

Webs of Support: An Integrative Framework of Relationships, Social Networks, and Social Support for Positive Youth Development

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Abstract Supportive relationships promote positive academic, behavioral, and psychological outcomes, while also buffering against negative outcomes. Traditionally, there has been a schism in how developmental scientists study relationships, with studies focused either on relationship quality and supports within dyads or general structures of relationships and social capital across social networks. While these lines of research provide insight into the power of relationships, resources, and networks for youth, they have not fully captured how relationships and resources operate in a relational developmental system. Drawing from relationship, social support, social capital, and social network literatures, this article presents a new framework, webs of support, to actualize how relationships and resources optimally operate to promote more accurate examinations of how adolescents gain the developmental supports necessary to thrive. This article also discusses implications and poses larger questions about the use of this framework in research and practice.

Introduction

Relationships are the vehicle that propels adolescent development forward and are the foundation upon which all adolescent¹ development rests. Adolescents learn, grow, and develop through relationships. Relationships socialize youth and subsequently encourage identity development, and provide social connections that are necessary for all humans (Lieberman 2013). Supportive relationships promote

positive academic, behavioral, and psychological outcomes (Chu et al. 2010), while also buffering against negative outcome such as substance abuse (Curran 2007; Li et al. 2011).

Research on relationships have either primarily focused on dyadic interactions or on the network structure of relationships. However, relational developmental systems theory asserts that adolescents are embedded within a multilayered ecology, within which adolescents influence and are being influenced by relationships with people, institutions, and the broader environment (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006; Lerner et al. 2015). From this perspective, each person in a relationship influences and is influenced by the other person and each dyadic relationship is embedded within a broader ecology of relationships, supports, opportunities, and barriers. Yet, with a few exceptions (Keller 2005; Schwartz and Rhodes 2016; Spencer et al. 2011), developmental researchers traditionally take dyadic approaches to understanding youth-adult relationships. Further, few studies capture the multidimensional, complexity of social supports and social capital (Varga et al., unpublished data). Taken together, these varied lines of research have not fully captured how relationships and resources operate in a relational developmental system. Drawing from relationship, social support, social capital, and social network literatures, the authors present a new framework, *webs of support*, to actualize how relationships and resources optimally operate to promote more accurate examinations of how adolescents gain the developmental supports necessary to thrive. Implications and larger questions about the use of this framework in research and practice will be discussed.

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¹ The authors consider adolescence to refer to the developmental period that occurs roughly between 10 and 19 years of age (Sacks 2003).

Relational Developmental Systems Theory and Youth-Adult Relationships

Adolescent development and overall human development are defined by the dynamic relationship between a person and their context (Lerner et al. 2015). “Context”, though, is not a homogeneous construct. Rather, youth are embedded within a multilayered ecology, within which the youth is an active agent continually influencing and being influenced by relationships with people, institutions, and the broader environment (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006). This development dynamic has been called a “youth system” (Zaff et al. 2016). When the needs and strengths of a young person are aligned with the assets and supports in a community, a young person is considered to be embedded within a “supportive youth system”, an ecological system that increases the probability that youth will be on a positive developmental trajectory (e.g., academic, social-emotional, physical, vocational, and civic trajectories).

Relationships constitute the foundation of any youth system. Families, schools, youth development organizations, health care institutions, and other aspects of a community are considered to be “contexts”, but they are filled with the people with whom young people relate every day. Like any other aspect of a youth system, relationships between a youth and others do not occur in isolation. Rather, all of these relationships are embedded within an ecology of relationships. As such, any given relationship influences and is influenced by other relationships (Keller 2005; Spencer et al. 2011).

Yet, the vast majority of the empirical research on relationships has examined how one important adult² can impact a young person’s behavioral, psychological, academic, and emotional development (Chang et al. 2010; Rhodes and DuBois 2008). These studies focus on single dyads in single ecologies (e.g., schools, mentoring programs). This research provides many insights about dyadic relationships between youth and adults. For example, higher emotional support from parents is linked to increases in positive psychological outcomes (e.g., self-esteem) and decreases in negative outcomes (e.g., depression; Smetana et al. 2006). Moreover, in teacher-student relationships, teacher investment appears important for fostering connection and is related to academic motivation and engagement (Yu et al. 2016). Research has established that successful mentoring relationships—characterized by authenticity, companionship, trust, reciprocity, attunement, and collaboration—are linked to increases in positive outcomes such as academic engagement (Spencer 2006; Varga and Deutsch 2016). Clearly, it is important for

youth to have strong supportive relationships with adults in every context. Yet, little is known about how these dyadic relationships, which are embedded within a broader ecology, are related to one another. Even within a single setting, such as school, little is known about how youth relationships with supportive adults beyond teachers (e.g. staff, administration) operate.

Understanding how these relationships are interrelated may shed light on how to most effectively support youth. For example, Jones and Deutsch (2011) found that afterschool program staff could use knowledge of proximal relational ties in youth’s lives (e.g., with peers, teachers, and parents) to provide support and resolve conflicts. In a study of parents’ roles in mentoring relationships, Spencer et al. (2011) found that parents who felt more connected to their child’s mentor often approached the mentoring relationship more collaboratively, whereas parents who did not feel connected to the mentor sometimes hindered the mentoring relationship. More recently, some mentoring research has moved toward a systems perspective, considering the interconnectedness between parents, other adults (e.g., social workers), mentors, and youth in mentoring relationships (Keller 2005; Keller and Blakeslee 2014; Spencer et al. 2011). These studies have provided great insight into the impact that other adults’ beliefs and actions can have on mentoring relationships and how mentoring relationships might impact the ecologies in which they are embedded. Most recently, Schwartz and Rhodes (2016) proposed a mentoring framework that promotes broader connections between youth and various adults through recognizing the potential mentors in youth lives and strengthening youth individual and environmental assets so they may make more intentional connections. This framework, when used in mentoring programs, could greatly expand the reach and impact of those programs (Schwartz and Rhodes 2016). Yet more research needs to be conducted and theories expanded to understand the broader ecology of relationships within which youth are embedded and the supports that these relationships provide. Research that intentionally examines the constellation of supportive adults in adolescents’ lives across contexts could provide a more complete understanding of the role relationships play in encouraging positive youth development. Importantly, relationships are not homogeneous. Instead, youth gain different benefits from different people within different contexts and in relation to different people. To begin to explore the content of these relationships, the authors turn to a discussion of social support and social capital in youth-adult relationships and how each construct has been traditionally examined.

² The authors recognize that peers are also important sources of support for youth but this article focuses primarily on youth-adult relationships.

Table 1 Social Support

Type	Definition
Emotional support	Allow discussion of feelings, expression of concerns/worries; indicate sympathy, approval, caring, acceptance of person
Instrumental support	Provide money, household goods, tools, transportation, child care, assistance with cooking, cleaning, shopping, repairs
Informational support	Provide information about resources, suggest alternative courses or action, provide advice about effectiveness
Companionship support	Provide partner for sports, outdoor activities, movies, theater, museums, restaurants, shopping, parties, trips
Validation support	Provide consensus information re prevalence of problems, normativeness of individual's behavior/feelings, individual's relative status in population

Adapted from Wills and Shinar (2000)

Social Support

Social support can generally be considered the social resources perceived to be available or provided to a person by formal and informal relationships (Gottlieb and Bergen 2010) and is associated with positive psychosocial and behavioral outcomes for adolescents (Chang et al. 2010; Beam et al. 2002). Social support can come from adults in different contexts (e.g., parents, teachers, mentors, coaches; Chu et al. 2010), and there are multiple forms of social support that function differently in response to different types of problems (see Table 1 for definitions; Wills and Shinar 2000). Due to the multidimensional nature of social support, much of the research previously conducted has focused on dyads in single contexts (e.g., teacher-student relationships; Demaray and Malecki 2002) with single types of support. Generally, the research suggests that social support can have positive effects for youth in relationships with various types of people. Parents have traditionally been found to be important providers of informational support for long-term issues for youth, such as career choices (Harris 1998). Peers have been found to be a source of validation support or social comparison for youth during a time of identity exploration (Brown 2004). Richman et al. (1998) found that high school students received technical appreciation (most akin to validation) from their teachers. Another study found that adolescents reported teachers provided more instances of informational support than both parents and peers (Malecki and Demaray 2003). Dubois and Silverthorn (2005) found that non-parental kin were the type of non-parental adult who was most likely to be nominated by youth as a natural mentor. These family members included older siblings, grandparents, and aunts and uncles. One study found that families provided unconditional regard and information on an individual's self-worth (validation support; Cutrona 2000). Family members have also been found to be the most durable and dependable source of instrumental support (Tracy and Biegel 1994; Dolan and McGrath 2006). Overall, the social support literature has primarily focused on the support of parents, peers, and teachers with lesser attention has

been paid to other adults in youth social networks such as extended family members and non parental adults who also provide important support (Beam et al. 2002; Chang et al. 2010). Additionally, little research has examined how social support from these various adults are related (Erikson et al. 2009). This approach of examining single types of adults and single types of support has limited the field's understanding of how to foster this important resource in youth-adult relationships (Malecki and Demaray 2003; Richman et al. 1998).

Despite the essentiality of social support to adolescent development, the literature has produced a mixed picture of how support operates embedded within a youth system. Integrating a social network perspective into conceptions of social support can help to clarify this picture (Gottlieb and Bergen 2010). A social network refers to all of the people in a given social environment and the different relationships that tie them together (Keller and Blakeslee 2014). According to social network theory, an adolescent's social network is comprised of all the people with whom the youth interacts in their ecology and the ties between those people (Wellman 1983). Gottlieb and Bergen (2010) suggest that, in order to fully understand the role of relationships in a young person's life, a person's entire social field needs to be mapped from acquaintances to close relationships to fully understand social support in a person's life. That is, all potentially relevant sources of support need to be mapped to ensure full examination of social support.

Returning to the social support literature, emerging research shows that multiple adults from different contexts can each be comprehensive sources of social support for youth (Varga et al., unpublished data). For instance, in one study, emotional supports from parents and adults in school and instrumental supports from out-of-school adults were most predictive of positive school engagement (Center for Promise 2015). These findings suggest that previous studies were not finding conflicting reports of support, rather all adults likely have the capacity to provide all kinds of support. Additionally, social network theory encourages consideration of how various actors in an adolescent's social network impact one another. For example, it has

been empirically established that feelings of emotional support and warmth from, and closeness to parents typically decline for youth during adolescence (Smetana et al. 2006; Buhrmester and Furman 1987), suggesting that adolescents turn elsewhere for support. Indeed, as youth age, they report higher levels of social support from peers (Bokhorst et al. 2010; Furman and Buhrmester 1992). Further, in an examination of the interdependence of informal mentors and other social relationships in adolescents lives, Erikson et al. (2009) found that informal mentors can both compensate for the lack of resources in an at risk adolescents' social network and be a complementary resource to advantaged adolescents. Overall, taking into account social supports multidimensional nature and examining it's interconnectiveness across adolescents networks would provide a better understanding of this important resource.

Social Capital

Social capital has been identified as an important resource youth gain from adults and is often (Chang et al. 2010). Bonding, or exclusive, social capital is the value (e.g., psychological resource) that is produced from connections between people who already know one another or share a common identity (e.g., family, culture). Bridging, or inclusive, social capital expands beyond the shared sense of identity of bonding social capital to include people from different groups. Bridging social capital networks provide social connections to external economic or social resources and are useful for spreading information across religious, class, and ethnic lines (Puntnam 2000). In studies of youth development, social network and social capital theories are often tied together, because social capital is both a resource generated in social networks (i.e., bonding social capital) as well as a tool for expanding social networks (i.e., bridging social capital). Social capital is generally considered to be a set of social resources that are accessed and exchanged in relationships between people and institutions (Bourdieu 1985). Studies have suggested that social capital promotes positive youth outcomes such as academic achievement (Chu et al. 2010; Kao and Rutherford 2007), educational attainment (White and Glick 2000), extracurricular participation (Glanville et al. 2008), and self-concept (Thomason and Kuperminc 2014) while also buffering negative youth outcomes such as substance abuse (Curran 2007) and dropping out of school (Croninger and Lee 2001). The assumption in many studies of social capital is that adults with higher levels of education and income provide young people with access and exposure to resources and networks the youth would otherwise not have. This exposure is subsequently useful for youth educational and professional advancement (Gaddis 2012). However, social capital has been ill-defined

empirically, with no standard definition or measurement. Some studies consider social capital to be an economic resource, while others consider social capital to be a psychological resource (e.g. emotional support, validation; see Table 2). Moreover, most studies on social capital for youth have had less focus on the actual relationships that underlie the interactions necessary to produce social capital (Varga et al., unpublished data). The result of this focus on undefined resources is that much of previous research on social capital in youth-adult relationships has often not furthered the fields understanding of how social capital is developed and produced in these relationships.

Some studies have recently begun to disentangle the characteristics of social capital and have suggested that psychological resources (e.g. bonding, expansion of networks) and individual characteristics (e.g., social competence) are implicated in developing and exchanging social capital (Abelev 2009; Jarrett et al. 2005). Furthermore, one study suggests that including youth agency, an essential component in youth systems theory, could improve assessment, analysis, and promotion of social capital in youth-adult relationships (Varga et al., unpublished data). These studies have expanded the fields understanding of how social capital is fostered, accessed, and exchanged in youth-adult relationships.

More extensive research that intentionally examines the underlying relationships and characteristics as well as the functions of social capital in youth networks is necessary. Ultimately, the structural aspects of social capital and network theories are helpful for studying youth development from an ecological frame that can be used to determine potential sources of support for youth, understand how dyads within a network are related to other actors in a network, and to understand how to expand a young persons' network.

While prior research has established the essentiality of relationships, social support, and social capital as approaches for examining youth development a framework combining these lines of research is necessary to better understand how to support adolescents across development. Drawing on these different theories and previous research (Center for Promise 2015), the authors propose a web of support framework for conceptualizing the relational and resource layers of youth systems theories.

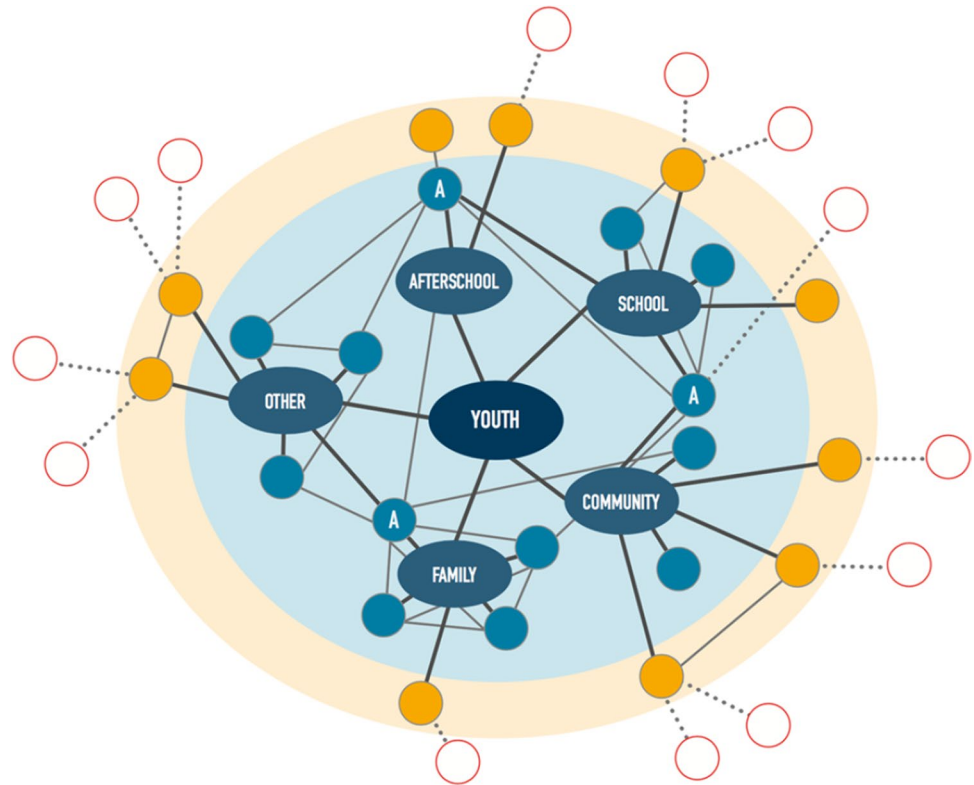
A Web of Support

A web of support refers to the network of relationships youth have with adults and peers across contexts in which supports are provided that help the young person advance in development (see Fig. 1). For this article, the authors will focus on youth-adult relationships. This framework considers:

Table 2 Summary of Previous Studies of Social Capital in Youth-Adult Relationships

References	Definition	Measurement	Type of resource
Chang et al. (2010)	“Social capital encompasses aspects of the social environment that provide an individual with access to resources that make positive outcomes more likely” (p 1067)	VIP’s educational attainment and engagement in misconduct	Economic resources; Social resources
Haddad et al. (2011)	No theoretical definition provided	VIP’s educational attainment, employment status, and occupational prestige	Economic resources; social resources
Stanton-Salazar (2001)	“The value of a relationship that provides support and assistance in a given social situation” (p 12)	In depth interviews with youth	Social resources; psychological resources
Brewster and Bowen (2004)	“Social capital includes the resources that reside in human relationships that help promote positive outcomes for individuals” (p 50)	Student surveys perceptions of teacher support	Psychological resources
Jarrett et al. (2005)	“Social capital as social relationships that entail the transfer of resources and provide positive benefits. For individuals, engaged in social interaction with other individuals or groups provides resources which they would not otherwise have access to” (p 43)	In depth interviews with youth	Social resources; psychological resources
Sullivan and Larson (2009)	“Bridging social capital: contact with people from circles outside their own who provide access to otherwise inaccessible information, connections, and other assets” (p 2–3)	In depth interviews with youth	Economic resources; social resources

VIP significant non-parental adult

Fig. 1 Web of support

1. *Youth agency and characteristics* Consistent with youth systems (Zaff et al. 2016) and ecological theories (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006), the authors assume youth are active agents in their own development and therefore intentionally engage or disengage from actors within the web. Further, their characteristics (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, internal assets) also determine the level of effectiveness any support will have.
2. *Relationships between all adults and peers within the web* Consistent with ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006), the authors not only consider the ways in which all actors within a web are related to an individual youth, they also consider the ways in which each actor is related to other actors within the web. The connections between adults in the web can shed light on the embeddedness of each relationship. Further, considering all relationships between adults allows for the inclusion of actors who are not directly related to the youth but instead are potential sources of support the youth may be connected to (i.e. bridged) through actors in the web. Additionally, consistent with social network and social capital theory (Wellman 1983), the authors take into account the frequency of interactions amongst all actors in the web, which allows us to distinguish between relationships that are long-lasting (i.e. strong ties) and relationships that are more fleeting (i.e. weak ties).
3. *Supports provided* Consistent with social support literature, the authors recognize that all adults regardless of their position in the web have the potential to provide at least one support to youth. Moreover, the authors consider how the support provided by one adult might impact the support provided by another adult within the web.
4. *Variation in importance* While all adults in a web can provide support for youth, certain adults might be elevated in the adolescents' mind. The authors recognize that there can be multiple adults who reach this elevated level in young people's webs but they hypothesize that youth need at least one for effective development. Characteristics of these adults are discussed below.

Youth as Active Agents in Their Web

Youth are active agents in their own development and are therefore active agents in developing and maintaining their web of supports (Schwartz and Rhodes 2016; Lerner et al. 2015; Larson 2006). Empirical evidence suggests that adolescents actively and intentionally regulate their behaviors in each context, sometimes adapting based on feedback from or circumstances within the context (Lerner et al. 2005a, b). In a qualitative examination of connection in youth-adult relationships, Futch Ehrlich et al. (2016) found that youth discussed intentional initiation behaviors that led to a greater

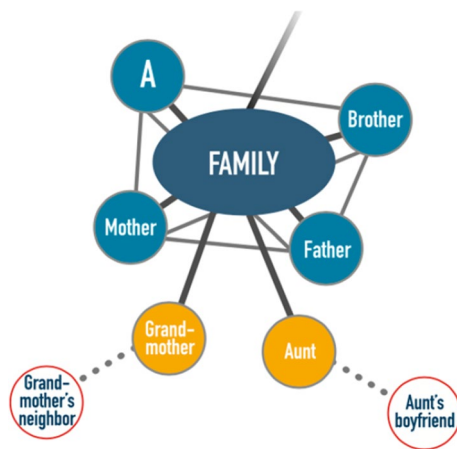


Fig. 2 Example of a core within a web

connection in their relationships with supportive adults. Additionally, several studies on youth initiated mentoring (YIM) find that youth are able to identify and select mentors, and that those relationships are enduring and filled with trust and support (Schwartz and Rhodes 2016; Schwartz et al. 2013; Spencer et al. 2013). Given the wealth of evidence that youth have agency in their own development, it is important that youth are considered in examinations of resources and relationships in their lives.

Structure of the Web: Strong Ties, Weak Ties, and “Cores”

All webs of support have two types of relationships, strong ties and weak ties (Wellman 1983). Strong ties tend to develop over long periods of time and are enduring (e.g., parents, extended family members, close friends). Clusters of strong ties constitute a core (see Fig. 2). Individuals in a core engage in consistent interaction with the youth and other core individuals making the core of the web interconnected and structurally sound (i.e., resilient). This optimal structure means that disturbances to a core such as a teacher leaving school or a sibling going to college do not collapse the core. Rather, consistent with tenets of relational developmental systems and universal resiliency theories, the core adapts to continue to support the youth. A web of support inevitably has multiple cores; one in each developmental context.

It is possible for youth to have a core in family, school, work, and out-of-school contexts. In this way, supportive adults are not viewed as removed from their contexts, as it is likely that the support they provide the youth is tied to the context. Core adults likely provide youth with supports that come together to satisfy the young persons’ needs in that context. Within each core, a youth may have a connection with an adult who rises above the others, who the authors

call an *anchor*. While youth may feel close to and supported by all of the people in their cores, the anchor is the person who:

- Youth feel they could go to for anything
- Can help youth navigate throughout individual contexts and/or bridge them to other contexts
- Provides an all-encompassing sense of unconditional support, and
- Provides youth with a sense that they are heard and matter.

While some members of the core can provide some of these functions, the anchor is the person the youth most often leans on because the anchor provides all of the functions. Previous research (Center for Promise 2015; Benson et al. 2011) suggests that positive developmental outcomes are more likely when youth have at least one anchor in their web, but optimal development might call for an anchor in all of the primary contexts in which youth are engaged. As previously mentioned, it is possible for a group of adults to collectively provide the kind of support a single anchor typically provides. For some youth, one person can embody all of these important characteristics; for others, several actors within a core could fulfill these needs.

At the periphery of each core are people with whom youth have weaker ties. Weak ties tend to fade in and out of youth lives, although they have the potential to develop into strong ties (e.g., neighbors, friend of a friend). People on the periphery have fewer interactions with the youth and, though they may also be connected to other individuals in the adolescents’ core, those on the periphery likely have entirely different core networks of their own. A key function of adults on the periphery is to provide youth with connections to new networks than adults in the core don’t have (i.e., bridging social capital), though core adults can also provide bridging social capital. Likewise, peripheral adults can also provide different types of social supports.

The size (number) and density (level of interconnection) of each web depends on several things: the availability of adults in adolescents’ ecologies, institutional support for youth-adult relationships, and cultural factors (e.g., Latino cultures place a heavy emphasis on family connectedness and are likely to have highly interconnected family cores). The type of support provided by the web depends on the adolescents’ individual attributes and developmental phase, their history, and context. For example, on the topic of cross-race mentoring relationships in the United States, some youth of color may feel a cultural distrust toward White adults because of the history of discrimination and oppression of people of color in this country, the effects of which are still relevant (Sanchez et al. 2014). Sanchez and colleagues (2014) further posit that this cultural distrust may

prevent youth of color from forming new relationships with cross-race adults in program settings. Though several practices have been highlighted that can ease this barrier (e.g., cultural competency training; Sue 2006), it is important to understand such cultural factors may exist. While the authors have proposed here an optimal structure of a web of support, they acknowledge that a wide variety of web structures is possible, many of which currently exist and are supportive for youth.

Implications and Inquiries

By using a web of support framework, areas of inquiry can be expanded to provide a more thorough understanding about what young people need in their lives to thrive. For example, research on educational achievement and attainment has focused on the effects of the dyadic relationship between youth and teachers (Yu et al. 2016) or parents (Jeynes 2007), or peers (Rubin et al. 2006), among others in an adolescents' life. Although considering the unique influence that a given person can have on an adolescents' educational outcomes is important to know, the effect of any relationship will inevitably be influenced by the other relationships that a youth has in her life. For instance, youth who have a warm, encouraging relationship with their parents will possibly have an easier time connecting with and deriving benefits from their teachers. On the other hand, youth who have neglectful or abusive parents can have a more difficult bonding with their teachers (Salzinger et al. 1993). Thus, considering a young person's web of support can change the way teachers and other practitioners think about positioning themselves to assist youth and change the resources they seek out to assist youth. Likewise, this framework can change the way that a researcher approaches studies on how a relationship can benefit youth development.

When does a Web of Support Promote Positive Youth Development?

The authors acknowledge that simply having a web of supportive adults and peers might not necessarily produce positive developmental outcomes, as de facto defined by societal norms. For instance, much research has demonstrated that youth facing large amounts of adversity sometimes seek gang membership for survival (Hagan and McCarthy 1997; Kipke et al. 1997); find companionship, social support, and acceptance in gangs (Jankowski 2001); and have higher self-esteem than non-gang youth (Evans and Mason 1996). While webs that include gangs may be adaptive for an individual youth in the short term, such webs ultimately remain maladaptive for long-term outcomes and for broader society (Yoder et al. 2003). To understand how to optimize webs

of support for all youth, researchers must better understand how different positive and negative agents in a web work together or against one another and how they affect developmental outcomes.

How is One Adult's Support Related to the Support in the Rest of the Web?

The authors stress that all actors in the web are part of an interconnected system (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006). This assumption maintains that one adult's provision of support exerts some level of influence on the surrounding actors' (including the adolescent) actions. However, it is unclear how one adult's support impacts adolescents support-seeking behaviors and adolescents' feelings of needing support. Further, it is unclear how one adult's support for a young person impacts other adults' provision of support in the web. Gaining insight in this area has implications for formal and informal mentoring student–teacher relationships (Schwartz and Rhodes 2016), student–teacher relationships (Rhodes and DuBois 2006), and relationships within after-school settings, among others. More research needs to be conducted on the relationships and interactions between adults in a web to better document the ripple effect each actor has on the adolescents' web of support.

How Would Public Policy Questions be Reframed Using a Web of Support Framework? The Example of School Choice

Public policies directed toward youth are typically implemented and evaluated as if youth are living and developing in a vacuum. The Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has funded mentoring as a key lever for reducing juvenile delinquency. While laudable, such a policy relies on a dyadic relationship to transform a youth's life. Using a web of support framework could refine the way that policy makers and evaluators develop a policy to support youth or assess the effectiveness of such policies; recognizing the essentiality of these webs to positive youth developmental outcomes and designing policies that encourage the optimization of these multiple, embedded relationships. As one example, school choice models, whether through bussing, charters, or vouchers, result in youth often attending schools that are not in their neighborhoods or within walking distance of their neighborhoods. Therefore, youth may be traveling a considerable geographic distance from their family and neighborhood cores which provide support they need, to new cores at school, making connections between cores difficult to establish (Weiss and Westmoreland 2006). If the connections across cores are indeed important, then policy makers would need to be aware of the barriers that school choice may pose to adolescents' webs

and subsequent development. Policy makers could then use this knowledge to develop ways to promote linkages between home and school cores, particularly in recognition of geographical barriers. Similarly, practitioners might consider opportunities to improve connections. For evaluations of school choice models, variations in impacts on academic outcomes and overall well-being could be a function of connections between home and school cores, or other relationships in an adolescents' life. For instance, the strength of connections between schools and families, or between the broader adult and peer networks in a neighborhood and the school community could be implicated in a young person's academic success. Therefore, considering a webs of support framework could illuminate why a program is having differential impacts on young people and provide insights into how to improve the program.

Conclusion

Frameworks for understanding the effects of relationships on the lives of adolescents have either focused on the depth of one-to-one relationships or on the breadth of social networks. In this paper, the authors have presented an integrated framework of various literatures showing that webs of support recognize that youth are active agents in relationships, their relationships are embedded within a broader ecology of relationships (and other supports), and different adults will provide different sets of social supports. Importantly, the authors do not consider a web of support to be a diffuse network. Instead, relationships in a web of support tend to be clustered within contexts (e.g., home, school), and youth need to negotiate those relationships across contexts. The authors hope is that this framework provokes different ways to consider empirical inquiries about relationships and overall youth development, and informs how practitioners and policymakers consider and develop the most effective strategies for supporting youth.

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Authors' Contributions Both authors had conducted research separately which led them to this concept. SV took the primary role in writing the article, designing the figures, and responding to reviewers. JZ primarily conceived the name and concept of webs of support and participated in writing and editing the manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final version of this article.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest Both authors report no conflicts of interest.

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