

Gender Differences in Growth Mindset, Group Identity, and Social Skills
Jacklyn Schlender, Research Assistant; Kevin Tan, PhD; Kate Wegmann, PhD
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Abstract

Promoting a growth academic mindset among high school students is associated with numerous positive life outcomes including overcoming obstacles, cultivating grit, taking risks, celebrating personal growth, and so on. This study specifically focuses on understanding the ways social skills and social identity relate to mindsets. Additionally, it is not known if these relations differ between male and female students. Gender differences may exist because of their different socialization process, resulting in varying levels of academic mindsets. Based on a cohort of students from one high school in urban New Jersey ($n=285$), gender differences in the relations among social skills, sense of social identity, and their levels of academic mindsets were examined. Preliminary analysis indicates female students report a marginally significant higher levels of growth mindsets than males (mean = 2.69, $sd = 0.28$ vs. mean = 2.61, $sd = 0.30$; $p \leq .10$). For female students, the level of social skills is significantly correlated with their social group identity ($r = 0.23$, $p \leq .05$). Group identity is significantly correlated with their mindset ($r = 0.24$, $p \leq .05$). For male students, only the level of social skills is correlated with their group identity ($r = 0.36$, $p \leq .01$). Additional work is ongoing to understand the relations among mindsets, social skills and social identity. Implications for educators in promoting student's growth mindsets will be discussed.

Keywords: gender differences, growth mindset, group membership, social skills, high schoolers.

Jacklyn Schlender, Research Assistant; Kevin Tan, PhD; Kate Wegmann, PhD
 School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

INTRODUCTION AND OVERALL MODEL

Research highlights the importance of young people's growth mindsets, social skills, and group identity in promoting positive youth development. However, to date, no study has looked at the interrelations among these factors among urban 9th grade students and how it may differ by gender.

- **Growth Mindset:** Belief that abilities can be nurtured through dedication and hard work, originated from psychologist Carol Dweck (Dweck 2006).
- **Social skills** can promote a growth mindset and are likely associated with a positive group identity with peers.
- However, based on **gender intensification theory**, the relations between social skills, group membership and growth mindset may differ between males and females.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Do gender differences exist among the interrelations between growth mindset, social skills, and group identity? If so, how does it differ between males and females?

DATA

Effective language that paints an understandable and detailed portrayal of the demographics of the population:

One cohort of 9th grade students in an urban New Jersey high school. In this school, 72% of the students are Latinx and 27% African American. A total of 292 students completed the survey which represents 92.1% of the freshman class. There were more male (58.2%) than female (41.8%) participants.

MEASURES

To measure students' social skills, they completed the Social Skills Improvement Survey, which is based on the Social Skills Improvement System (Gresham and Elliott).

The survey consists of 75 questions, measuring different aspects of social skills such as communication, cooperation and self-control. This measure has been empirically validated among high school students and is a widely used measure of students' social emotional needs.

- Group membership is based on 13 questions.
 - E.g. "I can trust group members"
- Growth mindset is based on 20 questions from Carol Dweck's scale.
 - E.g. "You are a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that"

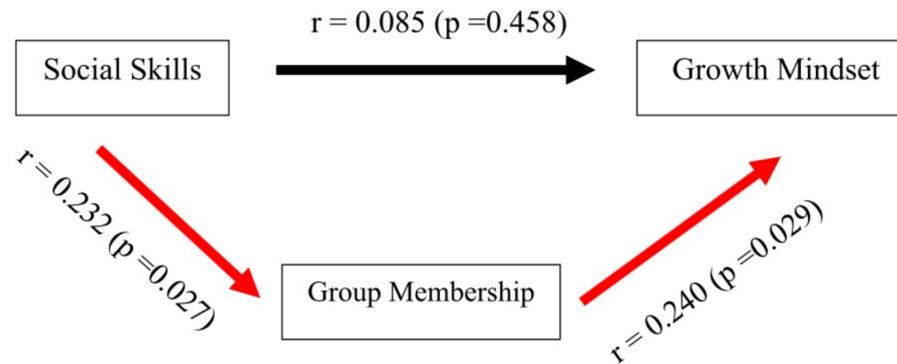
METHOD

For each of these domains in the survey, the sum score was first calculated. Subsequently, we applied Pearson correlation on the overall sample to examine the relationships among the three variables. Next, we separated the analyses by males and females.

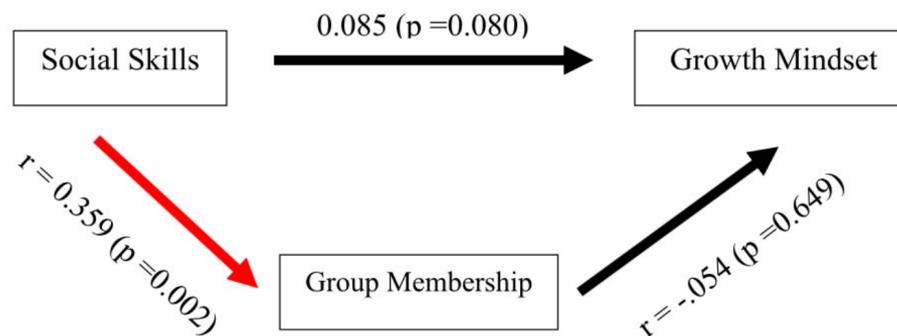
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Pearson Correlation Separated by Females and Males

Females:



Males:



- **Gender differences can exist** between social skills, group membership and growth mindset.
- For **male students**, social skills is positively correlated with a growth mindset ($r = 0.361$, $p = 0.003$). Social skills is not correlated with group membership. Group membership is not correlated with having a growth mindset.
- For **female students**, all hypothesized relationships are correlated with each other. Social skills is positively correlated with a growth mindset ($r = 0.254$, $p = 0.023$). Social skills are also positively correlated with group membership ($r = 0.223$, $p = 0.034$). Group membership is also positively correlated with a growth mindset ($r = 0.240$, $p = 0.029$).

References

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (1st ed.). Random House. Gresham, & Elliott. (2008). *Social skills improvement system*. Pearson.

LIMITATIONS

Student self-reports, students could have answered the questions with socially driven answers.

Generalizability, results are based on one cohort of freshmen students and from one urban high school. Findings might not be generalizable to different cohorts of students or in other urban schools.

Missing some student responses, a portion of students may have been absent on the days the survey was distributed.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall findings suggest **gender differences can exist** in the relations between group membership, social skills, and growth mindset. It is interesting that **group membership, or that sense of belonging, was found to be more important for females**. There are a variety of reasons as to why this might be, such as women may feel more confident when they are liked by their peers. Women also may be happier and more content when they feel included in their group. **Women overall may find more value in having good social skills**, which leads to better involvement in their group.

AREA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Continued testing: Mediation analysis using structural equation modeling to understand the direct effects of growth mindset, group membership, and social skills on males and females.

Other student outcomes: More work can be done to examine how growth mindsets, social skills, and group membership impact outcomes such as grades, attendance, and disciplinary referrals.

Longitudinal study: More research could look at how the relationships evolve from 9th through 12th grade. It is important that continued support be provided for students beyond their freshmen year.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisors Dr. Kevin Tan and Dr. Kate Wegmann for their guidance, encouragement, and support throughout the course of this project. I am beyond grateful for this opportunity and I look forward to see what comes from this research in the future.

References

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (1st ed.). Random House.

Gresham, & Elliott. (2008). *Social skills improvement system*. Pearson.