

CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOLESCENTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH SIGNIFICANT
NON-PARENTAL ADULTS

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the characteristics (age differences, sex differences, kinship status, role) of significant non-parental adult and adolescent dyads and to determine how relationship configurations are associated with adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. Using a sample of grade 12 students ($N = 192$), age and sex similarities and differences between adolescents and significant adults were examined as well as kinship status and role configurations between the dyads. Findings indicate that a substantial number of the adolescents identified a significant non-parental adult in their lives. Reports of significant adults were strongly differentiated along gender lines; male and female adolescents were both more likely to report significant non-parental adult who were the same sex as them as opposed to significant adults of the opposite sex.

Adolescents who reported kin or non-role specific significant adults had higher levels of social maturity than adolescents who identified non-kin or role-specific significant adults. Adolescents who identified role-specific significant non-parental adults had lower levels of problem behaviors than adolescents who reported non-role-specific significant adults. Importance of the significant non-parental adults was not associated with any of the psychosocial adjustment indicators. It would seem that the presence of significant non-parental adults in adolescents' lives might be beneficial to the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents if the adults are kin. Both role types (specific and non-specific) may benefit adolescents but in varying ways.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
List of Tables.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Background Literature	
Theoretical Framework.....	2
Significant non-parental relationships.....	5
Hypotheses and Research Questions.....	11
Method	
Sample.....	12
Procedures.....	14
Measures.....	14
Results.....	17
Discussion.....	48
References.....	56

List of Tables

Table 1	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Identification of a Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Self Reliance.....	19
Table 2	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Identification of a Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Self Identity.....	19
Table 3	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Identification of a Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Depressive Symptoms.....	20
Table 4	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Identification of a Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Social Maturity.....	21
Table 5	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Identification of a Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Problem Behavior.....	22
Table 6	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship of Role and Non-Role Specific Relationships of Adolescents and Significant Non-Parental Adults and Adolescent Self Reliance.....	24
Table 7	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship of Role and Non-Role Specific Relationships of Adolescents and Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Self Identity.....	25
Table 8	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship of Role and Non-Role Specific Relationships of Adolescents and Significant Non-Parental Adults and Adolescent Depressive Symptoms.....	26
Table 9	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship of Role and Non-Role Specific Relationships of Adolescents and Significant Non-Parental Adults and Adolescent Social Maturity.....	27
Table 10	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship of Role and Non-Role Specific Relationships of Adolescents and Significant Non-Parental Adults and Adolescent Problem Behavior.....	28

Table 11	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Kinship Status and Adolescent Self Reliance.....	29
Table 12	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Kinship Status and Adolescent Self Identity.....	30
Table 13	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Kinship Status and Adolescent Depressive Symptoms.....	30
Table 14	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Kinship Status and Adolescent Social Maturity	31
Table 15	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Kinship Status and Adolescent Problem Behavior.....	31
Table 16	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Self Reliance.....	33
Table 17	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Self Identity.....	33
Table 18	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Depressive Symptoms.....	34
Table 19	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Social Maturity.....	35
Table 20	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Problem Behavior.....	36
Table 21	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age and Sex Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Self Reliance.....	39

Table 22	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age and Sex Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Self Identity.....	40
Table 23	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age and Sex Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Depressive Symptoms.....	41
Table 24	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age and Sex Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Social Maturity.....	42
Table 25	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age and Sex Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Problem Behavior.....	43
Table 26	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Importance of Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Self Reliance.....	45
Table 27	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Importance of Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Self Identity.....	45
Table 28	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Importance of Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Depressive Symptoms.....	46
Table 29	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Importance of Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Social Maturity	47
Table 30	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Importance of Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Problem Behavior	48

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Characteristics of Adolescents' Relationships with Significant Non-Parental Adults

As adolescents mature and begin to take on the social roles associated with adulthood they may look to adults in their social networks to assist with this transition (Darling, Hamilton, & Niego, 1994). Some of the adults in adolescents' lives will become more important than others (Rosenberg, 1973). The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not certain characteristics of relationships between adolescents and significant adults are more or less beneficial to adolescents' psychological and social adjustment. Psychosocial adjustment refers to a constellation of related positive attitudes and behaviours that signal healthy psychological and social skills (Donahue & Benson, 1995). While a large body of research focuses on the benefit and importance of the adolescent-parent relationship (Galbo, 1984; Hurrelmann, 1990, Hamilton & Darling, 1996) less research has focused on the informal relationships that adolescents have with significant non-parental adults and the benefits these relationships may accrue (Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998).

The extant literature on adolescents and significant non-parental adults has tended to focus on either the demographic features of adolescents or significant adults (Blyth, Hill & Thiel, 1982) or the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents (Garmezy, 1983, Rutter, 1987). There is little empirical literature linking the demographic characteristics of the dyad to adolescents' psychosocial adjustment.

An additional weakness in the current literature has been the use of putative relationships (Hurrelmann, 1990). Rather than allowing adolescents to identify the important adults in their lives, researchers have assumed that adults in certain proscribed roles will elicit perceptions of importance from adolescents. The benefit of asking

adolescents which adults they perceive as important allows this study to extend beyond the configurations that researchers deem as important and see more clearly the perspective of the adolescent participants.

The purpose of this research is to explore the characteristics (age differences, sex differences, kinship status, role) of significant non-parental adult and adolescent dyads and to determine how relationship configurations are associated with adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. By linking demographic configurations and adolescent psychosocial adjustment, researchers and practitioners gain insight into the types of relationships that may be most beneficial to adolescents.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

Symbolic interactionism has provided an historic framework through which to view the importance of relationships on individual's perceptions of themselves and the world around them. Central to this theory is the idea that it is through interactions that societies and individuals derive a sense of meaning and identity (Stryker, 1967).

Rosenberg (1973) found that it is the perceptions of what individuals think others think of them that shapes their sense of self rather than the actual perceptions of the significant others. Although an individual cannot know the true perceptions of others, there are attempts to see oneself as others do and thus ascribe meaning to oneself based on these perceived evaluations. This reflexive process highlights the importance of significant adults on adolescents' socialization. Adolescents may construct their self-concepts based on their perceptions of the feedback they receive from important adults.

Although more than one adult may contribute to the cognitive and/or social development opportunities of adolescents, not all of these adults will become significant to adolescents. Early research by Sherif and Sherif (1964) revealed that adolescents are eager to prove themselves to “people who count” (p. 68). Adolescents do not view non-parental adults as equally significant (Rosenberg, 1973). More specifically, Stryker (1967) had this to say:

“This concept [significant other] represents the recognition that, in a fragmented and differentiated world, not all the persons with whom one interacts have identical or even compatible perspectives, and that, therefore, in order for action to proceed, the individual must give greater weight or priority to the perspectives of certain others. To speak, then, of significant others is to say that given others occupy high rank on an “importance” continuum for a given individual” (p. 377)

Adolescents filter the information they receive about themselves based on the importance they ascribe to an adult sending the message. Adults may channel messages through language or behavior towards adolescents. Cooley’s (1922) “looking glass self” concept focuses on how individuals are able to see themselves metaphorically in the reflections of others. These reflections could be verbal acknowledgement or eye contact. Josselson (1994) found that one of the ways that adolescents interpret messages from others in the interpersonal world is through eye-to-eye validation.

“The adolescent is preoccupied with how he or she is seen, discovering in others a mirror of the self. Exquisitely sensitive to his or her image, the adolescent self is always playing to an audience. The adolescent is a data collector of others’ reaction, doing research on who he or she is to

others.” (Josselson, 1994. p. 94).

From the information they receive from adults, adolescents interpret their perceived position and even their worth to others (Gottlieb & Sylvestre, 1996).

When adolescents are allowed to identify the significant adult that is most important to them, they are likely to choose the adult with the greatest ability to influence them (Rosenberg, 1973). One of the theoretical weaknesses in the extant literature on adolescents' relationships with significant adults has been the use of putative relationships. Researchers have ascribed value to certain adults based on their roles (e.g., teacher, parent or friend, see Hurrelmann, 1990) thus limiting adolescents in their options of who qualifies to be an important adult in their life. The assumption by researchers that certain proscribed social roles (e.g., teacher) automatically denote a status of “significant” is erroneous since “significance is in the eye of the beholder” (Rosenberg, 1973, p. 831). It behooves social scientists to allow adolescents to name the adults who are significant to them. Since it is through individual perceptions that one derives meaning (Stryker, 1967) the most information about adolescents' perceptions of significance and importance can be gleaned from adolescents themselves. This information will provide a more salient picture of which adults may contribute to adolescents' self-concepts and perhaps their psychosocial adjustment (Galbo, 1984).

Although symbolic interactionism does not explain all of the reasons for adolescent involvement with significant non-parental adults, it provides a fertile starting ground to understanding the relationships that emerge between adolescents and non-parental adults and their potential for influence in adolescents lives.

Significant Non-Parental Relationships

For many adolescents, parents occupy most of the chief social roles in their adolescents' lives, such as teacher, coach, friend, or manager (Blyth et al., 1982). As adolescents mature and begin to experience more social mobility than that of childhood, they interface with non-parental adults in more varied settings. For example, elementary schools often place children with a single teacher for most of the day, whereas North American high schools usually employ a rotation system in which students encounter several teachers throughout the day. Adolescents also encounter non-parental adults outside of educational settings. Due to their increased autonomy adolescents may choose to become involved in a sports team where they will have a coach, they may attend youth group where they will have a pastor or youth leader, or they may take on a part time job where they will have an employer. As children, individuals may have depended on their parents to initiate their relationships with non-parental adults through driving them or telephoning for information, however, with age and the acquisition of skills, adolescents are able to develop relationships with non-parental adults on their own.

Adolescents' associations with significant non-parental adults may have different functions depending on the type of relationship they engage in. Two types of relational categories emerge from the literature; they are *role specific* and *affective*. Role-specific significant non-parental adults influence the adolescent by performing overt socializing functions. For instance, a basketball coach is significant to an adolescent on the court and in basketball-related activities. Hamilton and Darling (1996) add that the adolescents in their study tended to choose significant non-parental adults who served a socializing function, such as teachers, coaches, or youth group leaders. They were cautious to point

out that these relationships are not without emotion and that the adolescent's affection for the significant non-parental adult often stems from the adults' recognition of the adolescent in their particular field of experience (e.g., a track coach). Darling et al. (1994) also observed that adolescents' relationships with significant non-parental adults in their study were predominantly role-specific.

Affective relationships are characterized by mutual regard between adolescents and non-parental adults, focusing on the relationship between participants as opposed to the activities they engage in (Darling et al., 1994). Although Bo (1996) found affective relationships most often reported as parent-child relationships, these types of associations could also be present in adolescents' relationships with significant non-parental adults. The studies that have evaluated affective relationships (see Darling et al., 1994; Hamilton & Darling, 1996) have had the opportunity of asking many questions related to the type of activities that the adolescent and significant non-parental adult are involved in as well as qualitative aspects of these relationships. It has not been demonstrated whether or not one type of relationship (affective versus role) is associated with adolescent psychosocial adjustment. Exploring the differences may lead to a better understanding of the association between adolescent psychosocial adjustment and involvement in different types of relationships with significant non-parental adults. The type of relationship that adolescents and significant adults are engaged in may transcend the binary distinction of role and affect. Galbo (1986) found that adolescents' affective relationships were found most often with kin significant non-parental adults (e.g., uncle) whereas adolescents' role-specific relationships were more likely with non-kin significant adults (e.g., coach). Kin refers to a "state of relatedness or connection by blood or marriage or adoption"

(Webster's Online Dictionary). It is not evident from the research whether or not kinship status infers an affective type relationship between adolescents and their significant non-parental adults. Past studies suggest adolescents appear to choose kin significant non-parental adults at approximately the same rate as choosing non-kin significant non-parental adults (Bo, 1996; Greenberger et al., 1998 and Blyth et al., 1982). Interestingly, adolescents may perceive that they are more important to an adult who is choosing to spend time with them on their own volition rather than feeling that the adult has a familial obligation to them. Hurrelmann (1990) examined "significant partners" in adolescence and found that the non-kin significant partners helped to emotionally anchor adolescents and provide valuable feedback to them. It may be that adolescents experience an increased sense of security when their social support network extends beyond their family. It is not currently known whether relationships with kin significant non-parental adults are differentially associated with adolescents' psychosocial adjustment in comparison to relationships with non-kin significant non-parental adults. This knowledge could give insight into the types of relationships (role versus kinship status) that foster positive adolescent psychosocial adjustment.

Differences in age between significant non-parental adults and adolescents may be a feature associated with adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. Hurrelmann (1990) showed that positive psychosocial outcomes were associated with relationships between adolescents and adults than with relationships between adolescents and peers. There is a possibility that adolescents' relationships with significant non-parental adults from the same age cohort could be associated with differential psychosocial adjustment outcomes than adolescents' relationships with significant non-parental adults from an older cohort.

than adolescents' relationships with significant non-parental adults from an older cohort. Greenberger et al. (1998) found that 18% of adolescent males (as opposed to 5% of adolescent females) identified their significant non-parental adults as older friends. Results also showed that 10% of adolescent males (opposed to 3% of adolescent females) identified "cousins" (likely a similar cohort) as significant non-parental adults. Almost a third of the males in Greenberger et al.'s study chose significant adults who were in a close age cohort. Some research (Galbo, 1984) suggests the age difference between adolescents and their significant non-parental adult may be one of the characteristics that affects the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents. This seems particularly true if the significant adult is perceived by the adolescent to be involved in illegal activities (Greenberger et al., 1998). The age differences between adolescents and significant adults have not yet been linked to adolescents' psychosocial adjustment.

The sex of significant non-parental adults involved in relationships with adolescents is also a point of interest. If part of the interaction process that leads adolescents to identify with significant non-parental adults involves role modeling, then perhaps adolescents' ability to identify with the physical characteristics, or the social role of significant non-parental adults, motivates adolescents to choose same sex significant non-parental adults. Almost 65% of the adolescents in two studies (Blyth et al., 1982; Greenberger et al., 1998) identified their significant adult as the same sex. Additionally, there may be a link between adolescents' age and sex and the age and sex of significant non-parental adults. It is unclear at this point whether or not adolescents who have relationships with same-sex significant non-parental adults report better psychosocial adjustment than adolescents who have relationships with opposite sex significant non-

parental adults or if an interaction effect between sex and age is likely. For instance adolescent males who report older male significant non-parental adults may have different psychosocial adjustment than adolescent males who identify young female significant non-parental adults. This information would assist in determining the healthiest relationships for adolescents to be involved in and whether or not there is a detrimental effect on adolescents involved with one age or sex significant adult over another.

The sex of the significant non-parental adult is not the only factor that is likely to affect the psychosocial adjustment outcomes of the adolescents. One of the difficulties with assessing any of the psychosocial adjustment outcomes of relationships between adolescents and significant non-parental adults hinges on the sex differences in well-being which exist both in adolescent and adult populations (Strickland, 1992). Schonert-Reichl and Offer (1992) found that adolescent girls tend to internalize their upsets, which manifest themselves through depressive symptoms, stress, self-doubt, eating disorders, and anxiety. On the other hand, adolescent boys tend to externalize their upsets, which manifest themselves in violence and acting out behavior (Schonert-Reichl & Offer 1992; Moffitt, 1993). These sex differences may help to understand the result found by Greenberger et al. (1998) which revealed that identifying a significant non-parental adult significantly lowered adolescent males' problem behavior, but had a very minor effect for adolescent females. Conversely, Greenberger et al. found that only females' depression scores were lowered by the presence of a significant non-parental adult. Owing to the sex differences described in the literature between adolescent males and females, sex will be

used as a control variable each time psychosocial adjustment is assessed in the current study.

Due to the sex differences that may exist in the population, one of the best ways to clearly measure psychosocial adjustment in adolescents is to use both the internal (depressive symptoms) and the external (problem behaviors) measures (Tran & Richey, 1997). Although other researchers have assessed adolescent internalizing/externalizing behaviors (Boyce-Rodgers & Rose, 2002) this study includes an assessment of psychosocial maturity to broaden the picture of adolescents' adjustment. Psychosocial maturity is a component of adolescents' self-perception (Greenberger et al., 1994). The inclusion of these three indicators of adjustment provides a comprehensive evaluation of both problematic behaviors and positive development.

Understanding the function of significant non-parental adults in adolescents' lives assists researchers and program planners alike to identify which adults may be more beneficial for adolescents to build relationships with. This study proposes to expand the extant literature in the area of adolescent relationships with significant non-parental adults by going beyond demographic descriptions of the dyads and examining possible associations between type of relationships and adolescent psychosocial adjustment. Associations between age and sex similarities/differences as well as kinship status and role configurations between adolescents and significant adults will be observed. The following research questions and hypotheses are proposed.

Hypothesis 1. Adolescents who identify significant non-parental adults in their lives will report higher levels of psychosocial adjustment than those adolescents who do not report relationships with significant non-parental adults.

The following research questions pertain to the type of relationships between adolescents and significant non-parental adults; role specific or non-role-specific.

Specific questions regarding the roles between adolescents and significant adults were not part of the available data set. Since there was not enough information available to make qualitative judgments about the level of affect, the term non-role-specific is used rather than affective.

Research Question 1 Which type of relationships (Role-Specific versus Non-Role-Specific) are adolescents more likely to be engaged in with significant non-parental adults?

Research Question 2 Is the type of relationship (Role-Specific versus Non-Role-Specific) with the non-parental significant adult differentially associated with the psychosocial adjustment of the adolescent?

The following research questions pertain to the kinship status between adolescents and significant non-parental adults.

Research Question 3 Are adolescents more likely to identify significant non-parental adults who are kin or non-kin?

Research Question 4 Will the type of relationships (kin versus non-kin) with non-parental significant adults be associated with adolescent psychosocial adjustment?

The following research questions pertain to the age and sex differences between adolescents and significant non-parental adults. While there is no mechanism in the current study for measuring the positive or negative features (e.g., involvement in crime) of the significant non-parental adults' behavior, researching age differences may illuminate whether there are healthier connections between one age strata over another.

Research Question 5 Are those named as significant adults principally older adults (e.g., 65 years) or younger adults (e.g., 25 years)?

Research Question 6 Are age differences between adolescents and their chosen non-parental adults associated with differences in the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents?

Hypothesis 2 Females will be more likely to choose female significant non-parental adults and males will be more likely to choose male significant non-parental adults.

Research Question 7 Are sex similarities or differences between adolescents and significant adults associated with adolescents' psychosocial adjustment?

Research Question 8 Are the age and sex similarities/differences between adolescents and significant non-parental adults associated with adolescent psychosocial adjustment?

Method

An extant data set was used to address the research questions and hypotheses. The data set contained information on significant adults allowing me to address my research problem and questions. Due to my role as a research assistant for the project, I was involved with the data collection and was therefore familiar with the information. My involvement in this project also included ethical approval for me to work with this data.

Sample

The participants were part of a larger project conducted over a two-year period between 1999-2001. The participants were grade 12 students from two rural school districts in Northwest Washington State. The students in the original study were chosen because of their enrollment in a social studies course that included a mentoring project in their local community. Social studies is a non-elective course in grade twelve. Legislation was pending in Washington state requiring all adolescents to complete a

mentoring/apprenticeship program for students in these two schools. The mandatory nature of the course reduces a potential selection bias accrued by students electing to participate in the course and in turn, the survey. Chi square analyses were employed to compare the reports of significant adults by school population. No significant differences between schools were found. Therefore data from the two schools were collapsed into one sample.

Only those participants who were administered questions about significant non-parental adults were selected for the study (the questions were not included in the survey for the whole sample). The final sample includes 104 males and 88 females, that is 192 of the original 253 participants. Their ages range from 14-19 years, with a mean age of 17.4 years. The ethnic background was fairly heterogeneous, consistent with the surrounding communities of the two school districts. The majority of adolescents (79.3%) self-reported their cultural background as European but born in the United States, with the remaining respondents reporting themselves as either Hispanic, North American Indian, or Asian. The adolescents in this sample lived with two biological parents (62.2%), a biological parent and one step-parent (17.1%), a single parent (15.6%) or someone else (4.7%).

Procedures

Active consent was obtained from the parents of potential respondents after consultation and permission from the school district and local high school administration. No parents declined permission for their children to participate. Researchers introduced the study and classroom teachers allowed class time for survey completion. Students were assured of confidentiality and asked for permission to contact them for follow-up

after completion of their mentoring project. No remuneration was given for participation in this study. Four participants were removed from analysis due to incomplete responses and seven students declined to participate resulting in 242 participants.

Measures

Demographic information. Respondents were given instructions to report their age and ethnicity on a blank line. Adolescents were instructed to circle one of two possible sexes. Adolescents were directed to circle one of the following living situations: two biological parents, biological mother and stepfather, biological father and stepmother, a single parent or someone else.

Significant non-parental adults. Participants were given the following instructions based on Greenberger et al.'s (1998) protocol for assessing relationships with Very Important Persons (VIPs): "Please consider whether you have an important adult in your life other than a parent. This might be someone in your life who is at least 21 years old, and who has had a significant influence on you, or whom you can count on in times of need. For example, an aunt, teacher, or friend's parent might be an important person to you." The participants were asked to circle yes or no to the question "Do you have an important adult in your life?" (Respondents were directed to skip to the next page if they did not have an important non-parental adult in their life.) Report of a significant non-parental adult was coded as 1; no report of a significant non-parental adult was coded as 0.

Those who had a significant non-parental adult were then asked, "Please list their relationship to you". Respondents were also asked the age of the significant non-parental adult and how the person became important to the adolescent "Please tell us how this

person became important to you". This information on the non-parental adults was used to develop measures of sex and type of relationship and age described next.

Sex of significant non-parental adult. The sex of the important adult was derived from the open-ended answers to the statements, "Please list their relationship to you" and "Please tell us how this person became important to you" when possible, (e.g., **SHE** is my aunt, **HE** works by my house). For thirty cases, this process could not determine the sex of the significant non-parental adult. Cases in which the sex could not be determined were coded as missing information.

Types of relationships. Two sets of codes were created to categorize adolescents' relationships with significant non-parental adults. First the relationships between adolescents and significant non-parental adults were categorized into role-specific (1) versus non-role-specific (2) based on Hamilton and Darling (1996) and Darling et al. (1994) affective and role-specific categories. The term non-role-specific is used rather than affective because of the lack of information available in the data to make qualitative judgments regarding the type of relationship.

Since the roles were deduced from open-ended responses to the statement "Please list their relationship to you", and not asked directly, they are based on the perceptions of the coder about the adolescent and adult relationship. Role-specific relationships were those based on education or responsibility of the adult for the adolescent (e.g., teacher, coach). The non-role-specific category reflected any relationships not defined by a role (e.g., friend, aunt). An undergraduate research assistant blind to the purposes of the study also coded all of the answers to this question and the inter-rater reliability between the principle investigator and the assistant was 100%.

The relationships between adolescents and significant non-parental adults were also categorized into kin (1) and non-kin (0) based on the responses from the statement "Please list their relationship to you". Family members were coded as kin; all other descriptions of significant non-parental adults were coded as non-kin.

Age differences. A variable was created to reflect the difference of the ages between the adolescent and their significant non-parental adult. The self-reported age of adolescents was subtracted from the reported age of the significant non-parental adult.

Psychosocial Adjustment:

Psychosocial maturity was assessed using Greenberger et al.'s (1998) Self-Reliance, Identity and Social Maturity sub-scales from the Psychosocial Maturity Index developed specifically for 11-18 year olds. The ten-item *Self-Reliance* scale is used as a measure of mastery over one's environment, a sense of personal influence, and control. A sample item (reverse coded) is, "The main reason I'm not more successful is that I have bad luck". Cronbach's alpha was .81 for this study. The ten-item *Identity* scale is a measure of identity consolidation, a sense that the respondent knows oneself. An example of an item is "I can't really say what my interests are". The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .78 for this study. The eleven-item *Social Maturity* scale is a measure of the respondents' success in relationships with others. A sample item (reverse coded) is, "I would rather use my free time to enjoy myself than to help raise money for a neighborhood project". The Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .82. The response set is on a four-point scale with anchor points ranging from "agree strongly" to "disagree strongly". Subscale scores were calculated by averaging items. Higher scores reflect positive psychosocial maturity.

Internalizing behaviors were assessed using Radloff's (1977) twenty-item Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). This scale was designed to measure current frequency of depressive symptoms. Respondents were asked to rate the frequency of the depressive symptoms over the last week using a Likert-type four-point scale ranging from "rarely or none of the time" to "most or all of the time". Examples of the items are "I had crying spells" and "I felt lonely". The scores were averaged to create a rating between 0 (low depressive symptoms) to 4 (high depressive symptoms). Cronbach's alpha was .88 for this study.

Externalizing behaviors were assessed by using items from Maggs, Almeida, and Galambos (1995). Students indicated whether they had engaged in each behavior never, once or twice, or more often during the past six months. The misdemeanors ranged from disobeying parents to displaying anti-social behavior, to breaking the law. The scale includes items such as, "smoked marijuana", "stole something, under \$20", "lied to my parents". To obtain scores, an average of items is calculated so that scores range between 1 and 4. Cronbach's alpha was .92 for this study.

Results

Preliminary analysis. A frequency analysis was conducted to demonstrate how many of the adolescents reported significant non-parental adults in their lives. Identifying or not identifying a significant non-parental adult was coded as a binary variable. Sixty-three percent ($n=122$) of adolescents identified a significant non-parental adult in their lives. While thirty-seven percent ($n=70$) did not.

Hypothesis 1. The first hypothesis predicted that identifying a significant non-parental adult would be associated with higher levels of psychosocial adjustment. This

question was tested by a series of ordinary least squares regressions. An ordinary least squares regression allows for continuous dependant variables. The three psychosocial maturity sub-scales (self-reliance, identity, social maturity), frequency of depressive symptoms, and incidence of problem behavior were the dependent variables. To control for sex differences in the dependent variable, sex of the adolescent was entered on the first step of the regression and significant adult was added in the second step as shown in Tables 1-5). As shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3 the final model was not significant between identifying a significant adult and self-reliance [$F(2, 189) = .088, p = .92$], self-identity [$F(2, 189) = .082, p = .92$], depressive symptoms [$F(2, 186) = 1.8, p = .17$]. The overall model for social maturity [$F(2, 189) = 25.83, p < .01$] and problem behaviors significant [$F(2, 186) = 10.41, p = .01$] was statistically significant. However, identifying a significant non-parental adult did not account for variance in adolescent social maturity (see Table 4) or adolescent problem behavior (see Table 5). The models were significant because of the association between sex of the adolescent and adolescent social maturity and problem behaviors.

Table 1

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between
Identification of a Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Self Reliance ($N=191$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	.44	1.41	.02
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	.49	1.43	.03
Significant Adult	-.42	1.48	-.02

Note. $R^2 = .20$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .03$ for Step 2 ($p = .78$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. Reporting a significant adult is coded 0 = No, 1 = Yes. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between
Identification of a Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Self Identity ($N=191$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	.41	1.42	.02
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	.45	1.43	.02
Significant Adult	-.42	1.48	-.02

Note. $R^2 = .20$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .03$ for Step 2 ($p = .78$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. Reporting a significant adult is coded 0 = No, 1 = Yes. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between
Identification of a Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Depression ($N=188$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	.14	.09	.12
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	.15	.09	.12
Significant Adult	-.09	.09	-.07

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .019$ for Step 2 ($p = .17$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 =

females. Reporting a significant adult is coded 0 = No, 1 = Yes. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Identification of a Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Social Maturity ($N = 189$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.52	.08	-.45***
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.49	.08	-.43***
Significant Adult	-.15	.08	-.13

Note. $R^2 = .20$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .22$ for Step 2 ($p = .06$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. Reporting a significant adult is coded 0 = No, 1 = Yes. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Identification of a Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Problem Behavior ($N = 188$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.44	.10	-.30***
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.42	.10	-.29***
Significant Adult	-.17	.11	-.11

Note. $R^2 = .09$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .10$ for Step 2 ($p = .12$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. Reporting a significant adult is coded 0 = No, 1 = Yes. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

It seems prudent to mention that adolescent females' social maturity scores were considerably lower than males' social maturity scores, a departure from the literature in this area which tends to assume that females are more mature overall than males in adolescence (Schonert-Reichl & Offer 1992; Moffitt, 1993). The results from the analysis of social maturity are significant because of the differences between males and females on social maturity rather than the association between adolescent social maturity and reporting a significant adult.

The following research questions pertain to the type of relationship (role specific vs. non-role-specific) between adolescents and significant non-parental adults.

Research Question 1. The types of relationships that adolescents experience with their significant non-parental adults were examined with a frequency analysis. Results indicate 30.5% (n=36) of the relationships were characterized as role-specific and 69.5% (n=82) were identified as non-role-specific.

Research Question 2. This question examined whether or not Role-Specific and Non-Role-Specific relationships were associated with differences in adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. Controlling for adolescents' sex, regression analyses were conducted with the type of relationship (role-specific or non-role-specific) as an independent variable and adolescent the psychosocial adjustment indicators as the dependent variables. As shown in Tables 6, 7 and 8 the final model was not significant between the type of relationship and adolescent self reliance [$F(2, 115) = .87, p = .42$], self identity [$F(2, 115) = .90, p = .41$], and depressive symptoms [$F(2, 112) = 2.12, p = .12$] in the overall model. However, the model for role-type and adolescent social maturity [$F(2, 114) = 18.03, p < .01$] and problem behaviors [$F(2, 113) = 6.39, p < .01$] was significant. The results of Tables 9 and 10 show that role type does account for a significant amount of variance in adolescent social maturity and problem behavior. Adolescents involved with role specific adults reported less frequent problem behaviors than adolescents involved with non-role-specific relationships with significant adults. However, adolescents who reported non-role specific relationships with significant adults had higher social maturity scores than adolescents involved in role specific relationships with significant non-parental adults.

Table 6

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship of Role and Non-Role Specific Relationships of Adolescents and Significant Non-Parental Adults and Adolescent Self Reliance ($N=117$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	1.79	1.62	.10
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	1.95	1.64	.11
Role	1.31	1.78	.07

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .02$ for Step 2 ($p = .47$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. Role-specific is coded 1, non-role-specific is coded 2. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$

Table 7

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship of Role and Non-Role Specific Relationships of Adolescents and Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Self Identity ($N=117$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	1.83	1.62	.10
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	1.99	1.64	.11
Role	1.30	1.78	.07

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .02$ for Step 2 ($p = .47$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. Role-specific is coded 1, non-role-specific is coded 2. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 8

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship of Role and Non-Role Specific Relationships of Adolescents and Significant Non-Parental Adults and Adolescent Depression ($N=114$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	.14	.11	.11
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	.16	.11	.13
Role	.20	.12	.16

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .04$ for Step 2 ($p = .10$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. Role-specific is coded 1, non-role-specific is coded 2. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 9

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship of Role and Non-Role Specific Relationships of Adolescents and Significant Non-Parental Adults and Adolescent Social Maturity ($N=116$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.51	.10	-.45***
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.48	.09	-.42***
Role	.25	.10	.20*

Note. $R^2 = .20$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .24$ for Step 2 ($p < .05$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. Role-specific is coded 1, non-role-specific is coded 2. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 10

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship of Role and Non-Role Specific Relationships of Adolescents and Significant Non-Parental Adults and Adolescent Problem Behaviors ($N=115$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.29	.10	-.26*
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.27	.10	-.23**
Role	.24	.11	.19*

Note. $R^2 = .07$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .10$ for Step 2 ($p < .05$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. Role-specific is coded 1, non-role-specific is coded 2. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The following research questions pertain to the type of relationship (kin vs. non-kin status) between adolescents and significant non-parental adults.

Research Question 3. A frequency analysis was used to explore whether or not adolescents were more likely to report kin or non-kin significant non-parental adults. Adolescents reported significant non-parental adults who were kin (45%, $n=55$) almost as frequently as those who were non-kin (55%, $n=63$).

Research Question 4. A series of regression analyses were conducted to probe whether or not kinship status was associated with adolescent psychosocial adjustment. The sex of the adolescent was entered on the first step as a control variable and then kin/non-kin status was entered on the next step. The dependent variables were the

adolescent psychosocial adjustment indicators. As shown in Tables 11, 12 and 13, the final model was not significant between kinship status and adolescent self-reliance [$F(2, 115) = 1.45, p = .24$], self-identity [$F(2, 115) = 1.51, p = .23$], and depressive symptoms [$F(2, 112) = .74, p = .47$]. Although the overall models for adolescent problem behavior [$F(2, 115) = 4.43, p < .01$] and social maturity [$F(2, 114) = 19.42, p < .01$] are significant, kinship status accounts for variance in social maturity (see Table 14) but not problem behavior (see Table 15). The model predicting problem behavior was significant because of the association between sex of the adolescent and problem behavior.

Table 11

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Kinship Status and Adolescent Self Reliance (N=117)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	1.79	1.62	.10
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	2.22	1.65	.13
Kinship Status	2.15	1.66	.12

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .03$ for Step 2 ($p = .20$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 =

females. Kinship status is coded: kin = 1, non-kin = 0. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 12

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Kinship Status and Adolescent Self Identity ($N=117$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	1.83	1.62	.10
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	2.27	1.65	.13
Kinship Status	2.19	1.66	.12

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .03$ for Step 2 ($p = .19$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 =

females. Kinship status is coded: kin = 1, non-kin = 0. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 13

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Kinship Status and Adolescent Depressive Symptoms ($N=114$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	.14	.11	.11
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	.14	.12	.12
Kinship Status	.01	.12	.01

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .01$ for Step 2 ($p = .90$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 =

females. Kinship status is coded: kin = 1, non-kin = 0. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 14

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Kinship Status and Adolescent Social Maturity ($N=116$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.51	.10	-.45***
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.46	.10	-.40***
Kinship Status	.27	.10	.24**

Note. $R^2 = .20$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .25$ for Step 2 ($p = .01$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. Kinship status is coded: kin = 1, non-kin = 0. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 15

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Kinship Status and Adolescent Problem Behavior ($N=115$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.30	.10	-.26**
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.27	.11	-.24**
Kinship Status	.09	.11	.08

Note. $R^2 = .07$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .07$ for Step 2 ($p = .37$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. Kinship status is coded: kin = 1, non-kin = 0. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Adolescents involved with kin significant non-parental adults reported higher social maturity scores than adolescents involved with non-kin significant non-parental adults.

The following hypothesis and research questions pertain to the age and sex differences between adolescents and significant non-parental adults.

Research Question 5. A frequency analysis was used to explore whether or not the significant non-parental adults reported are more likely to be from an older or younger generation. This analysis separated the relationships identified into three approximately 20 year categories: peer-type relationships, parent-type relationships and sage-type relationships based on the age differences between significant non-parental adult and adolescents. Peers (between 3 and 20 years older) made up 61.2% of the significant non-parental adults identified by adolescents, Parent-type (between 21-40 years older) made up 27.2% of the significant non-parental adults reported, and Sages (41-65 years older) made up 11.7% of the significant non-parental adults identified.

Research Question 6. This question explored whether or not age differences between adults and adolescents were associated with differences in the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents. The independent variable was the difference between the ages of the adolescents and their significant non-parental adults. The dependent variables were the adolescent psychosocial adjustment indicators. Multiple regression analyses were conducted, controlling for adolescents' sex. As shown in Tables 16, 17 and 18 the final model was not significant between age differences and self-reliance [$F(2, 100) = .86, p = .43$], self-identity [$F(2, 100) = .94, p = .39$], or adolescent depressive symptoms [$F(2, 97) = 2.73, p = .07$].

Table 16

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Self Reliance ($N=102$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	2.02	1.86	.11
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	1.71	1.91	.09
Age Difference	.05	.07	-.08

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .02$ for Step 2 ($p = .46$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Table 17

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Self Identity ($N=102$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	2.02	1.86	.11
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	1.66	1.91	.09
Age Difference	.05	.07	-.09

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .02$ for Step 2 ($p = .40$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Table 18

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Depressive Symptoms
($N=99$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	.15	.11	.14
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	.20	.12	.18
Age Difference	.07	.00	.19

Note. $R^2 = .02$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .05$ for Step 2 ($p = .06$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Table 19

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Social Maturity
($N=101$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.52	.11	-.44***
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.55	.11	-.47***
Age Difference	-.04	.00	-.11

Note. $R^2 = .19$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .20$ for Step 2 ($p = .22$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 20

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Problem Behavior ($N=100$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.37	.12	-.30**
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.40	.12	-.32**
Age Difference	-.05	.00	-.12

Note. $R^2 = .09$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .10$ for Step 2 ($p = .24$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Although the overall model for age differences and adolescent social maturity [$F(2, 99) = 12.85, p < .01$] and problem behaviors [$F(2, 98) = 5.46, p < .01$] was significant, age differences did not account for variances in social maturity (see Table 19) or in problem behaviors of adolescent (see Table 20).

Hypothesis 2. Chi-square analysis was used to assess whether or not adolescents were more likely to choose a significant non-parental adult who was the same sex as them. One of the weaknesses of the current study was the missing information permitting identification of the sex of thirty of the significant non-parental adults. These thirty cases were not included in the following analysis. The sex of the adolescent was paired with the sex of the significant non-parental adult to determine any significant patterns of

relationship. Results reveal significant associations [$\chi^2 (1, n=81) = 7.71, p < .01$] between the sex of the adolescent and significant non-parental adult. Findings showed that females were more likely to report female significant non-parental adults at a rate of 62.5% ($n=25$) versus identifying males at a rate of 37.5% ($n=15$). Male adolescents were also more likely to report male significant non-parental adults at a rate of 68.3% ($n=28$) versus identifying females at a rate of 31.7% ($n=13$).

Research Question 7. This question addressed whether or not the sex pairings of adolescents and significant non-parental adults were associated with adolescent psychosocial adjustment. A new variable was constructed to label the four possible configurations representing the sex of adolescent and significant non-parental adult relationships: female/female (1), female/male (2), male/male (3), male/female (4). A one-way ANOVA was used to assess the mean differences on adolescents' psychosocial adjustment scores across the sex configurations. The dependent variables are the psychosocial adjustment indicators and the independent variable is the new gender configuration variable. The configuration of the adolescent and the significant non-parental adult genders was not significantly related to adolescent self-reliance [$F (4, 85) = 1.39, p = .24$], self identity [$F (4, 85) = 1.36, p = .26$], depressive symptoms [$F (4, 82) = .29, p = .88$] or problem behaviors [$F (4, 83) = 1.85, p = .13$]. Adult and adolescent sex configurations did demonstrate an association with adolescent social maturity [$F (4, 84) = 3.93, p < .01$]. Adolescent males' relationships with male or female adults were associated with higher levels of social maturity. This effect may represent the sex differences that exist between males and females on the adolescent social maturity scores (see Hypothesis 1).

Research Question 8. The purpose of this question was to examine whether or not there was an interaction between the age and sex of the significant adult and the psychosocial adjustment of the adolescent. An interaction term was created consisting of the sex of significant non-parental adult X age of significant non-parental adult. A series of hierarchical regressions were conducted with sex of adolescent in the first step, age and sex of significant adults in the second step and the interaction term of age and sex in the third step. The dependent variables were the psychosocial adjustment indicators. As shown in Tables 21, 22, 23 and 25 the final model was not significant between the interaction term (age and sex of significant adult) and self reliance [$F(4, 74) = .88, p = .48$], self identity [$F(4, 74) = .91, p = .46$], depressive symptoms [$F(4, 71) = .88, p = .48$] or problem behaviors [$F(4, 72) = 1.10, p = .36$]. The model predicting adolescent social maturity was significant [$F(4, 73) = 3.51, p < .01$]. However, the interaction term failed to account for variance in adolescent social maturity (see Table 25). The model was significant because of the association between sex of the adolescent and adolescent social maturity.

Table 21

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age and Sex Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Self Reliance
($N = 78$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	2.61	2.42	.12
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	2.38	2.53	.11
Sex of Significant Adult	-1.00	1.40	-.08
Age of Significant Adult	-.05	.09	-.07
Step 3			
Sex of Adolescent	2.62	2.53	.12
Sex of Significant Adult	-5.07	3.88	-.42
Age of Significant Adult	-.12	.11	-.17
Age X Sex of Significant Adult	.08	.08	.40

Note. $R^2 = .02$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .03$ for Step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .05$ for Step 3 ($p = .27$). Sex of adolescent is coded

0 = males, 1 = females. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 22

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age and Sex Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Self Identity
($N=78$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	2.63	2.42	.12
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	2.34	2.53	.11
Sex of Significant Adult	-.95	1.40	-.08
Age of Significant Adult	-.05	.09	-.08
Step 3			
Sex of Adolescent	2.59	2.53	.12
Sex of Significant Adult	-5.08	3.88	-.42
Age of Significant Adult	-.13	.11	-.18
Age X Sex of Significant Adult	.08	.08	.40

Note. $R^2 = .02$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .03$ for Step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .05$ for Step 3 ($p = .26$). Sex of adolescent is coded

0 = males, 1 = females. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 23

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age and Sex Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Depressive Symptoms ($N=75$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	6.48	.14	.06
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	.11	.14	.10
Sex of Significant Adult	-.02	.08	-.04*
Age of Significant Adult	.07	.01	.19
Step 3			
Sex of Adolescent	.11	.14	.09
Sex of Significant Adult	.17	.21	.27
Age of Significant Adult	.01	.01	.28
Age X Sex of Significant Adult	.17	.21	.27

Note. $R^2 = .00$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .03$ for Step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .05$ for Step 3 ($p = .33$). Sex of adolescent is coded

0 = males, 1 = females. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 24

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age and Sex Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Social Maturity (N=77)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.41	.12	-.37***
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.43	.12	-.39***
Sex of Significant Adult	-.04	.07	-.07
Age of Significant Adult	-.04	.00	-.12
Step 3			
Sex of Adolescent	-.43	.12	-.39***
Sex of Significant Adult	-.12	.19	-.18
Age of Significant Adult	-.05	.01	-.15
Age X Gender of Significant Adult	1.44	.00	.13

Note. $R^2 = .14$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .16$ for Step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .16$ for Step 3 ($p = .70$). Sex of adolescent is coded

0 = males, 1 = females. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 25

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Association Between Age and Sex Differences of Adolescents and Significant Adults and Adolescent Problem Behaviors ($N=76$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.23	.14	-.20
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.27	.14	-.23
Sex of Significant Adult	.03	.08	.01
Age of Significant Adult	-.05	.01	-.14
Step 3			
Sex of Adolescent	-.27	.14	-.22
Sex of Significant Adult	-.07	.22	-.11
Age of Significant Adult	-.06	.01	-.17
Age X Sex of Significant Adult	.01	.00	.14

Note. $R^2 = .04$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .06$ for Step 2, $\Delta R^2 = .06$ for Step 3 ($p = .70$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0

= males, 1 = females. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Post Hoc Analysis

Galbo (1984) found that "the actual influence of the adults seemed to vary and depend, at least in part, on the importance of the situation, and the perceived importance of the particular adult" (p. 957-958). Given that this information was available as part of

the data set, a post hoc analysis was conducted to probe whether or not the importance of the significant adult demonstrated an association with adolescent psychosocial adjustment. Respondents were asked "How would you rate the importance of this person in your life?" based on the Greenberger et al. (1998) protocol for assessing significant adults. Subjects were asked to circle a number on a Likert-type five-point scale ranging from "not really all that important" to "truly key person to me" (Greenberger et al., 1998). Hierarchical regressions were conducted, controlling for sex of the adolescent. The independent variable was the degree of importance that the adolescent reported for their significant adult and the dependent variables were the psychosocial adjustment indicators. As shown in Tables 26 and 27 the final model was not significant between importance of the significant adults and adolescent self-reliance [$F(2, 108) = .65, p = .52$] or self-identity [$F(2, 108) = .67, p = .51$]. However, the overall model was significant for adolescent depressive symptoms [$F(2, 107) = 3.05, p < .05$], social maturity [$F(2, 107) = 13.11, p < .01$] and problem behavior [$F(2, 106) = 5.04, p < .01$]. Tables 28, 29 and 30 show that the importance of significant adults did not account for variance in depressive symptoms, social maturity or problem behaviors. The models were significant because of the association between sex of the adolescent and adolescent depressive symptoms, social maturity and problem behaviors.

Table 26

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between
Importance of Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Self Reliance ($N=110$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	1.93	1.72	.11
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	2.03	1.78	.11
Importance of Adult	-.30	1.16	-.03

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .01$ for Step 2 ($p = .80$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Table 27

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between
Importance of Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Self Identity ($N=110$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	1.96	1.72	.11
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	2.06	1.78	.11
Importance of Adult	-.30	1.16	-.03*

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .01$ for Step 2 ($p = .80$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Table 28

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between
Importance of Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Depressive Symptoms
($N=107$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	.19	.11	.17*
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	.24	.11	.21
Importance of Adult	-.12	.07	-.16

Note. $R^2 = .03$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .06$ for Step 2 ($p = .10$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 29

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between
Importance of Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Social Maturity ($N=109$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.50	.10	-.43***
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.47	.10	-.41***
Importance of Adult	-.08	.07	-.11

Note. $R^2 = .19$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .20$ for Step 2 ($p = .24$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 =

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

Table 30

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing the Relationship Between Importance of Significant Non-Parental Adult and Adolescent Problem Behavior ($N=107$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Sex of Adolescent	-.33	.12	-.27**
Step 2			
Sex of Adolescent	-.29	.12	-.23
Importance of Adult	-.11	.08	-.13

Note. $R^2 = .07$ for Step 1, $\Delta R^2 = .09$ for Step 2 ($p = .17$). Sex of adolescent is coded 0 = males, 1 = females. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

There exists an assumption in North American society that the presence of significant non-parental adults in adolescents' lives is beneficial to adolescents (Blyth et al., 1982). Community programs such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters and the YMCA solicit adult volunteers to build relationships with adolescents, in an effort to improve adolescents' well being and development (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). Adolescent psychological and social adjustment may be influenced by the roles that significant non-parental adults model for them. Alternately, adolescents may use their relationships with significant adults to shape their self concepts based on the feedback they receive (Erikson, 1968).

If, as Rosenberg (1973) suggests, the social process of identity construction involves “taking the role of the other” (p. 829), then it seems natural that adolescents would gravitate towards adults of the same sex, thus making the process of taking on the role of the other simpler because of inherent sex-role similarities. Adolescents in the current study were more likely to report a significant non-parental adult who was the same sex as them, findings consistent with the results of Galbo (1984), Greenberger et al. (1998), and Blyth et al. (1982). Although the adolescents were more likely to report same-sex significant adults, the sex configuration of the dyad did not demonstrate an association with adolescent psychosocial adjustment. Similarly, the interaction between the sex and age of the significant adults was not associated with adolescents’ problem behaviors. Given the overall finding that identifying significant adults was not associated with adolescents’ psychosocial adjustment, it may be that sex and age are unrelated because significant adults are unimportant to adolescent adjustment. Alternatively, adolescents may be able to interact with non-parental adults in adult-type relationships equally across age and sex configurations, nullifying any relationship between these characteristics. Beam, Chen and Greenberger (2002) found that across age and sex groups adolescents’ relationships with significant adults were qualitatively unique from their relationships with parents or peers. Perhaps this uniqueness allows adolescents to ignore social biases regarding age and sex (Bo, 1996) and relate to their significant adults with a greater degree of equality than they may experience with other adults.

Beam et al. (2002) also found that significant adults engage adolescents in positive adult behaviors and “peer-like relations”. The majority of adolescents (61%) in the current study reported their significant adults to be from the generation just above

theirs (between 3-20 years older) as opposed to older adults or adults in the age range of their parents. This finding is consistent with Blyth et al. (1982) who found that adolescents chose younger adults fifty-eight percent of the time. Perhaps the relationships that adolescents identified in the current study resemble peer friendships more than apprenticeship relationships. It may be that adolescents have more exposure to younger adults than to older adults. In part time jobs adolescents are likely to work with other young adults who are slightly older. Adolescents are also more likely to report older siblings or relatives from their cohort as significant adults because they may have been more involved with their younger relatives growing up. On the other hand, adolescents may be more comfortable initiating relationships with people closer in age (Bo, 1996). It is not clear whether or not these adults function more like parents or peers. Although Beam et al. (2002) found that adolescents' relationships with significant adults were qualitatively different from adolescents' relationships with parents, they both have a socializing function. It may be that in the community where this sample originates, parents function in many of the roles that it would be beneficial for significant non-parental adults to perform (teacher, coach, friend, or manager, Blyth et al., 1982), if there was not a strong parent in adolescents' lives already. This may allow adolescents in this sample to have relationships with significant non-parental adults based on mutual affect or common interest as opposed to specific psychological or social needs.

The participants in this study engaged in relationships that were non-role-specific more than twice as often as role-specific (69.5% vs. 30.5%). This result is inconsistent with Darling et al. (1994) who found that adolescent relationships with significant non-parental adults tended to be role-specific. In Darling's study significant adults were

recognized as role models, teachers, and guides. However parents were the primary adults reported to perform these roles. Interestingly, in the current study, adolescents who had relationships with non-role specific significant adults demonstrated higher levels of social maturity. It may be that identifying a significant adult whose relationship is not role based provides adolescents a scaffolding opportunity that they would not otherwise access. Scaffolding is when significant adults engage adolescents in adult behaviors, thus advancing the adolescent's cognitive and social opportunities (Darling et al., 1994). These advances in social opportunities may lead to a more socially mature adolescent. Significant adults may assist adolescents by providing them with the foundations of an adult social network (Beam et al., 2002). This feature of their relationships may make adolescents more likely to engage in relationships with adults who do not already play a specific role in their lives. Adolescents who are more socially mature may choose adults for this reason. Alternately, adolescents exhibiting higher social maturity may be more attractive to significant non-parental adults looking to engage in relationships.

Roth et al. (1998) found that significant adults who were more interested in building friendships with adolescents than teaching them a specific skill were more successful in positively influencing at-risk adolescents. This is not congruent with the results of the current study, which found that adolescents who identified role-specific significant non-parental adults had lower levels of problem behaviors than adolescents who identified non-role-specific significant non-parental adults. It may be that adolescents involved in a role-specific relationship may exhibit lower problem behaviours because of the possible punitive consequences from their significant adult. For instance, if the significant adult identified was a teacher or pastor, the adolescent may

be more cautious in their behavior in an effort to win the favor of their significant adult or to avoid punishment.

Another possibility for the differences in results for the role and non-role specific adults may be explained by the presence or absence of a quality relationship with one or more parents in adolescents' lives. If parents are functioning in many of the scaffolding roles that adolescents need to navigate into adulthood (Bender, 1997) then adolescents may be afforded the opportunity to build relationships with young adults that resemble peer friendships. This idea of parents and family playing an important scaffolding role is consistent with the results of the kinship analysis as well.

Research shows that parents and extended family are the adults that adolescents are most likely to have contact with (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003). Adolescents' choices of kin as opposed to non-kin were almost equal in the current study, a finding consistent with Bo (1996) and Beam et al. (2002). Bo found that frequency of contact with family was related to positive personality traits. Although kinship status was associated with higher levels of social maturity in the current study, having a familial relationship did not demonstrate an association with any of the other psychosocial adjustment indicators. It may be that kin significant adults have a more vested interest in their own family doing well. Thus the influence of kin significant adults may be more likely to positively influence social maturity in adolescents because of a family bias. Beam et al. (2002) found that adolescents' relationships with kin were longer in duration and provided a "wider array of social support" (p. 322). Therefore identifying kin significant adults may have an inherent psychosocial advantage. Adolescents with higher levels of social maturity may be more likely to seek out adults in their kinship system to build

relationships with because of a perception of parental allegiance. Adolescents may perceive their parents to have more approval for relationships with adults in the family as opposed to adults unknown to them.

Perceptions are an important part for the motivation of adolescents' relationships with significant adults (Greenberger et al, 1994). Perceptions of self and reality are built on interpretations of others' perceptions of oneself (Stryker, 1967) as well as the importance one allots these perceived judgments. Analyses revealed that the importance of significant adults did not demonstrate an association with adolescent psychosocial adjustment. This result contradicts Rosenberg's (1973) assertion that it is not necessarily what others think of us, but rather how important they are to us that has an impact on our sense of self. Galbo (1984) reveals in his study "the actual influence of the adults seemed to vary and depend, at least in part, on the importance of the situation, and the perceived importance of the particular adult" (p. 957-958). Perhaps the importance of significant adults is unrelated to adolescent psychosocial adjustment for the same reasons that reporting a significant adult is not associated with psychosocial adjustment. Perhaps significant adults are only beneficial to adolescents when certain demographic criteria are present. That is if significant adults are non-role specific or kin, then they could have an impact on adolescents' psychosocial adjustment, regardless of their level of importance to the adolescent. If significant adults fall into any other demographic categories, then their relationships were not shown to have an association with adolescent psychosocial adjustment in this study. This result is consistent with Beam et al. (2002) who found that only frequency of support and contact were affected by importance of significant adults, not any of the other psychosocial outcomes. An alternate explanation for this result may

be found in the relationships that adolescents in the current study have with their parents. The important role of parents is well documented (Galbo, 1986; Blyth et al., 1982). Perhaps the parents of the adolescents in this study are meeting many of adolescents' psychosocial adjustment needs, thus diminishing the influence of significant adults.

Limitations

Due to the cross sectional nature of this secondary data, it is impossible to determine any causal effect of relationships with significant non-parental adults on adolescent psychosocial adjustment. It may be that adolescents reporting better psychosocial adjustment are better equipped to "attract" significant adults in their lives. Without longitudinal data, this possibility cannot be ruled out.

Another limitation mentioned in the procedures section was the occlusion of the sex of the significant non-parental adult which had to be deduced from response to an open-ended question.

Because the sample collected was not randomly selected from the population, we need to be cautious about generalizing to the whole community. Furthermore, the application of these findings to other adolescents is limited because of the uniqueness of this sample.

Future directions

While parents are still the most influential adults in adolescents' lives (Galbo, 1986), relationships with significant non-parental adults may be increasing in popularity as a method for learning adult roles (Darling et al., 1994) or understanding one's position in society (Erikson, 1968). If adolescents perceive parents as important, and parents are giving adolescents positive feedback, then adolescents may be able to derive their sense

of self-worth (Gottlieb & Sylvestre, 1996) and have their psychosocial needs met through their relationship with their parents. Future studies may find it useful to ascertain how the quality of parent relationship affects adolescents' reports of significant non-parental adults. It would also seem judicious to consider utilizing a qualitative approach to the study of significant non-parental adults in the future, so as to benefit from the emergent categories and relational characteristics that adolescents themselves identify. If, as Rosenberg (1973) has suggested, "significance is in the eye of the beholder" (p. 831), then it is likely that adolescents could provide more information about the important adults in their lives when the format is less structured.

In conclusion, the contribution that this research adds to the literature on adolescents' relationships with significant non-parental adults is two-fold. Foremost, the current study confirms and extends the findings from the literature regarding the demographic characteristics of adolescent/significant adult dyads. The uniqueness of this project was the links made between the characteristics (age differences, sex differences, kinship status, role type) of significant non-parental adult and adolescent dyads and the adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. Adolescents' relationships with significant non-parental adults may not always be beneficial to adolescent psychosocial adjustment, unless certain criteria are present. Relationships with role-specific or non-role-specific may be more helpful to adolescents. Practitioners and program planners may want to consider mobilizing the significant adults already in adolescents' kinship networks rather than trying to expand the significant adults that adolescents come in contact with in an effort to improve psychosocial adjustment.

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