

A Portrait of Academic Alienation in Adolescence: Motivation, Mental Health, and Family Experience

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Abstract

This study investigates differences in the pattern of motivation, mental health, and family experience variables between students' who are more or less academically disengaged in their 7th grade year in middle school. Data come from the Prince George's County Family Management Study that aims to understand how parents influence the psychological and social development of their children. The sample includes 1482 youth and their families, 62% are African-American, and the mean income of the sample is \$45,000-\$49,999 (Range \$5,000 to \$75,000). A "Psychological Disengagement Scale" was created from several attitude scales concerning school. Students falling in the lower and upper quartile were designated as our "Low" and "High" alienation groups, respectively. These groups were then compared on adolescent self-reports of their academic motivation, mental health and the support for schooling in their home. Groups were also compared on several parent self-report measures, including parent beliefs concerning their child's schooling and their involvement in their child's school life. Results showed that alienated students were more negative on a broad array of variables, indicating a general sense of alienation. Specifically, disengaged students, especially those who also evidenced school problems such as suspension and failure, reported more feelings of anger and depression, less positive feelings of belonging, self-worth and resilience, lower grades, and less positive beliefs about their academic competence and the importance of education than their non-alienated peers. The disengaged adolescents also perceived less frequent help from their parents with schoolwork, less support and rules concerning school problems and performance, and more negative affect when working with their parents on school work. Additionally, parents of disengaged students reported less of a value of education, less favorable views of involvement in school in general, and less positive perceptions of the school their child attended. It is important to note that parents of students in the different groups did not differ on reasons for not being more involved, on actual school involvement, on mean income level, or on their own educational level obtained. Overall, these results suggest that academic motivation and behavior, mental health, and parent involvement measures are all part of the portrait of academic alienation in adolescence. Given the descriptive nature of this study, the cross-sectional nature of our data, and the pattern of parent report results found in this study, it is not clear how parent practices are related to academic disengagement. Further on-going work will allow us to examine this question longitudinally.

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Introduction

The period of early adolescence marks a time of tremendous concurrent growth in the psychological, social, and biological spheres of a child's development. The major life tasks to be achieved during this transitional period include the development of what Erikson (1959) referred to as a "sense of industry," as well the integration of different facets of the self into a coherent sense of personal identity. School experience and academic success can play important roles in helping early adolescents to develop a sense of competence and autonomy, as well as feelings of relatedness to others (e.g. Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Eccles & Midgley, 1989). But just how are academic motivation and achievement related to personal adjustment in early adolescence? And how does parent involvement and support related to patterns of motivation and adjustment in early adolescence?

School Experience and Well-Being

The literature on at-risk adolescents highlights the importance of considering the interdependence of academic and personal adjustment outcomes during adolescence. Work in educational psychology shows that many academic motivation variables tend to cluster in constellations of affects, cognitions and behaviors (e.g. Ames, 1992), while work on problem behaviors in adolescence also suggests substantial co-occurrence of psychological and behavioral manifestations of maladjustment (e.g. Donovan & Jessor, 1985; Jessor & Jessor, 1977). For instance, Dryfoos' (1990) review draws together data that shows academic failure is an important correlate in later problems such as delinquency, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and school dropout. In this review, she raises the question "if school failure were eliminated, and all children were achieving well in school, would the other categorical interventions [for pregnancy, delinquency and substance abuse] become obsolete?" (1990; p. 236). This work suggests that understanding the factors that contribute to academic alienation early in adolescence may have implications for addressing other related problem behaviors that appear later in adolescence. In addition to this work, other studies suggest that school achievement and success serve as protective factors against some of the maladaptive behaviors and psychological problems that emerge in adolescence (e.g. Lord, Eccles & McCarthy, in press; Rae-Grant, Thomas, Offord, & Boyle, 1989).

Although it is clear that many adolescents do experience belonging and success in middle school, and move through adolescence without serious psychological or behavioral problems, for some this period commences or continues a process of alienation that may ultimately result in

school withdrawal (Finn, 1989; Kagan, 1990). In this study, the first question we examine is how motivation and achievement measures are related to broader measures of student well-being during the period of early adolescence. We examine the general issue of whether or not one can draw a multidimensional portrait of academic alienation during the early middle school years that includes both motivational and mental health variables.

Home Involvement in the Child's School Experience

The role of the home environment in fostering positive academic beliefs (values, competence perceptions, goals) and behaviors is seen as important to keeping students engaged in school during adolescence. Research has shown that parents' beliefs and values can have an important impact on their children's achievement-related beliefs and values (Ames & Archer, 1987; Parsons, Adler & Kaczala, 1982). In addition, direct parent involvement in and support of the child's school experiences are known to play an important role in a child's academic success (e.g. Epstein, 1989).

Even though it is widely recognized in the educational community how important parent involvement is in helping schools to work effectively for all students (e.g. Comer, 1988), some evidence suggests that parents in this country actually feel that the school personnel, not themselves, are in large measure responsible for their child's education (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). This attitude seems to become more prevalent as the child progresses in school. Parent-school connections, and parent involvement in general have been shown to decline right around the time students enter the middle or junior high school (e.g. Carnegie, 1989; Epstein, 1983). This is especially problematic considering that the overlap between a home environment that promotes support for and valuing of education, and an educational setting that creates a sense of belonging, promotes competence, and instills autonomy are thought to be critical to the healthy development of adolescents' during this time (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan & MacIver, 1993).

In this study, we examine how particular aspects of parent involvement are related to the level of academic disengagement a child manifests. Following Epstein's (1991) model of various levels of parent involvement in school, we examine variables related to (1) parent involvement in learning activities in the home; and (2) parent involvement in the school. We also examine measures of the "psychological environment" of the home related to education by looking at how parents of students who are disengaged might differ from those parents of students who are engaged in school. Specifically, we look at measures of parents' valuing of education, and the aspirations parents have for their child's future education (e.g. Eccles, 1983). Finally, we assess demographic differences in the socio-economic status and ethnic background of the students and

their parents to see if these variables are related to disengagement in this sample. All of these measures are described below.

Summary: Research Questions

In general, this study looks at two main questions. First, what are the differences between a group of academically alienated and a group of non-alienated students on a series of academic motivation and mental health measures? Furthermore, are there any differences on these measures between students who are also showing behavioral signs of disengagement (e.g. suspension, academic failure). Finally, are there any differences between demographic variables (SES, ethnicity, gender) and level of alienation?

The second main research question addresses the issue of differences in parent support for schooling between the alienated and non-alienated students. Do adolescents who are academically disengaged report less parent involvement? More negative affect when working with their parents? Less help with school and social problems than non-alienated students? Additionally, do the parents of academically alienated students report less involvement? Less value attached to education? Less favorable aspirations for their child's educational future?

In sum, these two questions will allow us to draw a descriptive summary of the kinds of factors that are related to school disengagement in early adolescence. Because the data is cross-sectional, this study attempts only to provide the broad strokes of a portrait of alienation. No attempt is made to assess correlational relationships at this point. On-going work is looking at the relationships among these variables, and the relationships among parent and student measures across time.

Methods

Sample

The sample consisted of 1482 families with a seventh grader who agreed to participate in the Prince George's County Middle School Family Survey, a study designed to assess how parents influence the academic, psychological, and social development of adolescents. In addition to the target youth, primary care givers (approximately 92% mothers) and secondary care givers (approximately 75 % fathers) were interviewed. Of the target youth, 50.9% were male, and 62% were Black. The mean family income was 45,000-49,999 (range 5,000 -75,000).

Each consenting parent and target youth was interviewed at home by a trained interviewer, and also completed a self-administered questionnaire. The interview and questionnaire for parents included measures of parent involvement in school, parenting style, family environment and relationships, and perceptions of their adolescents' adjustment. Target

youths reported on their perceptions of their parents' involvement in school, their school environment, and their motivational beliefs and mental health.

Measures

The measures examined in this study can be summarized by five main categories: (1) demographic background variables, (2) adolescent motivation and school behaviors, (3) adolescent mental health measures, (4) adolescent perceptions of parent-school involvement/attitudes, and (5) parent reports of school involvement/attitudes. All of these constructs, including items and reliabilities are included in an extended appendix attached to the paper. Because of the sheer number of scales, only a brief overview is provided here (please refer to Appendix). In general, the measures were reliable ($\alpha \geq .60$). Exceptions to this criterion of reliability include adolescent reports of the affect they experience when they work with their parents, and a scale that assesses the amount of contact the parent had with the school during the last year. These reliabilities fell in the .58 range (see Appendix).

Demographic measures include mean family income before taxes, ethnic background (African-American vs. European American for this study), and gender. The measures of academic motivation include indices of self-concept of academic ability, academic liking and importance, and feelings of belonging in school (single item). School behavioral measures include adolescents' self-report of their grades, and parent and child reports of school problems including skipping classes, suspension, and failing a class. Mental health measures include adolescents' self-reports of self-esteem, resiliency, depressive symptomatology, and feelings of anger.

The parent involvement measures are drawn from surveys and interviews with both the adolescent and their parent. Adolescent reports include perceptions of the importance their parent attaches to school, the educational expectations and aspirations the parent has for the child, the frequency of parent help, existence of school rules by the parents, and the affect the child experiences when doing on school work with the parent. Parent reports include the values they attach to education, expectations they have concerning their child's educational future, beliefs regarding involvement in their child's middle school life, and actual involvement behaviors. Finally, parents perceptions of the climate and quality of middle school their child was attending were also examined in this study.

Creating Academic Alienation Groups

To create the "Academic Alienation" groups, a composite scale was created from three existing measures: attitudes toward school (e.g. liking), school disengagement (e.g. boring, waste of time), and the adolescent's sense of school subjects as important. In addition, a "School

Problems" scales was created to further differentiate those students who were psychologically disengaged from those who were psychologically disengaged and showing behavioral problems. The school problems scale was a sum of both adolescent and parent reports of the child being suspended or expelled in the last year, and the child failing a class within the last two years.

For the first series of analyses that examined the relationships between motivation and mental health variables, three groups were created. First, groups were created by taking the upper and lower quartiles of the psychological alienation scale. Next, within the high psychological alienation group, we differentiated those with at least one suspension/expulsion and one class failure, from those who did not report having both of these experiences. The groups that are presented in Tables 1 and 2, and Graphs 1-3 are described below:

Group 1 (N=342) - Low psychological alienation from school, few school problems

Group 2 (N=306) - High psychological alienation from school, some school problems

Group 3 (N=61) - High psychological alienation from school, school problems

Analysis Procedure

To assess differences in motivation, mental health and family experience of more or less academically alienated adolescents, two main sets of analysis were conducted. First, we examined differences among the three groups outline above on demographic, motivational, and mental health measures using chi-square and analysis of variance techniques (ANOVA). These results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Next, we looked at differences in adolescents' and parents reports of home involvement. In these analyses, we collapsed together the two disengaged groups of students ("some school problems" and "school problems"), all of whom reported high levels of academic disengagement. These groups are described below:

Group 1 (N=342) - Low psychological alienation from school, Lower 25%

Group 2 (N=367) - High psychological alienation from school, Upper 25%

For these analyses, two group t-tests were used to assess differences between "Low" and "High" academic alienation adolescents. All of the variables presented in this section were entered into analysis of variance techniques to examine group, race, and gender main effects and interactions. Because few significant interactions of group by race, gender, or race and gender emerged, only the t-test results are presented here in Tables 3 and 4. Exceptions are noted in the results section.

Results

Demographic Variables by Alienation Groups

Table 1 shows the gender and racial composition of each of the three alienation groups, as well as the mean family income before taxes of the parents of students in each group. There is no significant effect of mean pre-tax income level by group. There are significant gender and race differences, as well as a significant three-way interaction of gender by race by group membership. First, boys are over-represented in Group 3, high psychological alienation and school problems (75%). Second, both European-American boys and girls are over-represented in Group 2 (high alienation-some school problems), and under-represented in Group 1 (low alienation-few school problems).

Academic Motivation and Mental Health Variables by Alienation Groups

Table 2 shows the three-group comparisons for the academic motivation, school problems, and mental health measures. In addition, a parent report of how worried the parent was about the child's motivation, cutting school, adjustment to junior high, and academic performance was included to validate the three-group distinctions². The results are also presented in Graphs 1 to 3 in the Appendix.

In looking first at the results for the motivation and achievement variables, the results show that the students who are academically alienated are also more negative in their assessments of their academic competence, the importance they attach to school, feelings of belonging in school (single item), and the grades they receive. Furthermore, adolescents who have been suspended and failed in the past are differentiated from those alienated students who don't also show these behavioral problems by grades, academic self-concept, and parent concern. Members of this third group, which is mainly comprised of equal proportions of African and European-American boys, report the lowest grades, the lowest academic self-concepts, and their parents are much more concerned about their well-being than parents in the other group.

In looking at the school behaviors by group membership, Graph 2 shows the proportions of students reporting a yes response to items about skipping of classes, being suspended or expelled, and failing a class in the last 2 years. It should be noted that the latter two scales were used to create differentiate the "School Problems" group (Group 3). Both groups of alienated students were more likely to report at least some cutting of classes and academic failure than the non-alienated students. The "school problems" group, by definition, had a significantly higher incidence of at least one suspension/expulsion than the other two groups.

² A significant interaction of group membership and gender occurred on this variable. ($F=9.12$, $df=3,645$ - $p=.003$). Parents of boys in the high alienation group were more worried than parents of any other students. Boys were significantly over-represented in this group.

Finally, Graph 3 shows the group differences on adolescents' self-reports of four indices of mental health. Again, the psychologically alienated groups score more negatively on these measures (e.g. higher depression and anger, lower self-esteem and resilience) than the non-alienated students. Additionally, the alienated students who also evidence school problems report more anger than either of the other two groups.

Adolescent Perceptions of the Home by Alienation Groups

As mentioned above, for the final series of analyses students were divided into two groups only, those in the upper and lower quartiles of the "Psychological Disengagement" scale. Table 3 and Graphs 4-5 show the results for adolescents' perceptions of their parent's academic beliefs, the availability of school help and support, and the affect they experience when working with their parent on school work. Overall, alienated students reported a more negative psychological environment related to school in their homes, and less opportunities to work with and receive support from their parents. While significant results emerged on the perceptions of parent belief measures, and the alienated students did perceive lower expectations and aspirations, and less importance attached to education by their parents, for both groups students attributed very positive beliefs concerning education to their parents. However, the alienated students also report less frequent interactions with their primary and secondary care-givers around school work, less parent management concerning school and good performance, and fewer opportunities where the parent provided support for problems the adolescent experienced in school. Finally, more negative affect and less positive affect was reported by the alienated students concerning their parent's involvement in their schooling.

Parent Reports of School Involvement by Alienation Group of Their Adolescent

In turning to parent reports concerning their beliefs and behaviors regarding their child's education, fewer significant differences emerged than in the previous analyses. Table 4 shows the t-test results. Parents of the alienated students show a statistically significant difference in their valuing and aspirations for their child, which are less positive. However, these more "negative" attitudes are very small, and the value attached to schooling and level of educational attainment expected and wished for adolescents in both groups is quite high. For instance, parents of adolescents in both of these groups expect and wish for their children to obtain at least a two-year professional degree, if not a master's degree. Again, however, parents of the academically alienated students are more worried about their child's education and behavior.

In looking at parent beliefs about school involvement, and the reasons they report for not being more involved in their adolescents' education, few differences emerge. In fact, parents of the alienated students do not report that lack of efficacy or interest keeps them from helping any

more than the parents of the non-alienated adolescents. In terms of actual involvement in the child's school, no differences between the two groups exist. Finally, parents of the alienated group of students do report more frequent contacts with the school in the last several years, perhaps due to parent-teacher conferences concerning grades and/or behavior³.

Parent and Adolescent Perceptions of the Middle School

Finally, Tables 4 and 5, and Graph 6 show differences among the two groups for both adolescent and parent perceptions of the school. Adolescents who are academically alienated report significantly more negative views of their schools' quality, their teacher relationships and the expectations held for them to achieve, and the availability of adult support in their school. Parents of these students have less favorable views of the school also, being less satisfied with its overall quality, the interpersonal climate for students, and the accessibility of the staff.

Discussion

Motivation and Mental Health

Overall, these results provide a broad, descriptive portrait of the kinds of variables that are related to academic alienation in early adolescence. The results of this study suggest substantial co-occurrence of difficulties in school and difficulties in personal adjustment. Although our cross-sectional data does allow us to make statements regarding the causal nature of the relations among motivation and mental health, two potential explanations seem plausible. First, because adolescence is known to be a time of increased psychological difficulties for some students (e.g. Kazdin, 1993), issues of mental health (depression, low self-worth, low resourcefulness) may impact school performance and motivation. Conversely, a student who continually experiences school failure, lack of reinforcement, and subsequent negative feelings of competence may eventually become depressed, show low self-worth, or act out (e.g. Cole, 1991; Gold & Mann, 1985). It could be that, as Deci and his colleagues (1991) suggest, when the basic needs for competence and feelings of belonging (relatedness) are not met in the context of schooling, especially during this developmental time, personal adjustment suffers. The negative perceptions of support and expectations for success in school that alienated students report point in the direction of an environment that serves to alienate these students (e.g. Finn, 1989). It is interesting to note that socio-economic status was not found to be significantly related to alienation status, and the European-American students were over-represented in the high alienation groups. Further investigation into why this might be the case is on-going.

³ A significant interaction of group membership by gender occurred on this variable ($F=7.98$, $df=3,647$ - $p=.005$). Parents of boys in the high alienation group reported the most frequent amount of contact with the school last year.

Home Experiences and School Experiences

Adolescents who were academically disengaged also reported a more negative home and school environment. The amount of support and academic helping time available in the home, and feelings associated with receiving help from parents were seen as more negative by the alienated adolescents. This is particularly troublesome given the fact that parent support is known to decline at this time, and known to be important to an adolescents' continuing achievement (e.g. Epstein, 1989). The students who seem to most need support and parent help, those who are alienated, report less support and encouragement in both the home and the school context. It seems likely that this lack of adult support serves to further the alienation.

The parent involvement results need to be approached with caution, for two reasons. First, parents of alienated and non-alienated students do not reporting different amounts of actual involvement in their child's school, different reasons for not being more involved, or expectations or aspirations concerning their child's education. Alienated adolescents do report less involvement and support, however. This may be because we did not ask the adolescent and parents parallel measures concerning the quality of help in the home, or because parents and alienated adolescents' view these opportunities differently. At this point, we can only say that alienated adolescents perceive their homes as less supportive of education, while their parents do not. This might be a cause of problems as well. We are currently examining the predictive relationships among these variables.

Future Directions

To expand on this descriptive study, we plan to examine more closely the role of specific features of the home and school environment in their impact on motivational and mental health variables. For instance, we will use measures that assess the "fit" of the students' school culture with their needs, and assess how well this "fit" influences outcomes in the child. Also, we are in the process of preparing follow-up data from the students 8th grade year, so we will be able to assess the influence of home and school environments on these outcomes, taking into account prior levels of motivation and mental health.

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Table 1
Demographics by Group Membership

Descriptive Variables	Low Psychological Alienation from School		High Psychological Alienation from School		Significance
	Few School Problems Group 1 (N=342)	Some School Problems Group 2 (N=306)	Some School Problems Group 3 (N=61)	School Problems	
Demographics¹					
Girls	196 (57%)	146 (48%)	16 (26%)		χ^2 (df=2)=21.67***
Boys	146 (43%)	160 (52%)	45 (74%)		
Blacks	234 (74%)	171 (58%)	39 (66%)		χ^2 (df=2)=17.22***
Whites	82 (26%)	123 (42%)	20 (34%)		
Mean Family Income Before Taxes (See comments below)	10.37	10.48	9.33		F(2,671)=1.78

Note. Total N =709, including 358 girls, 351 boys, and 444 African Americans, 225 Caucasians, 40 students of mixed ethnic background not included here.

¹ Numbers represent the count of boys, girls, blacks or whites in each group, while numbers in parentheses represent the percentage of boys, girls, blacks or whites within a particular group. There is a significant three-way interaction of group membership by gender and race. Caucasian boys and girls are overrepresented in the group 2 (psychological alienation, some school problems), and are underrepresented in group 1 (low psychological alienation) in this sample.

Mean income is an ordinal scale where 8=\$35.39,999; 9=\$40-44,999; 10=\$45-49,999; and 11=\$50-54,999. For this study there are no significant main effects by group membership or higher-order interactions between group membership and race or gender. For the whole sample (N=1482) mean income of Black families=9.50, White families=11.09 (F=43.40**).

Table 2
Group Comparisons for Motivation and Achievement, School Behaviors, and Mental Health Measures

Descriptive Variables	Low Psychological Alienation from School		High Psychological Alienation from School		Significance
	Few School Problems		School Problems		
	Group 1 (N=342)	Group 2 (N=306)	Group 2 (N=306)	Group 3 (N=61)	
Motivation and Achievement					
Academic Self-Concept	5.97 a	4.74 b	4.42 c		F(2,696)=153.59**
Academic Importance ²	6.55 a	4.26 b	4.15 b		F(2,700)=485.55**
Academic Liking ²	4.28 a	2.63 b	2.66 b		F(2,701)=700.91**
Feelings of Belonging in School	4.37 a	3.68 b	3.54 b		F(2,699)=67.85**
School is Important Now-Future	4.41 a	2.63 b	2.66 b		F(2,701)=137.37**
Grades	4.33 a	3.73 b	3.60 c		F(2,696)=61.32**
Parent's Concern About Child's Education/Performance ³	-0.22 a	0.06 b	0.87 c		F(2,694)=84.92**
School Behaviors					
Percent Skipping School	4% a	14% b	33% c		F(2,691)=28.36**
Percent Suspended from School ⁴	11% a	12% a	100% b		F(2,704)=228.65**
Percent Failing a Class ⁴	14% a	27% b	100% c		F(2,704)=131.44**
Mental Health					
Self-Worth	3.98 a	3.36 b	3.35 b		F(2,704)=55.42**
Resourcefulness	3.90 a	3.26 b	3.34 b		F(2,701)=60.35**
Depression	1.71 a	2.03 b	2.22 b		F(2,701)=23.36**
Anger	2.04 a	2.65 b	3.09 c		F(2,704)=62.77**

¹ Tukey HSD mean comparisons were used to test all possible pairs. Different superscripts for a particular variable across groups indicates a significant mean difference at the p≤.05 level for all possible pairs.

² These variables were part of the "Psychological Alienation Scale" used to designate groups, and are presented for descriptive purposes.

³ This parent report measure was used to validate the levels of academic alienation groupings. It represents a measure of parent concern about child's academic life.

⁴ These variables were part of the "School Problems Scale" used to designate groups, and are presented for descriptive purposes. *p≤.05, **p≤.01

Table 3
T-Test Comparisons : Academically Alienated vs. Non-Alienated Students.
Adolescents' Perceptions of Parent's Academic Beliefs and Involvement in School.

Descriptive Variables	Low Psychological Alienation from School	High Psychological Alienation from School	Significance
	Group 1 (N=342)	Group 2 (N=367)	
Perceptions of Parent's Academic Values/Aspirations for Him/Herself School Success is Important Expects Child to be a Good Student Educational Aspirations for Child	4.79	4.42	20.64**
	5.38	4.87	7.86**
	7.55	6.80	5.43**
Perceptions of Parents' School Help Primary Care-giver Help with School Secondary Care-giver Help with School Parent Management Strategies for Schooling Parent Support for School Problems	4.67	3.99	7.26**
	3.64	3.07	4.95**
	3.71	3.21	8.50**
	4.70	4.07	10.45**
Affective Reactions to Parents' School Help Like Parents' School Involvement Negative Affect Doing Schoolwork with Parent Positive Affect Doing Schoolwork with Parent	4.01	3.12	19.44**
	1.67	2.25	-11.70**
	3.85	2.92	15.16**

*p≤.05, **p≤.01

Table 4
T-Test Comparisons : Academically Alienated vs. Non-Alienated Students.
Parent Reports of Academic Beliefs and Involvement in School.

Descriptive Variables	Low Psychological Alienation from School Group 1 (N=342)	High Psychological Alienation from School Group 2 (N=367)	T-Value and Significance
Parent's Worry, Values and Educational Expectations*			
Parent Valuing of Education	6.74	6.49	4.68**
Parent Worry About Child's Education	-0.22	0.19	-8.53**
Level of Education Wished for Child	8.38	8.18	2.21*
Level of Education Expected of Child	7.01	6.61	3.10**
School - Involvement Beliefs			
Belief in Positive Effects of Parent Involvement	4.06	3.97	2.13*
Lack Efficacy/Interest to Help With School	1.28	1.31	-0.91
Family Matters Prevent School Involvement	1.41	1.39	0.24
Lack of Time/Energy to Get Involved	2.07	2.10	-0.51
School - Related Beliefs			
Overall Satisfaction w/ Middle School	2.44	2.34	2.70*
Perception of School's Interpersonal Climate	3.62	3.50	2.49*
Accessibility of School Staff	3.63	3.51	2.80**
School Involvement Behaviors			
Contacts with the School Last Year	2.19	2.73	-2.22*
Number of School Involvements	1.27	1.33	-0.67

*No differences in parent's education level, parent's memories of the quality of their own school experiences, or parents' recollections of their parent's educational expectations for them emerged between parents of the youth who were alienated and those of adolescents who were not alienated.

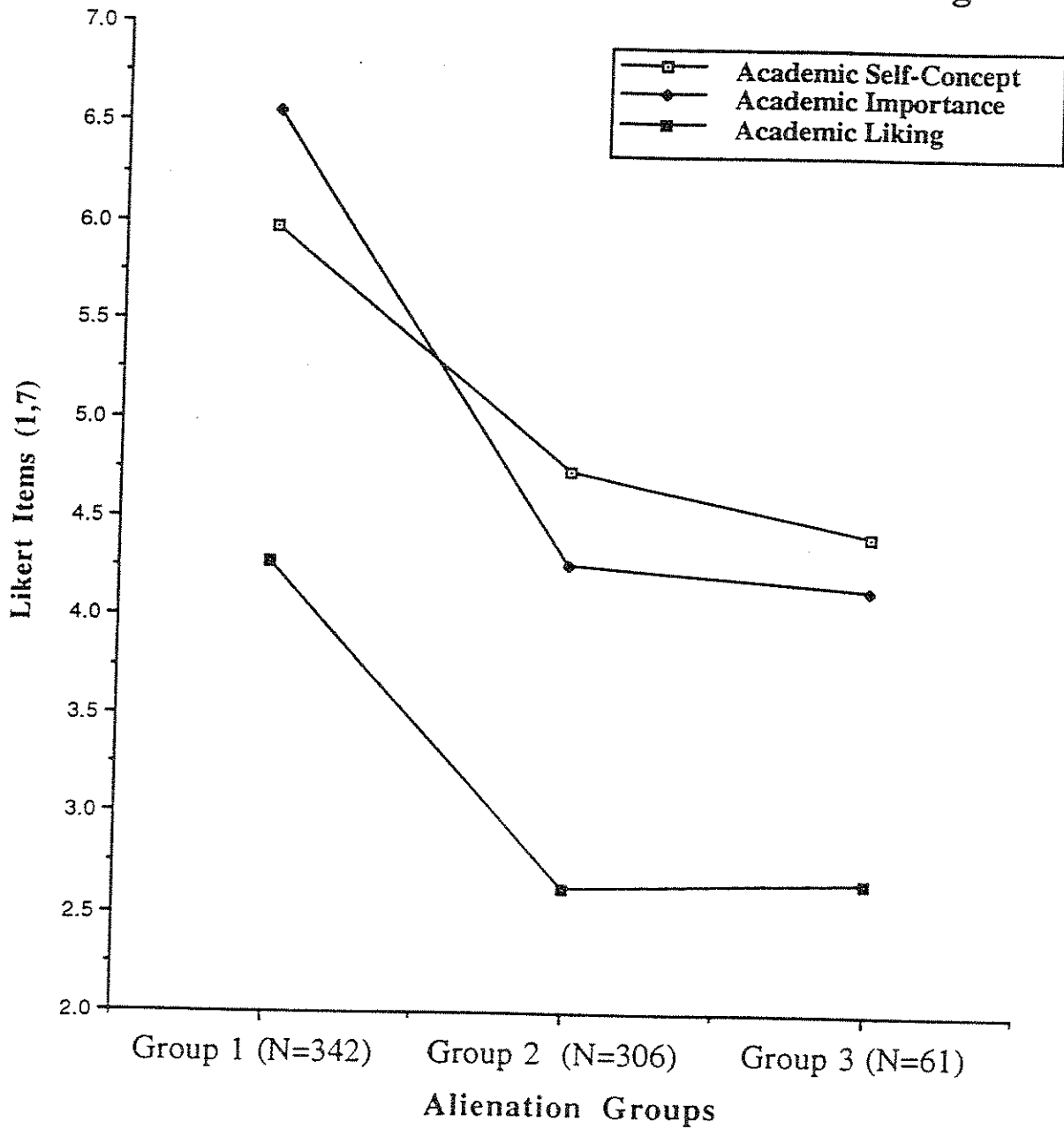
**p≤.05, **p≤.01

Table 5
T-Test Comparisons : Academically Alienated vs. Non-Alienated Students.
Adolescents' Perceptions of Their School Environment.

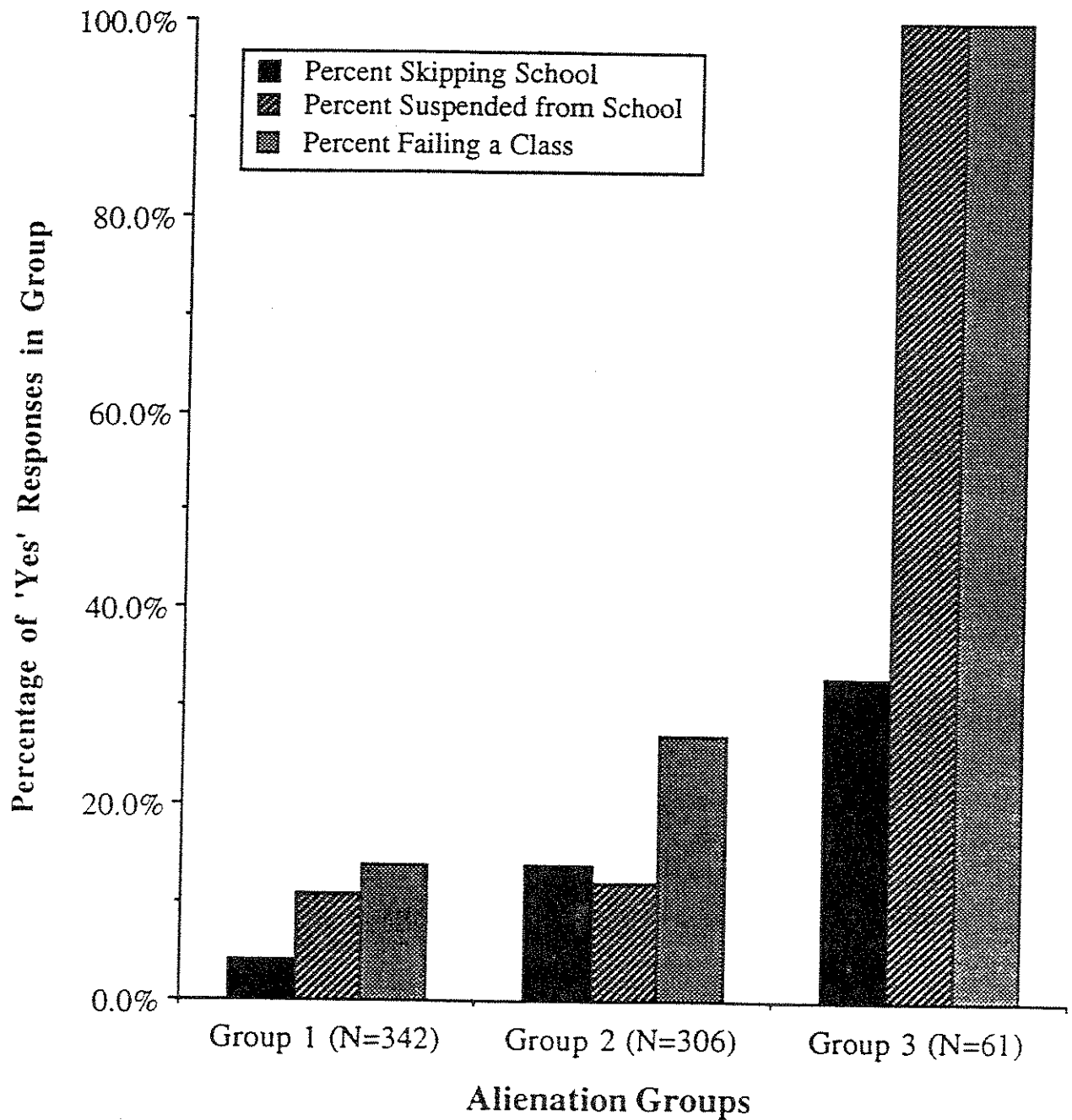
	Low Psychological Alienation from School (N=342)	High Psychological Alienation from School (N=367)	Significance
Descriptive Variables			
General School Climate/Quality	3.59	3.17	11.45**
Adult Support in the School	3.32	2.55	9.87**
Hostile Peer Climate in School	2.15	2.63	-9.36**
Teacher Relationships/Expectations	4.28	3.54	17.15**

*p≤.05, **p≤.01

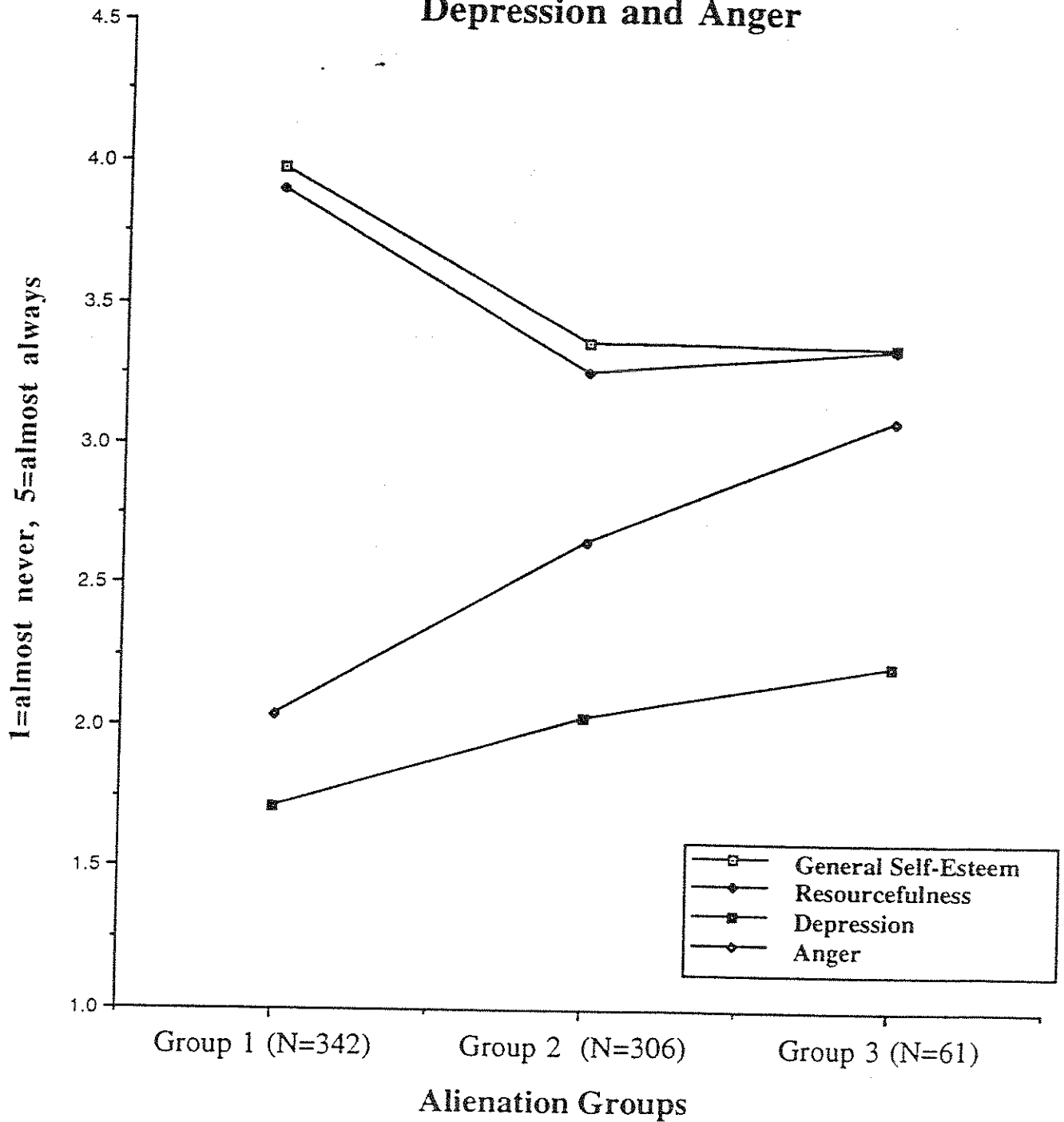
Academic Motivation Measures by Alienation Group: Self-Concept, Importance and Liking



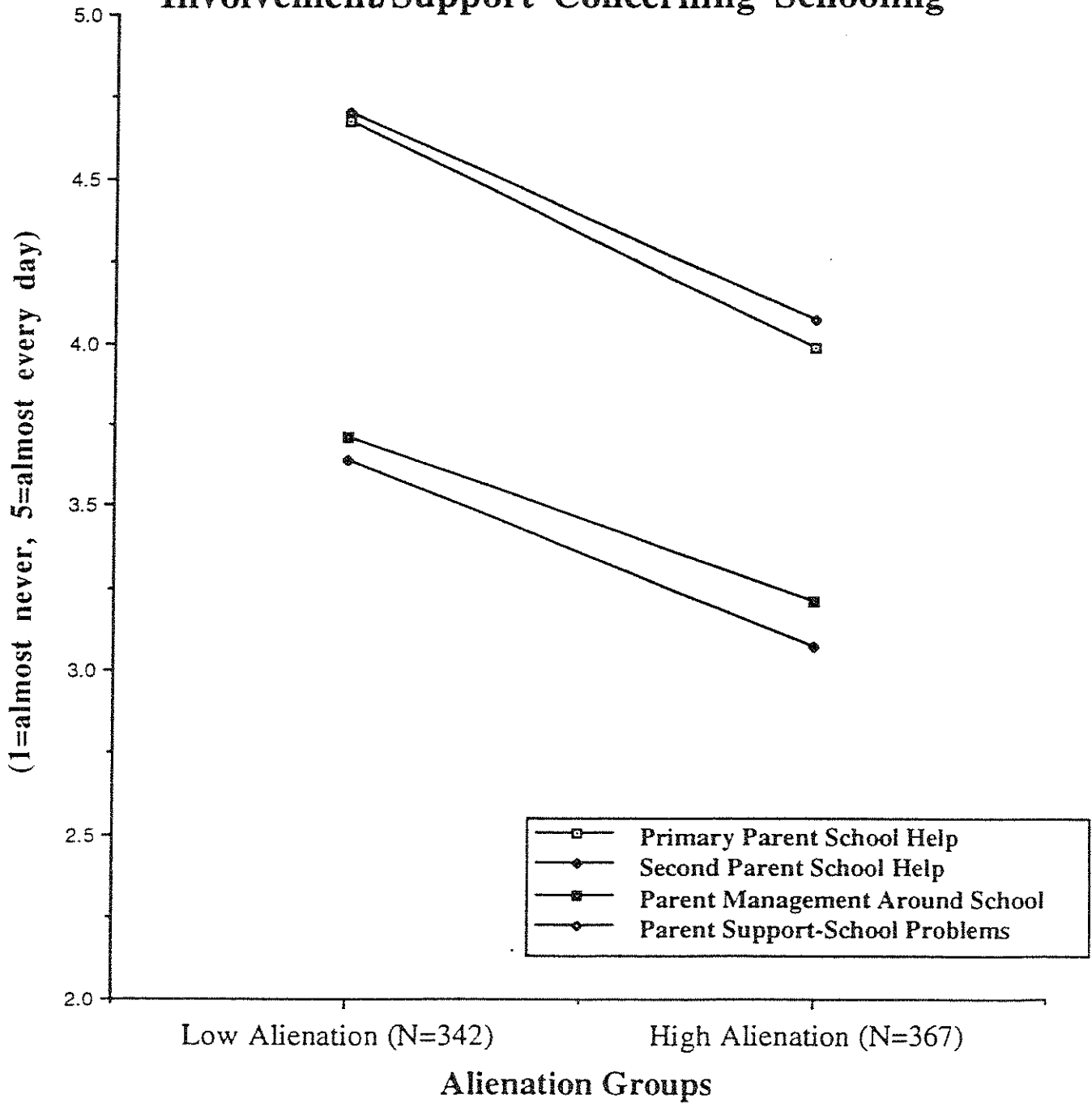
School Behaviors by Alienation Group: Skipping Class, Suspension, and Failing a Class



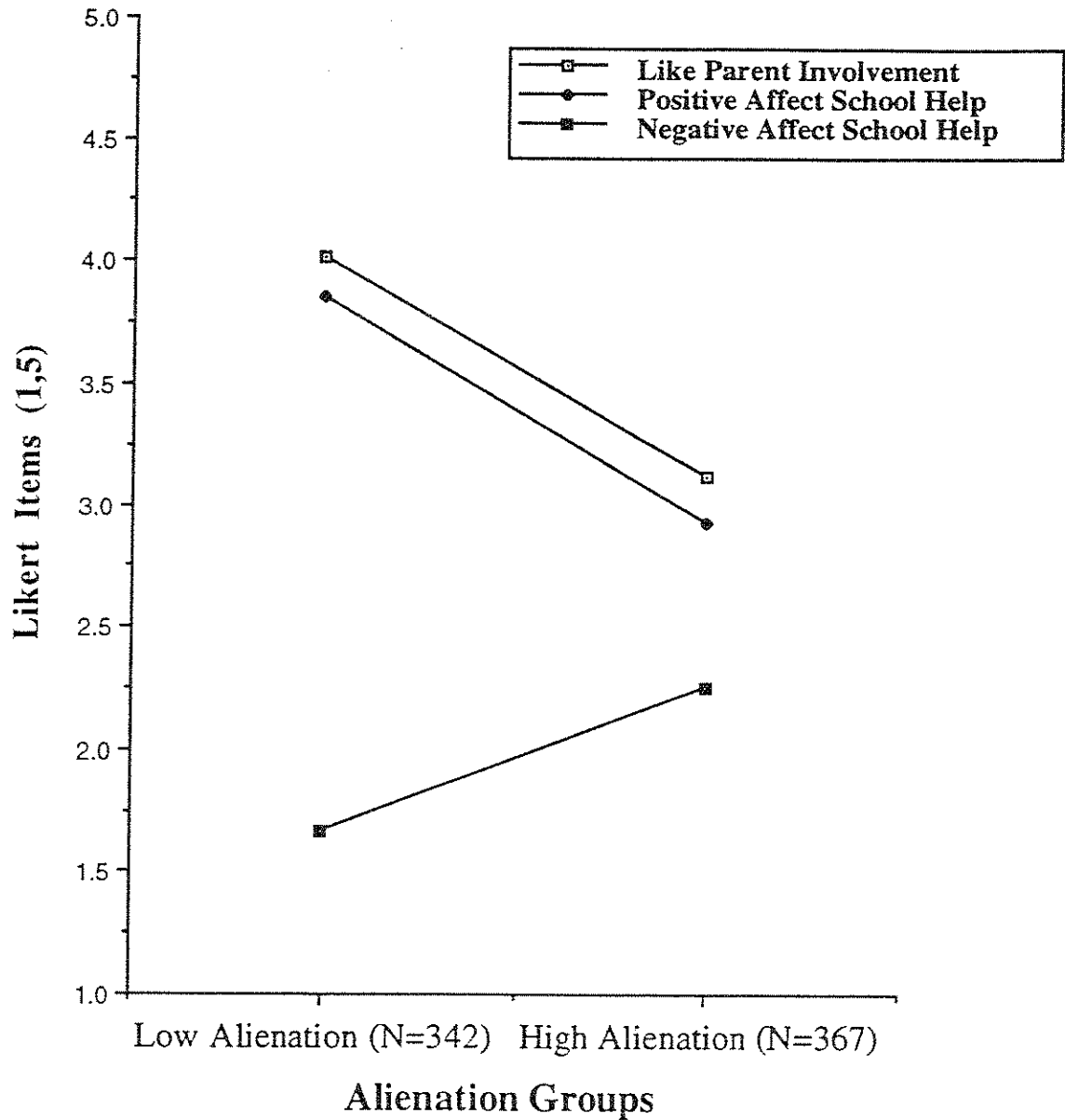
Mental Health Measures by Alienation Groups: Self-Esteem, Resourcefulness, Depression and Anger



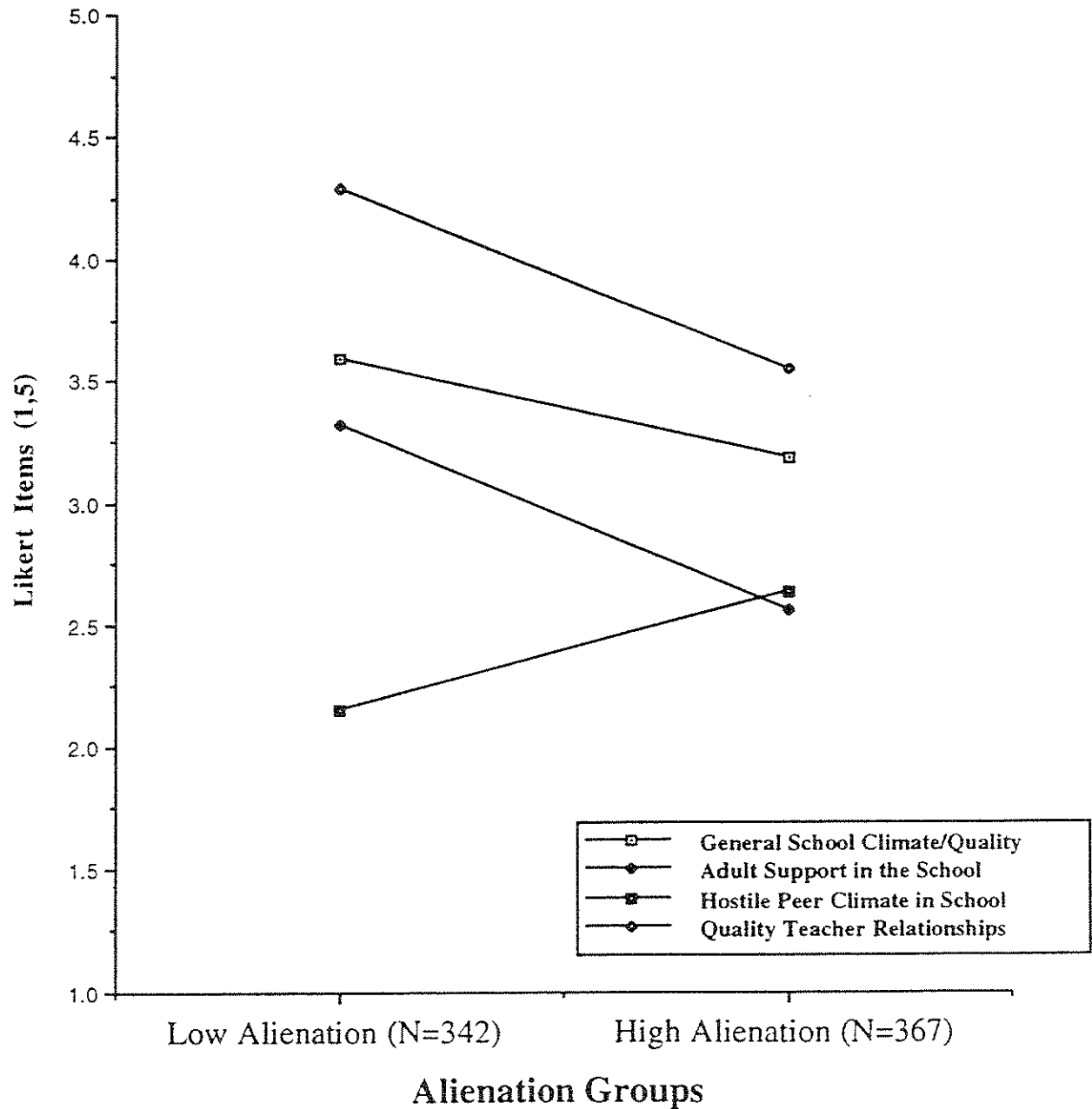
Adolescent's Perceptions of Parent Involvement/Support Concerning Schooling



Adolescent's Self-Report of Feelings Related to Parent Involvement in Their Schooling



School Perceptions by Low and High Academic Alienation: School Climate and Social Support



Appendix

Adolescent Measures - Motivation and Achievement

Academic Self-Concept

(4 items)

Alpha=.79

Compared to other kids your age, how well do you do in math? (1=much worse, 7=much better)
Compared to other kids your age, how well do you do in other school subjects? (1=much worse, 7=much better)
How good are you in math? (1=not at all good, 7=very good)
How good are you in other school subjects? (1=not at all good, 7=very good)

Academic Importance

(2 items)

Alpha=.82

Compared to other things, how important is math? (1=much less important, 7=much more important)
Compared to other things, how important are other school subjects? (1=much less important, 7=much more important)

Academic Liking

(3 items)

Alpha=.74

In general, you like school a lot? (1=strongly agree, 7=strongly disagree) REVERSED.
You look forward to going to school everyday? (1=strongly agree, 7=strongly disagree) REVERSED.
In general, I like school a lot? (1=strongly agree, 7=strongly disagree) REVERSED.

Feelings of Belonging in School

(1 item)

You don't feel as if you really belong in school (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree)

School is Important Now and in the Future

(5 items)

Alpha=.69

Schooling is not so important for kids like me. (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree).
Even if I do good in school, I still won't be able to get a good job when I grow up.
I learn more useful things from friends and relatives than I learn in school.
I have to do well in school if I want to be a success in life. REVERSED.
I have so much to do at home that I don't have time to do homework.

Grades

(1 item)

Which of the following best describes the grades you get in school on your semester report card?
(1=mostly F's, 2=Mostly D's, 3=Mostly C's, 4=Mostly B's, 5=Mostly A's)

Adolescent Measures - Motivation and Achievement

* **Composite Academic Alienation Scale** (3 Scales) *Alpha=.66*

Academic Liking Scale (see above). REVERSED-Standardized.
Academic Importance Scale (see above). REVERSED-Standardized.
Negative Attitude Towards School Scale (see below) -Standardized.

✓ **Negative Attitudes Towards School** (5 Items) *Alpha=.66*

Most of your classes or subjects are boring (Interview). (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree) REVERSED.
Most of my classes or subjects are boring (Survey). (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree) REVERSED.
Homework is a waste of time (Interview). (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree) REVERSED.
Homework is a waste of time (Survey). (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree) REVERSED.
Grades are very important to you. (Interview). (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree)

Adolescent Measures - School Behaviors

Skipping Class (0=No, 1=Yes) (1 item)

How often, if ever do you skip school or cut classes (0=never, 1=hardly ever, sometimes, often collapsed due to low frequencies) CHILD REPORT

Suspended from School (0=No, 1=Yes from either source) (2 items)

Have you ever been suspended or expelled from school? (0=no, 1=suspended only, expelled only, both suspended and expelled collapsed due to low frequencies). CHILD REPORT

Has (CHILD) been suspended, excluded, or expelled from school, or has (CHILD) cut classes in the past two school years? (0=no, 1=yes) PARENT REPORT

Failing a Class (0=No, 1=Yes) (1 item)

Has (CHILD) failed or done very poorly in a class in the past two school years? PARENT REPORT

Adolescent Measures - Mental Health

Self-Esteem

(6 items)

Alpha=.80

- How happy are you with the way you act? (1=not at all happy, 5=extremely happy)
- How happy are you with the way you look?
- How happy are you with the kind of person you are?
- How often would you like to change lots of things about you if you could? (1=almost never, 5=almost always) REVERSED
- How often do you wish you were different than you are? REVERSED
- How often are you pretty sure about yourself?

Resiliency/Resourcefulness

(4 items)

Alpha=.74

- How often are you very good at bouncing back quickly from bad experiences? (1=almost never, 5=almost always)
- How often are you very good at figuring out problems and how to solve them?
- How often are you very good at learning from your mistakes?
- How often are you very good at carrying out the plans you make for solving problems?

Depression

(6 items)

Alpha=.82

- During the last month, how often have you been depressed? (1=almost never, 5=almost always)
- During the last month, how often have you felt hopeless?
- During the last month (including today), how often have you felt lonely?
- During the last month, how often have you felt like you don't care anymore?
- During the last month, how often have you felt very sad?
- During the last month, how often have you had thoughts of ending your life?

Anger

(4 items)

Alpha=.81

- During the last month, how often have you felt so angry you wanted to smash or break something? (1=almost never, 5=almost always)
- During the last month, how often have you felt really mad at other people?
- During the last month, how often have you felt that you couldn't control your temper?
- During the last month, how often have you felt so upset you wanted to hit or hurt someone?

Adolescent Perception Measures - Home Experiences/Parent Involvement Related to School

Perception of Parent's Belief in the Importance of School Success (5 items) $\text{Alpha}=.73$

How important is it to your parent(s) that:

- You do well in school? (1=not at all important, 5=very important)
- You go to college right after high school?
- You get good grades?
- You do your homework.

Begin to plan for long-range educational or occupational goals (1=my parents don't want me to do this, 5=very, very important)

Perception of Parent's Expectations that Child will be a Good Student (1 item)

How good of a student do your parent(s) expect you to be in school? (1=one of the best, 5=one of the worst students) REVERSED

Perception of Parent's Educational Aspirations for Child (1 item)

How far do you think your parent(s) believe will go in school?

- 1=8th grade or less
- 2=9-11th grade
- 3=Graduate from high school
- 4=Post-high school, vocational training
- 5=Some college
- 6=Graduate 2 year college with associates/para-professional degree
- 7=Graduate 4 year college
- 8=Master's degree/teaching credential
- 9=MD, Law, Ph.D. or other doctoral degree

Primary Care-Giver's Help with Schoolwork (4 items) $\text{Alpha}=.79$

How often does your parent check your homework after it is completed, e.g. proofreading?

- (1=almost never, 5=almost every day)
- How often does your parent talk to you about what you are learning in school?
- How often do you talk to your parent about problems you are having in school?
- How often does your parent help you with your school work?

Secondary Care-Giver's (SCG) Help with Schoolwork (4 items) $\text{Alpha}=.85$

How often does SCG check your homework after it is completed, e.g. proofreading? (1=almost never, 5=almost every day)

- How often does SCG talk to you about what you are learning in school?
- How often do you talk to SCG about problems you are having in school?
- How often does SCG help you with your school work?

Adolescent Perception Measures - Home Experiences/Involvement Related to School (continued)

Family Management Strategies in School Domain

(6 items)

Alpha=.65

My parents try to make me do extra work if I get bad grades (1=almost never, 5=almost every day)
My parents can help me when I have trouble with math homework.
My parents know when I am having trouble with my homework.
My parents limit my privileges because of poor grades.
My parents remind me to do my homework if I forget.
My parents give me special privileges because of good grades.

Parent Support for School Problems

(2 items)

Alpha=.66

When you have a social/personal problem at school, how often can you depend on parents to help you out? (1=almost never, 5=almost every day)
When you have trouble with schoolwork, how often do you go to your parents for help?

Positive Feelings about Parents' School Involvement

(5 items)

Alpha=.69

It is embarrassing to have my parents do things at school (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree)
It's good for teachers and kids when parents are involved at my school. REVERSED
Parents just get in the way when they are involved at my school.
I often get tense or upset when my parent(s) and I work together on schoolwork at home.
I like to discuss homework or other school work with my parents. REVERSED.

Negative Affect Working with Parent on School Work

(4 items)

Alpha=.58

When your parent(s) help you with your home work, how often do you feel frustrated? (1=never, 5=always)
When your parent(s) help you with your home work, how often do you feel sort of dumb? (1=never, 5=always)
When your parent(s) help you with your home work, how often do you feel like your parent(s) expected too much from you?
When your parent(s) help you with your home work, how often do you feel like your parent(s) expected too little from you?

Positive Affect Working with Parent on School Work

(3 items)

Alpha=.58

When your parent(s) help you with your home work, how often do you feel sort of smart? (1=never, 5=always)
When your parent(s) help you with your home work, how often do you feel glad?
I enjoy working with my parent(s) on schoolwork. (1=not at all, 5=a lot)

Parent Measures - Beliefs/Involvement Related to School

Parent's Valuing of Education

(2 items)

Alpha=.85

How important is it to you that CHILD does well in school in general (1=not at all important, 7=very important)
How important is it to you that CHILD do well in math?

Parent's Worry about Child's Education/Performance

(6 items, Standardized)

Alpha=.75

How concerned are you that your 7th grader lacks sufficient initiative or motivation to get as much education as you would like him/her to have? (1=not at all concerned, 5=very concerned)
In comparison to other 7th graders, how much trouble does your 7th grader get into? (1=much less trouble, 7=much more trouble)
How well is your 7th grader adjusting to junior high school? (1=not very well, 7=very well) REVERSED
What are the chances your 7th grader will often cut school? (1=very low, 5=very high, 6=already happened)
What are the chances your 7th grader will do well in junior and senior school? (1=very low, 5=very high, 6=already happened) REVERSED
What are the chances your 7th grader will be held back in school? (1=very low, 5=very high, 6=already happened)

Level of Education Wished/Expected for Child

(1 item each)

If finances were not a problem and everything else went right, how far would you like to see (CHILD) go in school?

Things often don't go right, so how far do you think (CHILD) will actually go in school?

1=8th grade or less

2=9-11th grade

3=Graduate from high school

4=Post-high school, vocational training

5=Some college

6=Graduate 2 year college with associates/para-professional degree

7=Graduate 4 year college

8=Master's degree/teaching credential

9=MD, Law, Ph.D. or other doctoral degree

Parent Measures - Beliefs Related to School Involvement

Positive Attitude Towards School Involvement

(5 items)

Alpha=.70

When parents are actively involved in their child's school, the schools are more effective. (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree) REVERSED.

When parents are actively involved in their child's school, the school is more responsive to needs of child's ethnic group/culture. REVERSED.

Teachers should do more to help get parents involved in their school. REVERSED.

Parents should take more responsibility for getting involved in their children's school. REVERSED.

Teachers have enough to do without also having to work with parents.

Family Matters Prevent Primary Parent from Involvement w/ in School

(3 items)

Alpha=.61

How much has each of the following limited how much time you have been involved at your child's school?

I have special family problems (1=not at all, 4=a lot)

I have too many children to do things at school.

I have small children or others needing care.

Time/Energy Prevent Primary Parent from Involvement w/ School

(5 items)

Alpha=.74

How much has each of the following limited how much time you have been involved at your child's school?

I don't have the energy (1=not at all, 4=a lot)

Work.

I'm too busy.

How much has each of the following limited how much time you spend helping your 7th grader at home with his/her homework?
I don't have the energy.

Work

Helplessness/Disinterest Keep Parent from Involvement w/ School

(7 items)

Alpha=.68

How much has each of the following limited how much time you have been involved at your child's school?

Teachers/staff don't make me feel comfortable (1=not at all, 4=a lot)

I don't feel I can be of help.

I'm not interested in doing things at school.

I don't feel safe going to youth's school.

I don't think I should be involved now that my 7th grader is in junior high school.

I have no way to get to school.

I don't know enough about the subject to help.

Parent Measures - Beliefs Related to School Environment

Parent Satisfaction with Middle School

(4 items)

Alpha=.73

In general, how satisfied are you this year with:

- The interest and ability shown by teachers at (CHILD's) school? (1=not too satisfied, 3=very satisfied)
- The quality of the courses that were offered at (CHILD's) school?
- The extra-curricular and sports activities and clubs at (CHILD's) school?
- (CHILD's) safety at (his/her) school?

Parent Perception of School's Interpersonal Climate

(4 items)

Alpha=.84

At 7th grader's school:

- Teachers and staff are sensitive to the variety of backgrounds kids come from (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree) REVERSED.
- Children generally feel like they belong. REVERSED
- The staff care about the students as individuals. REVERSED
- Teachers and staff are sensitive to the special needs of junior high school kids. REVERSED

Parent Perception of Accessibility of School Staff

(6 items)

Alpha=.84

- It's easy to make appointments with the teachers and principal (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree). REVERSED
- Parents are encouraged to visit if they have special concerns about their child. REVERSED
- People with ideas different from common ones get a chance to be heard. REVERSED
- The teachers and staff work hard to get parents involved. REVERSED
- The principal understands parent's points of view. REVERSED
- The teachers understand parent's points of view. REVERSED

Parent Measures - Actual School Involvement/Contact

Previous Year's School Contacts

(3 items)

Alpha=.59

- Thinking back to the last school year, how many times, if ever, did you or your spouse:
Phone or see a teacher or other school personnel about (CHILD'S) schoolwork? (Number of times)
- Phone or see a teacher about (CHILD'S) good or bad school behavior? (Number of times)
- Attend a parent-teacher conference? (Number of times)

School Activity Involvement

(6 items, Sum Score)

Alpha=.60

- Last year, did you act as a paid school staff person, working in school as an aide...? (Yes/No)
- Last year, did you act as a school program supporter, coming to the school to assist in event....? (Yes/No)
- Last year, did you act as a classroom volunteer, volunteering in school...? (Yes/No)
- Last year, did you act as an advocate, meeting with school official...? (Yes/No)
- Last year, did you act as a decision maker, being on an advisory board...? (Yes/No)
- Last year, did you act as a policy maker, evaluator determining discipline...? (Yes/No)

Adolescent Perception Measures - School Climate/Experiences

School Climate/Quality

(8 items)

Alpha=.74

At the school I go to now, all the kids are expected to do well in their work (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

At the school I go to now, the academic program is very good.

At the school I go to now, there is good discipline.

At the school I go to now, the kids generally feel like they belong.

At the school I go to now, the principal and the teachers generally do not encourage kids like they should. REVERSED.

I would recommend to other kids that they go to my school.

At the school I go to now, the staff cares about students as individuals.

Adult Support Available in School

(3 items)

Alpha=.80

When you have a personal problem, how often can you depend on other adults in school to help you out? (1=almost never, 5=almost always).

When you have a personal problem, how often can you depend on the principal or assistant principal to help you out?

When you have a personal problem, how often can you depend on your teachers to help you out?

Hostile Peer Climate at School

(3 items)

Alpha=.50

It's easy to make friends at this school (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree).

You do not feel safe at school (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree) REVERSED.

At the school I go to now, the students are not very friendly.

Teacher Expectations/Relationships

(3 items)

Alpha=.70

You get along well with your teachers (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree) REVERSED.

Your teachers think you are a good student.

At the school I go to now, my teachers think I am a good student.