



The Impact of Participation in Cool Girls, Inc. on Girls' Social Capital Networks

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Introduction

•Social capital, defined as access to community members who serve as reliable sources of information, support, and guidance, is an important contributor to positive youth development (Jarret, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Ferguson, 2006).

•Cool Girls, Inc., is an Atlanta-based organization that aims to promote positive development among socioeconomically disadvantaged girls. One way they try to do this is by increasing girls' social capital networks.

Present Study

•This study is part of a larger program evaluation of Cool Girls, Inc.

•We explored social capital networks among three groups: Cool Girls in their first year, Cool Girls in their second or more year, and a demographically matched comparison group.

•We hypothesize that Cool Girls participants will report greater gains in the number of non-related adults and peers in their social capital networks compared to the non-experimental group.

Participants

•We administered pre- and post-test surveys to Cool Girls in their first year ($N = 93$), Cool Girls in their second or more year ($N = 91$), and comparisons ($N = 92$) (overall $N = 276$). There was an average of 9 months between the pre- and post-test surveys.

•Participant Demographics:
 79.5% African American
 9.4% Latina
 3.1% Asian/Vietnamese
 1.2% Caucasian
 0.8% Pacific Islander
 5.9% Other

•Participants range from 8 to 14 years of age.

Methods

•At both the pre- and post-test survey, participants indicated up to three individuals from whom they could seek support for each of the following domains (i.e., a total of 15 possible nominations):

1. Academics
2. Goal Setting
3. General support and guidance
4. Sexual health
5. Problem Solving

•We coded responses based on type of relationship: parent, adult relative, adult nonrelative, peer relative, and peer nonrelative.

•We conducted paired sample t-tests to examine changes in total nominations within each relationship category for Cool Girls in their first year, Cool Girls in their second or more year, and comparisons.

Results

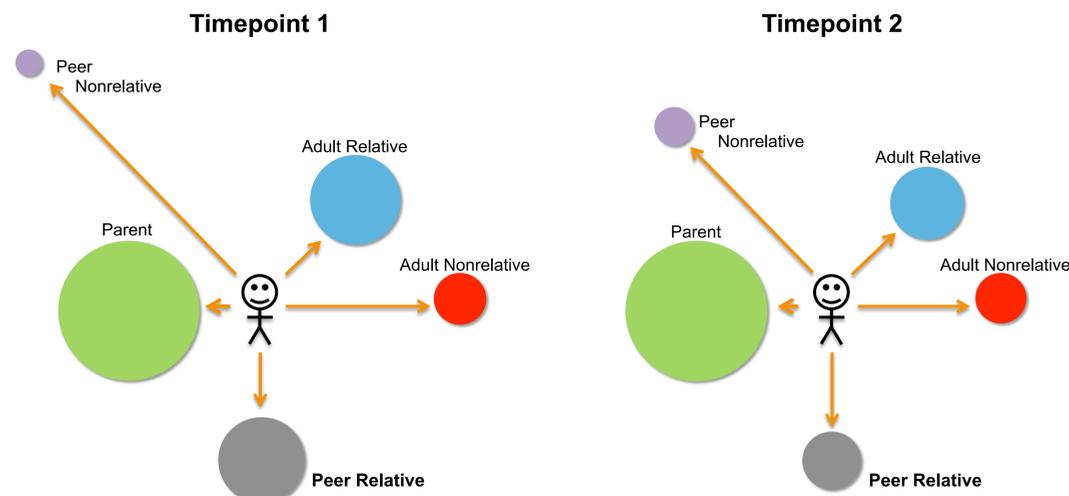


Figure 1. Social capital networks of first-year Cool Girls at timepoints 1 and 2. The stick figure represents the Cool Girl participant. The length of the line illustrates the frequency with which participants nominated a helper within each relationship category across all domains; shorter lines indicate more frequent nomination. The size of the color-coded circles indicates the total number of different people who were nominated within that relationship category; larger circles illustrate more people nominated.

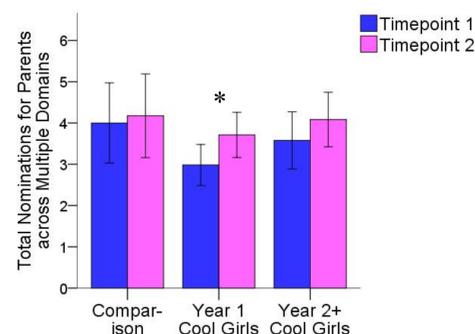
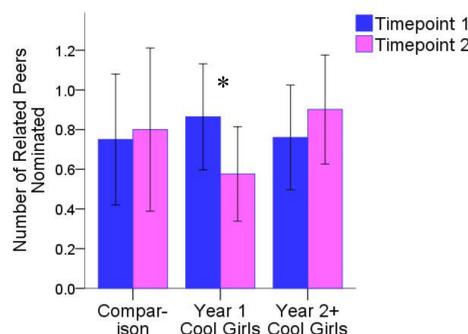


Figure 2. Year 1 Cool Girls reported more total nominations for parents across multiple domains by timepoint 2, ($t(58) = -2.93, p = .005$). There were no significant differences in the mean total number of nominations for parents across multiple domains by timepoint 2 for comparisons or participants who have been in Cool Girls for more than 1 year. * $p < .05$

Figure 3. Year 1 Cool Girls nominated fewer related peers by timepoint 2, ($t(58) = 2.21, p = .031$). There were no significant differences in the mean number of related peers nominated by timepoint 2 for comparisons or participants who have been in Cool Girls for more than 1 year. * $p < .05$



Discussion

•The results did not support our hypothesis that Cool Girls would report larger gains in the number of non-related adults and peers in their social capital networks compared to the non-experimental group.

•The only significant changes in number of nominations or number of people nominated in each relationship category occurred for first-year Cool Girls. This suggests that Cool Girls may have its largest impact on girls' social capital networks during the first year.

•First-year Cool Girls reported significantly more nominations of parents across multiple domains by timepoint 2. Cool Girls, Inc. may encourage its participants to seek help and guidance from reliable adults, including parents.

•The increase in nominations of parents across multiple domains may help explain why first-year Cool Girls nominated significantly fewer peer relatives. It is possible that Cool Girls, Inc. encourages its participants to seek support from reliable adults and, consequently, Cool Girls may seek help from fewer related peers.

•Finally, the findings in this study suggests that Cool Girls, Inc. can further promote positive youth development by adopting additional strategies to increase participants' social capital networks, particularly among non-related adult mentors.

•The results of this study are limited by:

1. The inability to control in which programs the comparison group participates.
2. Our measures did not differentiate between peers who do and do not attend Cool Girls. Thus, our measures could not determine if Cool Girls started to seek help from more peers in Cool Girls instead of peers outside of Cool Girls.
3. Survey fatigue; Cool Girls who have been in the program for more than one year may have become fatigued due to several rounds of testing.

Future Directions

•Future research will examine how the size and structure of girls' social capital networks affect other outcomes, such as academic success and psychological well-being.

•In addition, qualitative research could further our understanding of why Cool Girls, throughout the course of their first year in the program, may seek their parents' support and guidance more frequently and why they may go to fewer of their related peers for support and guidance.

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