

## **An Exploratory Study on the Social Cognitions of High School Freshmen Students' Social Skills, Peer Popularity and School Self-Efficacy**

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The developmental period of the high school years is characterized by the eminence of social cognitions in driving behaviors. Students' beliefs about their social skills, peer popularity, and school efficacy (one's self-confidence in school) are critical in promoting educational success. This study is informed by social cognitive theory, which highlights the way individuals learn behaviors through observing others in their social contexts. The study explores the social cognitions of a cohort of 9th grade students (n=218) in a semi-urban high school in Central Illinois. Data was collected and compared at two time points in 9th grade: semester 1 and 2. Preliminary findings revealed social skills beliefs are not significantly correlated with school self-efficacy or peer popularity at semester 1. However, at semester 2, social skills mindsets are positively correlated with school self-efficacy ( $r = 0.421, p \leq 0.001$ ) and peer popularity ( $r = 0.225, p \leq 0.001$ ). Findings suggest students' beliefs in the importance of their social skills is not significant for the beginning transition into high school. However, toward the end of their freshmen year, students become aware of the importance of their social skills in increasing their beliefs about peer popularity and school self-efficacy.

# An Exploratory Study on the Social Cognitions of High School Freshman Students' Social Skills, Peer Popularity, and School Self-Efficacy

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## Introduction

**Social skills** are important during the transition into high school. The high school years are characterized by the eminence of cognitions, such as students' beliefs about the importance of school and their peers, in driving behaviors.

**No study** focused on the relations among perceived importance of social skills, beliefs about school and peer popularity at 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

## Research Question

**What is the relationship among social skill perceptions, peer popularity, and school self-efficacy during the first year of high school?**

## Theoretical Framework

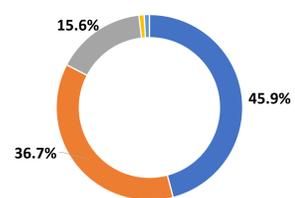
**Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977):** Posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior.

**Looking Glass Theory (Cooley, 1902):** Highlights the importance of how we appear to others. Behaviors are based on the judgements that we make based on how we think we appear to others.

## Data

Data is based on a cohort of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students (n=218) in a semi-urban high school in Central Illinois. Data was collected in both sem 1 and 2.

Race/Ethnicity



■ White ■ Black ■ Asian  
■ Hispanic ■ Other

### **Gender:**

Male: 46.8%,  
Female: 53.2%

**Free Reduced Lunch**  
Yes: 50%

**Special Education**  
Yes: 8.3%

## Measures

### **Social Skills Perceptions (S1 $\alpha=.948$ , S2 $\alpha=.957$ )**

Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) (Gresham & Elliot, 2008) 46 Questions e.g., : *I say "please" when I ask for things* (not important, important, critical)

### **Peer Popularity (S1 $\alpha=.756$ , S2 $\alpha=.701$ )**

3 Questions e.g., : *Compared to other students in school, I am:* (Least Popular, Fairly Popular, Average Popular, Very Popular, Most Popular)

### **School Self-Efficacy (S1 $\alpha=.853$ , S2 $\alpha=.768$ )**

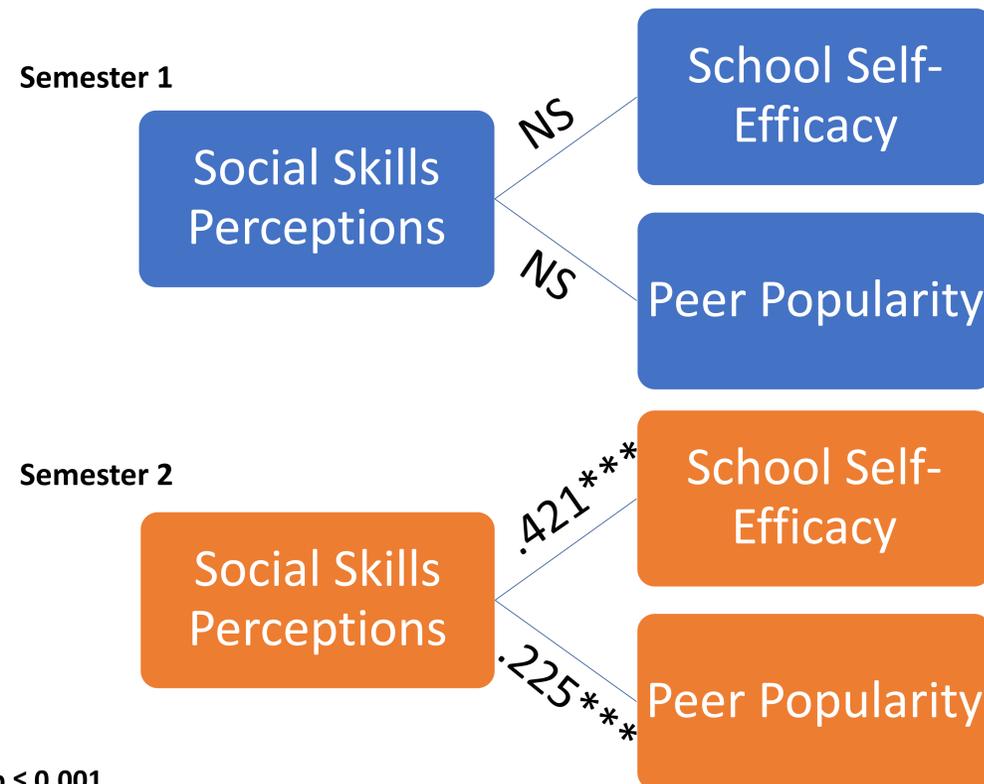
7 Questions e.g., : *I will graduate high school* (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree)

## Analysis

**Mean scores** of Social Skills Perceptions, School Self-Efficacy, Peer Popularity were compared at Semester 1 and 2

**Pearson correlation** were conducted to understand their relations at Semester 1 and 2

## Results



\*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$

**Findings** revealed that social skills perceptions were not significantly correlated with school self efficacy and peer popularity at semester 1. However, social skills perceptions at semester 2 were significantly positively correlated with self-perceptions of school self efficacy ( $r = 0.421$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ) and peer popularity ( $r = 0.225$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ).

## Discussion

**The associations among social skills perceptions, school self-efficacy, and peer popularity** are more prominent at semester 2 as compared to semester 1.

As students adjust to the expectations of high school and form relationships with classmates and teachers, they become more aware of the importance of their social skills.

## Limitations

**Student self-reports** may result in students responding to questions non-truthfully with socially desirable answers.

**Demographic differences** such as gender, racial/ethnicity, SES were not explored.

**Generalizability** concerns because study was based on one semi-urban public-school location.

## Area for Future Research

**Continue to monitor the relations** among social skills perceptions, peer popularity and school self-efficacy from tenth to twelfth grade. Also, explore possible demographic differences.

**Possibly looking at external factors** such as siblings, parents, or coaches and study their role on peer popularity and school self-efficacy.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

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