

How is participation in extracurricular activities in middle adolescence related to later perceived social status?

Poster presentation accepted for SRA (April 2002)

Margaret K. Vernon

Recent research on adolescent involvement in extracurricular activities suggests that participation in structured after school activities is a predictor of many positive academic outcomes, including increased GPA, higher educational attainment, and increased liking of school (Eccles and Barber, 1999; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Zaff, 2001). In addition, participation in school based extracurricular activities in high school has been associated with lower rates of early school drop out for students who are labeled as "at risk" for academic failure (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). One explanation for these findings is the hypothesis that participation in school based extracurricular activities may foster positive peer relationships and raise an individuals' status among his or her peers (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997).

Although previous research has clearly shown a positive relationship between extracurricular involvement and academic outcomes and the particular relationships have depended on the type of activity (e.g., Eccles & Barber, 1999), less is known about the processes underlying these relationships. The goal of the study reported here was to empirically test the Mahoney & Cairns hypothesis that extracurricular involvement helps to foster positive peer relationships and feelings of popularity and confidence within one's peer group. Due to earlier work indicating that behavioral outcomes may depend on the type of extracurricular activity, several types of activities were compared. A latent change model was used to test the predictive value of activity involvement in tenth grade on feelings of social confidence and popularity with ones' peers in eleventh grade. The types of involvement in extracurricular activities that were compared include organized sports involvement, school club/organization involvement, and community service or volunteering involvement.

Method. This study used longitudinal data from the Childhood and Beyond (CAB) study. The data set has a cohort sequential design and was collected within the greater metropolitan area of a large Midwestern city. Data from 164 students who were in 10th and 11th grades during 1996 and 1997 were included. Students filled out questionnaires during school time. .

Self-perceived social status and peer popularity were assessed while the students were in tenth and eleventh grades, with three scales: the social worries scale (e.g., , "How worried are you about not being good looking"); the social self concept of ability scale (e.g., "How popular are you with boys/girls"), and the social affect scale (e.g., "How often do you feel good about yourself while you are with your friends"). All scales contained 3-4 items and alphas ranged between .60 and .80. Activity involvement was assessed by simply asking students "Do you participate in any organized sports during the year (or school clubs, etc.)". Students responded yes or no and proceeded to name the activities they were involved in if they answered in the affirmative.

Results and Discussion. A latent change structural equation model with covariates was used to conduct the analyses (see Figure 1), and a multiple indicator

approach was used to define the latent constructs corresponding to perceived social status at year one (when adolescents were in 10th grade), and at year two (when adolescents were in 11th grade). As can be seen in figure 1, participation in activities during 10th grade was expected to predict an increase in perception of perceived social status during 11th grade. Missing data estimation was handled by the first information maximum likelihood routine in AMOS 4. The model was fit to the covariance matrix.

The relative fit indices indicated that the model with covariates acceptably fit the data (NFI=0.970, CFI=0.982, RMSEA=0.119) and the chi-square goodness of fit test was significant (chi-square=65.20, df=27, p<.001). The covariate model shows participation in sports predicts an increase in perception of social status from tenth to eleventh grade (b=.160, p<.05). Participation in school clubs and participation in volunteering activities does not predict an increase in perceptions of social status from grade 10 to 11. These findings are important because they support the Mahoney & Cairns (1997) hypothesis that participation in extracurricular activities may increase one's status with peers; however, they refine that perspective by indicating that it is not participation per se that matters, but participation in particular types of activities. This finding supports the earlier work of Barber and Eccles (1997). The fact that participation in sports, but not other activities, accounts for some of the increase in self-perceived status suggests that the prestige of the extracurricular activity may play a critical role in adolescents' beliefs about the social value of involvement in particular activities.

Figure 1: Model with covariates

Reference.

Eccles, Jacquelynne S., & Barber, Bonnie L. (1999). Student council, volunteering, basketball, or marching band: What kind of extracurricular involvement matters? *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 14(1), 10-43

Mahoney, J. L., & Cairns, R. B. (1997). Do extracurricular activities protect against early school drop out? *Developmental Psychology*, 33(2), 241-253.

Zaff, Jonathan F., Moore, Kristen, A., Papillo, Angela, R., & Williams, Stephanie. (2001). Implications of extracurricular activity participation. Presented at the 2001 biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development. Minneapolis, MN.