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## The Impact of Extracurricular Leadership Activities on Adolescent Life Satisfaction

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## ABSTRACT

Little research has explored the role of different leadership activities on psychological well-being of adolescence. However, previous research has shown that leadership development along with the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs: *autonomy, relatedness, and competence*; and experiencing feelings of vitality lead to optimal functioning and development and positive life satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2001).

The current study uses Self Determination Theory (SDT) and Authentic Leadership Theory (ALT) as guiding frameworks to examine the relationship between leadership activities and adolescent life satisfaction.

The study aimed to explore the how the three basic psychological needs, feelings of vitality, and leadership activities (in and outside of school; ISLA and OSLA respectively) impact reported life satisfaction.

Data was collected from 109 high school students (36% Male, 64% Female) in 12 western New York high schools with ages ranging from 14-18-years-old.

A statistically significant hierarchical regression model revealed significant relationships between outside of school leadership activities and life satisfaction both alone (*adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 8.8%*) when coupled with vitality (*adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 35.3%*) and when both are joined with basic psychological needs satisfaction (*adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 44.0%*)

With this knowledge, community leadership program options may be explored by areas where they are not readily available to some/all youth. The results of this study suggest that expanding and developing community level activities for all youth may lead to higher levels of life satisfaction amongst that population.

## INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have shown that certain extracurricular school-based activities such as sports can help satisfy basic psychological needs and increase feelings of vitality and life satisfaction (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Hanrahan, 2005).

School sports and other in-school leadership activities can allow for adolescents to develop positive and meaningful relationships with adults (who can serve as mentors) and peers and give opportunities for their psychological needs to be met. However, it has not yet been deeply explored whether the type of activity or the environment which it takes place affects overall youth life satisfaction.

The present study utilizes SDT and ALT in hierarchically examining the relationships between 4 constructs of interest (inside and outside of school leadership activities, basic psychological needs satisfaction [BPNs], vitality) and youth life satisfaction.

The purpose is to better understand how the nature/context of leadership activities can help explain the variance in life satisfaction amongst youth from underserved populations. Through assessing inside of school versus outside of school leadership activities (ISLA and OSLA respectively) this study hopes to display the impact community involvement has on the overall life satisfaction of adolescents.

## METHODS

- This study focuses on understanding reported adolescent life satisfaction prior to a youth leadership conference.
- Participants (n=109) from 12 different high schools (mean from each school= 7, SD= 3.7) were chosen by their respective districts to attend a free youth leadership conference.
- Demographics showed most participants identifying as female (63.3%) and white/Caucasian (88.1%). Student ages ranged from 14-18 (M= 15.53, SD=1.07).
- The current study utilizes 4 pre-conference surveys with data regarding basic psychological needs satisfaction, vitality, life satisfaction, and leadership development in and outside of school.
- All assessments utilized a 7-point Likert scale, except for the leadership development questionnaire which had a 5-point scale. The number of questions ranged from 4 (leadership development) to 21 (BPNS).
- The predictor variables examined in this current study are basic psychological needs satisfaction and vitality. These variables were chosen due to the hypothesized positive relationship with the outcome variable of life satisfaction. Additional factors analyzed in this study are leadership involvement inside and outside of school.

## RESULTS

Prior to performing the regression analyses, correlations among all of the control, predictor variables, and the outcome variable, life satisfaction, were calculated, alpha levels of <.05 were incorporated into the hierarchical regression models.

Table 1. Reliability estimates.

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Vitality	7	.60
Life Satisfaction	5	.84
Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction	21	.90

All of the correlations between study variables are illustrated in Table 2. All bivariate correlations performed (except in school leadership involvement) were statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ) ranging from moderately weak ( $r = .311$ ) to strong moderate ( $r = .622$ ) associations with life satisfaction.

Table 2. Means (M), standard deviations (s.d.), and correlations between study variables

Variables	M	s.d.	n	1	2	3	4	5
1. Leadership involvement inside of school	2.0566	1.21757	108	-	.339**	.161	.128	.183
2. Leadership involvement outside of school	1.0094	.84510	108			.288**	.263**	.311**
3. Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction	5.2512	.77002	106				.641**	.622**
4. Vitality	4.7682	.77625	106					.582**
5. Life Satisfaction	3.7434	.78547	106					

\* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
\*\*Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In predicting life satisfaction scores, a hierarchal regression analysis, controlling for outside of school leadership involvement, examined the role of vitality and basic psychological needs satisfaction (Table 3.):

The first model examining the variance explained by OSLA, adolescents' involvement in outside of school leadership activities significantly predicted adolescent's life satisfaction scores Adjusted  $R^2 = .088$ ,  $F(1,104) = 11.114$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . The  $F$ -test was significant and accounted for 8.8% of the variance contributing to life satisfaction scores. OSLA  $\beta = .369$ ,  $t(104) = 3.33$ ,  $p = .001$  significantly predicted variance in the model.

The second model examining the variance explained by OSLA and vitality, adolescents' outside of school leadership involvement and feelings of vitality significantly predicted adolescent's life satisfaction scores Adjusted  $R^2 = .353$ ,  $F(2,103) = 43.712$ ,  $p < 0.00$ . The  $F$ -test was significant and accounted for 35.3% of the variance contributing to life satisfaction scores. OSLA,  $\beta = .169$ ,  $t(103) = 2.08$ ,  $p = .040$ , and Vitality,  $\beta = .538$ ,  $t(103) = 6.61$ ,  $p < .001$ , significantly predicted variance when in the model. Additionally, SPLD explained an incremental 26.5% increase of the variance in Life Satisfaction.

The third model examining the variance explained by OSLA, vitality, and BPNs significantly predicted adolescent's life satisfaction scores, Adjusted  $R^2 = .440$ ,  $F(3,102) = 16.894$ ,  $p < 0.00$ . The  $F$ -test was significant and accounted for 44.0% of the variance contributing to life satisfaction scores. OSLA failed to significantly predict variance when BPNS was entered into the model. However, Vitality,  $\beta = .294$ ,  $t(102) = 3.06$ ,  $p = .003$ , and BPNs,  $\beta = .398$ ,  $t(102) = 4.11$ ,  $p < .001$ , significantly predicted variance when in the model. Further, BPNs explained an incremental 8.7% increase of the variance in AL scores (Figure 1).

Table 3. Results of hierarchical regression analyses for life satisfaction.

Variables	Life Satisfaction		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	3.452	.990	.080
<i>Control Variables</i>			
Outside of School Leadership Involvement	.311**	.169*	.118
<i>Main Effects</i>			
Vitality	-	.538**	.294*
Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction	-	-	.398**
Standard Error of the Estimate	.750	.632	.588
F-Test	11.114**	29.695**	28.383**
Cumulative Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.088	.353	.440

\*Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
\*\*Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

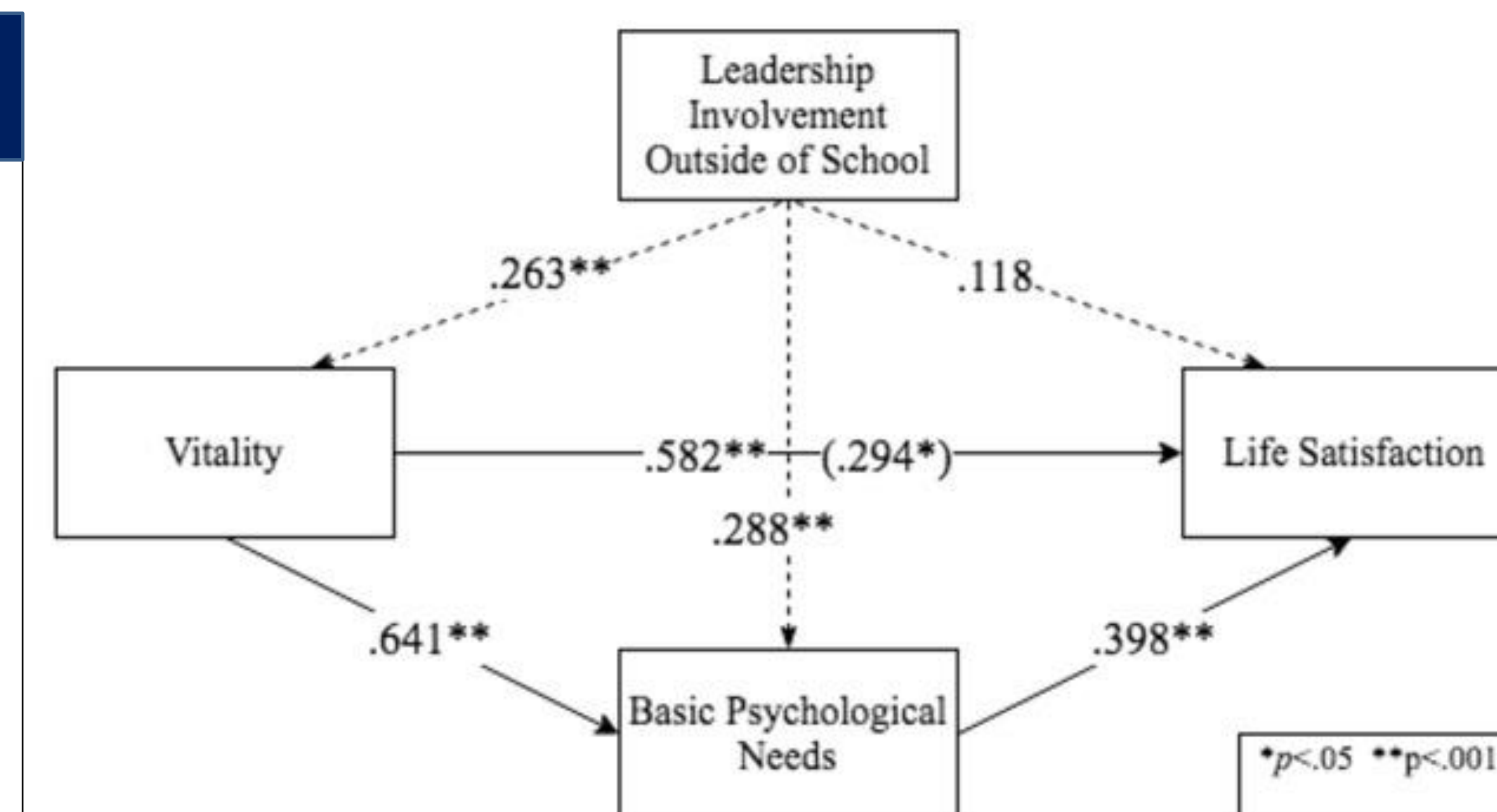


Figure 1. Statistical model indicating the standardized beta coefficients for Vitality, Basic Psychological Needs (possible mediator), Leadership Involvement Outside of School (control), and Life Satisfaction.

## DISCUSSION

- The main findings suggest that leadership involvement, specifically those held outside of school, play a significant role in positively increasing youth life satisfaction.
- This data showed strong correlations for outside of school leadership activities and feelings of autonomy, relatedness, competence, vitality, and life satisfaction, while in school leadership activities did not.
- The predictive modeling demonstrates practical and theoretical insights for creating the optimal conditions for adolescents development and well-being.
- Self-Determination Theory:** Outside of leadership school activities may provide more opportunities for the three basic psychological needs to be satisfied:
  - Autonomy.** OSLA allow for youth to act in a way that is more aligned with their true self and interests.
  - Relatedness.** OSLA creates opportunities from student from different educational (e.g., different schools or school districts), economic (e.g., middle class v. lower middle class), and social strata (e.g., within school clicks) to feel meaningful connected with other over a shared interest.
  - Competence.** OSLA affords opportunities for the engagement in activities that create a deeper level of mastery.

- Authentic Leadership Theory:** Authentic leadership in OSLA programs may create open and supportive relationships with adolescents. If the three basic psychological needs are not being thwarted in any way and positive role models are actively trying to develop positive relationships, then feelings of vitality may increase which all together can improve reported life satisfaction (Kernis & Goldman, 2005).
- Implications:** OSLA may impact to the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, vitality, and life satisfaction. The results of this study suggest that expanding and developing community level activities for all youth may lead to higher levels of life satisfaction amongst that population. With this knowledge, community leadership programs should be invested in and made readily available to adolescents.

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