Sense of School Belonging and Coping Self-Efficacy Among At-Risk Youth

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Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

- Ecological systems theory proposes that personal, social, and environmental contexts interact in the process of one's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).
- Social support and positive self-perception are key elements for healthy adolescent development (Bandura et al., 1999).
- A sense of school belonging is positively related to motivation, effort, and achievement (Resnick et al., 1997).
- Coping self-efficacy mediates the effect of environmental stressors on psychological distress (Prelow et al., 2006).
- Biological, cognitive, and social developmental factors influence the coping process (Campas et al., 2001).
- Higher level of family support leads to positive outcomes (Amato & Keith, 1991).
- Students attending alternative schools face various challenges that may make coping difficult (Zweig, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

- ❖ To investigate the relationship between at-risk students' coping self-efficacy and sense of school belonging.
- ❖ To examine whether coping self-efficacy and sense of school membership differ as a function of students' home family structure.

Method

Participants were 121 students in Grades 7 - 12 attending an alternative school in the Southeastern U.S.

Participants completed a paper survey in the Fall semester of 2014. According to self-report, students were:
- 37.5% girls (M_{age} = 16.87, *SD* = 1.44) and 62.5% boys (M_{age} = 16.69, *SD* = 1.73)
- 67.8 % Caucasian, 19.1% African American, 3.5 % Hispanic, and 9.6% other ethnicities (5 students not reporting)

Measures
- Coping Self-Efficacy Scale (Chesney et al., 2006)
  - 13 items (e.g., "When things aren't going well for you, how confident are you that you can … keep from getting down in the dumps.?" "… keep from feeling sad?")
  - Six-point scale from 1 (*definitely false*) to 6 (*definitely true*)
  - 3 factors measuring perceived efficacy related to
    - o problem-focused coping,
    - o emotion-focused coping (i.e., stopping unpleasant emotions and thoughts), and
    - o social support coping (i.e., enlisting support from friends and family).

Measures (continued)
- Family environment
  - One item: "Which best describes your home environment? (a) two parents, (b) single parent, (c) parent and a stepparent, (d) other relatives, (e) other"
  - Responses coded dichotomously as:
    - o Two parent: two parents or parent and stepparent (*n* = 59)
    - o Non-intact: single parent, relatives, and other (*n* = 62)
- Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993)
  - 18 items (e.g., "I feel like a part of my school"; "I feel proud to belong to my school.")
  - Six-point scale from 1 (*definitely false*) to 6 (*definitely true*)

Analyses

- Pearson's correlations were calculated to examine the relationship between coping self-efficacy and sense of school belonging.
- Independent *t* tests were conducted to determine whether students' coping self-efficacy or sense of school belonging differ by family structure.
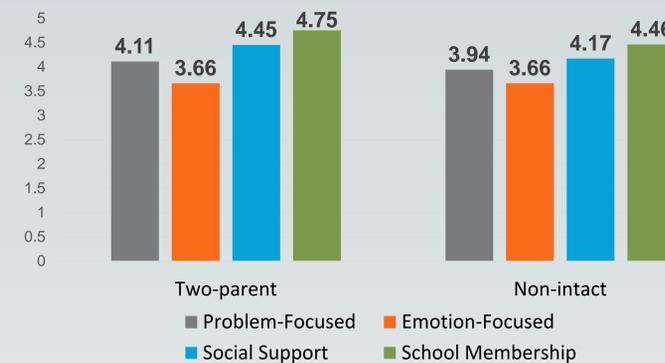
Results

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations for Coping Self-Efficacy and Sense of School Belonging

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3
1. Problem-focused coping SE	4.02	.28			
2. Emotion-focused coping SE	3.66	1.56	.81*		
3. Social support coping SE	4.30	1.40	.65*	.59*	
4. School belonging	4.60	.89	.50*	.49*	.55*

Note. SE = Self-Efficacy; *N* = 121; *p* < .01

Figure 1
Means Levels of Coping Self-Efficacy and Sense of School Belonging by Family Structure

Two-parent: Problem-Focused 4.11, Emotion-Focused 3.66, Social Support 4.45, School Membership 4.75
Non-intact: Problem-Focused 3.94, Emotion-Focused 3.66, Social Support 4.17, School Membership 4.46

- Problem-Focused
- Emotion-Focused
- Social Support
- School Membership

Key Findings and Future Research

- At-risk students' coping self-efficacy was positively correlated with their sense of school belonging.
- Regardless of their home family structure, students reported similar levels of coping self-efficacy and school belonging.
- The results of this study add to previous research on the relationship between coping self-efficacy and a sense of school belonging with at-risk youth.
- The results of this study might help educators design programs focused on increasing at-risk students' coping self-efficacy and sense of school belonging.
- Future research should compare the level of coping self-efficacy and sense of school belonging reported by students from traditional schools and alternative schools.

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