for “sometimes,” and 0 for “often.”

<sup>3</sup> This item was reverse-scored (never = 0, hardly ever = 1, sometimes = 2, often = 3) as it represents a positive feeling, whereas the other items are negative feelings.

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