
RESEARCH ARTICLE

“The Comparison Trap”: The Role of Perceived Parent Social Comparison on Adolescent Academic Self-Efficacy and Academic Self-Handicapping

Antoinee Nimeesha M. Angeles¹, Jeremy M. Orodio², Jan Chrunzie C. Sta. Juana³, Jamillah Anne Q. Zoleta⁴ and Stella P. Go⁵ ✉

¹²³⁴⁵*De La Salle University Integrated School, Manila, Philippines*

Corresponding Author: Stella P. Go, **E-mail:** stella.go@dlsu.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Parents' attitudes and behavior can impact children's self-esteem, self-perceptions, and behavior. However, limited studies have investigated the relationship between parent social comparison and adolescents' academic self-appraisal and academic behavior. To address this gap, a survey was conducted among 200 Senior High School students from the Integrated School of De La Salle University - Manila to determine the types of perceived parent social comparison (PPSC) experienced (upward identification, upward contrast, downward identification, downward contrast) and their relationship to academic self-efficacy (ASE) and academic self-handicapping (ASH). Results revealed that adolescents have a moderate level of PPSC, with upward identification obtaining the highest mean score. No significant differences were found between males and females. However, significant differences between adolescents compared by parents to others sometimes and those compared often/always were observed in the overall PPSC, downward identification comparison, and upward contrast comparison. After controlling for sex and frequency of PPSC, forward multiple regression revealed that downward contrast was the only significant negative correlate of ASE. In contrast, downward identification was the only significant positive correlate of ASH. The study suggests that cultivating a positive and supportive parent-adolescent relationship rather than a culture of comparison may lead to better outcomes for adolescents.

KEYWORDS

Perceived parent social comparison; academic self-efficacy; academic self-handicapping; adolescents.

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1. Introduction

Social comparison profoundly impacts a person's cognitive and behavioral development by influencing how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to others. Social comparison is the mental propensity to evaluate one's opinions and abilities (Festinger, 1954) and other aspects of the self, such as behavior, attitudes, and physical attributes (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007), by comparing oneself with others. The comparison process is relatively automatic, as most people find it difficult to hear about others' successes and failures without reflecting on their own (Festinger, 1954). Individuals can compare themselves to others in two opposite directions: upward and downward. These differ in their motivations, comparison targets, and consequences. Moreover, individuals either identify themselves with a comparison target, seeing characteristics of themselves in the other and viewing the other's position as similar to their own, or contrast themselves with a comparison target, emphasizing the differences between them and the target (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2017; Van der Zee et al., 2001).

Upward comparison occurs when people compare themselves with someone they perceive to be superior. When individuals engage in upward identification, they identify themselves with others who are more successful, motivating them to aspire to emulate their qualities. Identifying with others who perform better than oneself may provide information that can help improve

one's performance (Wheeler, 1966). However, when individuals engage in upward contrast comparison, they measure themselves against those perceived to be better off, falling short compared to the superior comparison target. Thus, upward contrast leads to feelings of inferiority, envy, or self-doubt.

Downward comparison involves assessing oneself against those perceived as less successful (Guyer & Vaughan-Johnston, 2018; Wills, 1981). One can engage in downward identification or downward contrast. When individuals engage in downward identification, it can lead to anxiety as identifying oneself with an inferior other may serve as a reminder that one's situation is just as bad or has the potential to worsen. Conversely, when individuals engage in downward contrast comparison, the focus is on self-enhancement to feel better about oneself by contrasting oneself with an inferior target (Wills, 1981). An individual's well-being improves when they contrast their situation with that of others who are thought to be performing worse. Downward contrast can boost self-esteem and help control negative feelings.

Studies have also revealed that upward identification was the most common type of academic comparison. Upward identification gave rise to feelings of hope that an individual might one day receive a good grade comparable to the target and that higher course grades were associated with higher comparison-level choices (Buunk et al., 2005; Buunk et al., 2010; Dumas et al., 2005). They claimed that this comparison may be associated with one's drive to improve oneself, determine the best learning strategy, and set a model to attain a higher standard of what one produces.

It cannot be argued that parental attitudes and behaviors can significantly affect their children's self-esteem, self-perceptions, and self-appraisals. One behavior that may impact an adolescent's academic self-appraisal and academic behavior is parent social comparison. Parent social comparison refers to the way parents evaluate their children's achievements by comparing them to others (Lee et al., 2020). In this study, parent social comparison refers to perceived parent social comparison (PPSC) or the perception of adolescents regarding how their parents compare them with others.

Parents can engage in both upward and downward comparisons of their children. Arigo and Torous (2020) discovered that when parents engage in upward contrast, where parents evaluate their children's achievement against those perceived as superior and find them wanting, it results in feelings of self-doubt within children and increased pressure to live up to the standards set by those perceived as more successful. Conversely, when parents engage in upward identification, identifying their children with those perceived as superior and viewing them as role models for emulation, positive outcomes may result, including increased motivation and determination to excel among children. However, downward contrast comparison, where parents assess their children as performing better against perceived inferiors, can potentially boost children's subjective well-being. Yet, when parents engage in downward identification, viewing their children as just as inferior as the comparison target, it can result in negative self-perception, lower self-esteem, and increased feelings of inferiority in children. Suls et al. (2002) found that when parents regularly compare their children to less competent individuals, it prompts children to develop a negative self-perception, resulting in lower self-esteem and heightened feelings of inferiority.

Studies have shown that parent social comparison is related to adolescents' academic self-appraisal, which, in this study, refers to academic self-efficacy. Academic self-efficacy is defined as a person's belief in their ability to accomplish academic tasks successfully (Mulyadi et al., 2016), which relates significantly to academic success (Artino, 2012; Druckman & Bjork, 1994; Jinks & Morgan, 1999; Yokoyama, 2018). Adolescents whose parents employ a positive social comparison tend to develop increased self-confidence (Wang et al., 2020). When upward identification and downward contrast are experienced by adolescents, it may lead to higher academic self-efficacy as they see tasks as challenges rather than difficult situations to avoid.

Parent social comparison is also related to adolescents' academic behavior. In this study, academic behavior refers to academic self-handicapping (ASH), or the tendency to create obstacles or excuses to performance, whether behavioral or self-reported, to protect or enhance one's self-esteem (Rhodewalt et al., 1991). As students face challenging tasks and comparisons from their parents, they may struggle to thrive in their academics. Consequently, they may engage in academic self-handicapping (ASH). Past studies have observed that when parents compare their children negatively, such as upward contrast and downward identification, some may put off work, play around, and exert less effort to make their poor performance appear to be the result of these actions (Régner et al., 2007; Urda & Midgley, 2001). Self-handicapping was also found to be the lowest among adolescents who frequently experience upward identification (Xing et al., 2022). Additionally, those with higher self-handicapping tendencies exhibited less self-awareness, lower academic self-efficacy, and worse performance on all the course assessments (Gadbois & Sturgeon, 2011; Martin et al., 1999).

In relation to this, Xing et al. (2022) found that perceived parent social comparison was associated with academic self-efficacy and self-handicapping. They observed that adolescents experiencing upward contrast and downward identification comparisons from their parents had decreased self-efficacy and increased self-handicapping.

While past studies have delved into parent social comparison, there remains an existing knowledge gap regarding its role in adolescents' academic self-appraisal and academic behavior, as less is known about their association (Wang et al., 2020; Xing et al., 2020). Thus, this study explores the relationship between the different types of parent social comparison (upward identification, upward contrast, downward identification, downward contrast) and Filipino adolescents' academic self-appraisal, specifically their academic self-efficacy and their academic behavior, particularly academic self-handicapping. Additionally, it examines whether there are differences in the type of parent social comparison experienced between males and females and between adolescents who are compared by their parents to others less frequently and those compared more frequently and consistently. It also investigates whether there are differences between ASE and ASH according to sex and frequency of perceived parent social comparison.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a correlational study that utilized a cross-sectional survey design. It investigates the relationship between academic self-efficacy and the types of perceived parent social comparison, namely upward identification, upward contrast, downward identification, and downward contrast. Similarly, it investigates the relationship between academic self-handicapping and the types of perceived parent social comparison. Furthermore, it is also a descriptive study as it presents the types of PPSC experienced by adolescents and the extent of their PPSC, ASE, and ASH.

2.2 Population and Sampling

The sample for this study was drawn from a population of 2,028 SHS students from De La Salle University Integrated School Manila enrolled for the Academic Year 2023-2024. Simple random sampling was used to select 200 respondents, consisting of 100 males and 100 females. Using a G*Power analysis, a minimum sample size of 200 was necessary to achieve a moderate level of power (0.85) with a significance level of 0.05. This ensured that the study would be able to detect a medium-sized effect (Cohen's $f = 0.25$)

2.3 Instrumentation

The research instrument that the researchers utilized was a self-administered online questionnaire using Google Forms. Questions related to perceived parent social comparison were adapted from Van der Zee et al. (2000). For the adolescent academic self-efficacy and adolescent academic self-handicapping items, the researchers adopted the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Gafoor and Ashraf (2007) and the Self-Handicapping Scale by Urdan and Midgley (2001). The questionnaire consisted of 7 sections: introduction, informed consent, and participant assent, basic information, frequency of PPSC, types of PPSC, ASE, and ASH.

Section 1 of the questionnaire introduces the researchers. Section 2 presents the informed consent, participants' assent, and parent consent forms, respectively. They discussed the purpose of the study, risks, benefits, study procedures, duration, voluntary participation, confidentiality, data privacy, and contact information. Section 3 covered the respondents' basic information.

Section 4 focused on the Frequency of Perceived Parent Social Comparison, which assessed how often parents compared their children academically to others, using a two-point scale from sometimes to often/always.

Section 5 covers the Type of Perceived Parent Social Comparison adolescents experience. This was measured using a scale adapted from Van der Zee et al. (2000) that consists of 12 items. This was presented on a five-point scale ranging from not like him or her to very much like him or her. The scale's reliability is $\alpha = 0.883$.

Section 6 presents the Academic Self-efficacy Scale developed by Gafoor and Ashraf (2007). It consists of 16 items that assess the adolescents' confidence in coping with problems and performing academic tasks successfully. It utilized a five-point scale ranging from not at all true of me to very accurate of me. The reliability of the Academic Self-efficacy Scale is $\alpha = 0.852$.

Section 7 covers the Self-handicapping Scale by Urdan and Midgley (2001). This scale determined the adolescent's tendency to develop behavioral or claimed excuses for potential failure. The scale consists of 6 statements to which respondents indicated their answers through a five-point scale ranging from not at all true of me to very accurate of me. The reliability-of the scale is $\alpha = 0.810$.

A pre-test was conducted on twenty senior high school students outside of De La Salle University-Manila to determine the clarity of the questionnaire items, the average time of completion, and other potential problems with the research instrument.

2.4 Data Collection

The data for this study were collected over four weeks, from January 25 to February 20, 2024. Respondents received the questionnaires via email during the first week of data collection. Before beginning the survey, participants were instructed to read and complete the informed consent or participant assent form. All participants over 18 (legal age) signed an informed consent form, while those under 18 signed a participant assent form, and their parents signed a parent consent form. Respondents who did not respond to or return the questionnaire within the first week received a follow-up email in the second and third weeks. However, if there was still no response after the follow-up emails were sent, another respondent was invited to participate in the study.

2.5 Data Analysis

Encoding and scoring the various scales for each respondent was the first step in the data analysis process.

Descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages, were used to determine the prevalence of perceived parent social comparison among adolescents. On the other hand, means and standard deviations were utilized to find out the types of perceived parent social comparison SHS students experienced and the extent of their academic self-efficacy and academic self-handicapping.

The t-test statistic for independent samples was employed to determine whether there were significant differences between males and females in the overall PPSC, the types of PPSC, ASE, and ASH. It was also used to determine whether there was a significant difference between adolescents who experienced parent social comparison sometimes and those who experienced it often/always.

A forward multiple regression analysis was used to investigate whether there was a significant relationship between ASE and the 4 types of PPSC as well as ASH and the 4 types of PPSC, controlling for sex and frequency of PPSC. Microsoft Excel was used to encode the data, while Statistical package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) was used to conduct the statistical analysis.

2.6 Ethical Statement

The study ensured strict compliance with the ethical principles in the responsible conduct of research involving human participants found in the Belmont Report, De La Salle University's Code of Research Ethics and Responsible Conduct of Research, and De La Salle University's Senior High School Research Manual. Before the data collection, informed consent was obtained from respondents 18 years old and above. Participant assent was likewise secured from respondents below 18 years old and from parents of minors in the study. The consent forms explained the study's purpose, procedures, duration, voluntary participation, risks, benefits, confidentiality safeguards, and the researchers' contact information. Data collected were stored in a secure Google drive accessible only to the researchers and their adviser and will be permanently deleted 6 months after the publication of the research.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. PPSC, ASE, and ASH According to Sex

Level of Perceived Parent Social Comparison. Table 1 shows that adolescents, regardless of sex, experience a moderate level of parent social comparison. This implies that parents compare their children's academic performance with others to a moderate or reasonable extent. Consequently, this level of comparison may not lead to excessive pressure or unrealistic expectations on the adolescent, nor will it significantly undermine their self-esteem. In fact, of all the types of PPSC, upward identification had the highest mean score, and downward identification had the lowest mean score. This indicates that in the perception of adolescents, their parents are more likely to compare them to others who are superior to them academically and see these superior individuals as role models from whom they can get inspiration to work harder and strive for more.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and T-test Analysis on the Types of Perceived Parent Social Comparison, Academic Self-Efficacy, and Academic Self-Handicapping According to Sex

Variables	Males (n = 100)		Females (n = 100)		95% Confidence Interval of Mean Difference	t(198)	p	Effect Size	
	M	SD	M	SD				Cohen's d	Qualitative Interpretation
1. Downward Identification	7.21	2.56	7.02	2.74	-.93 -.55	-.507	.613 ^{ns}	-.07	Very small
2. Downward Contrast	9.3	2.98	9.54	3.31	-.64 - 1.12	0.539	.591 ^{ns}	0.08	Very small
3. Upward Identification	10.61	3.01	10.53	3.11	-.93 -.77	-.185	.853 ^{ns}	-.03	Very small
4. Upward Contrast	7.39	2.74	7.44	3.58	-.84 -.94	0.111	.912 ^{ns}	0.02	Very small
B. Academic Self-Efficacy	47.28	5.28	48.53	3.61	.070 - 2.59	2.082	.039*	0.29	Small
C. Academic Self-Handicapping	12.91	5.41	13.13	4.79	-1.20 - 1.64	0.305	.761 ^{ns}	0.04	Very small

Note. *(p < .05), **(p < .01), ***(p < .001), ns (p > .05)

Overall PPSC - M = 12.00 to 23.99 (Low Level), 24.00 to 40.99 (Moderate Level), 41.00 to 60.00 (High Level)

4 Types of PPSC - M = 3.00 to 6.99 (Low Level), 7.00 to 11.99 (Moderate Level), 12.00 to 15.00 (High Level)

ASE - M = 16.00 to 46.99 (Low ASE), M = 47.00 to 66.99 (Moderate ASE), M = 67.00 to 80.00 (High ASE)

ASH - M = 6.00 to 14.99 (Low ASH), M = 15.00 to 22.99 (Moderate ASH), M = 23.00 to 30.00 (High ASH)

Moreover, the t-test statistic for independent samples revealed no significant differences between males and females in terms of overall PPSC ($t(198) = 0.02, p = .986$), downward identification ($t(198) = -0.51, p = .613$), downward contrast ($t(198) = -0.54, p = .591$), upward identification ($t(198) = -0.19, p = .853$), and upward contrast ($t(198) = 0.11, p = .912$).

Level of Academic Self-Efficacy. Table 1 also reveals that, overall, adolescents have a moderate level of academic self-efficacy. This level indicates that they have a balanced perception of their ability to successfully perform their academic tasks. However, they also recognize that, while this is so, there are areas for improvement. This finding is supported by Meng and Zhang (2023), who found that students with higher self-efficacy feel more capable of accomplishing their academic tasks and are more likely to solve problems and achieve higher levels of academic success. Therefore, adolescents with a moderate level of academic self-efficacy appear to have a solid foundation of confidence that encourages them to persevere and be resilient.

On the other hand, the t-test statistic for independent samples revealed a significant difference in ASE scores between males and females ($t(198) = 2.08, p = .039$), with females scoring higher than males (Table 1). The 95% confidence interval of the mean difference is between .070 and 2.59, so we can be 95% confident that the mean ASE scores of female adolescents in the DLSU Senior High School population will be significantly higher than those of the males. This finding supports previous studies that indicate higher self-efficacy among females, demonstrating higher confidence in academic activities, possibly due to their study habits (Chanana, 2018; Sachitra & Bandara, 2017).

Level of Adolescent Academic Self-Handicapping. Both male and female adolescents had low levels of academic self-handicapping, and there was no significant difference between both groups ($t(198) = 0.31, p = .761$) (Table 1). This suggests that male and female adolescents engage in self-handicapping strategies aimed at protecting their self-esteem only to a limited extent. Thus, they are less likely to create excuses for possible academic failure or poor performance. Adolescents with low self-handicapping are more likely to challenge themselves academically, leading to higher academic achievement (Huțuleac, 2014). This further implies that adolescents are more likely to succeed in carrying out their academic tasks and take responsibility for their actions, which leads to increased academic self-efficacy.

3.2. PPSC, ASE, and ASH According to Frequency PPSC

Significant differences were found in the overall PPSC ($t(198) = -3.28, p = .001$), downward identification ($t(198) = -3.14, p = .002$), and upward contrast ($t(198) = -4.58, p < .001$) between adolescents who experienced being compared by their parents to others sometimes and those who were compared to others often/always (Table 2).

Table 2
T-Test Analysis on the Types of Perceived Parent Social Comparison, Academic Self-Efficacy, and Academic Self-Handicapping According to Frequency of Perceived Parent Social Comparison

Variables	Sometimes (n = 161)		Often/ Always (n = 39)		95% Confidence Interval of Mean Difference	$t(198)$	p	Effect Size	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				<i>Cohen's d</i>	Qualitative Interpretatio n
A. Overall Perceived PPSC	33.61	8.03	38.28	7.8	-7.48 - -1.86	-3.279	.001**	-.59	Moderate
1. Downward Identification	6.83	2.58	8.28	2.63	-2.36 - -.54	-3.136	.002**	-.56	Moderate
2. Downward Contrast	9.32	3.14	9.82	3.19	-1.61 - .61	-.886	.377 ^{ns}	-.16	Small
3. Upward Identification	10.52	3.18	10.77	2.50	-1.32 - .83	-.454	.651 ^{ns}	-.08	Very Small
4. Upward Contrast	6.93	3.09	9.41	2.79	-3.55 - -1.41	-4.579	<.001***	-.82	Large
B. Academic Self-Efficacy	47.82	4.46	48.26	4.97	-2.04 - 1.17	-.536	.592 ^{ns}	-.10	Small
C. Academic Self-Handicapping	12.99	5.18	13.15	4.79	-1.96 - 1.63	-.182	.855 ^{ns}	-.03	Very Small

Note. *($p < .05$), **($p < .01$), ***($p < .001$), ns ($p > .05$)

These findings indicate that those who were compared to others by their parents often/always had higher scores on the overall PPSC, downward identification, and upward contrast than those whose parents compared them to others only sometimes (Table 2). The 95% confidence interval of the mean difference in the scores of the 2 groups on the 3 variables indicates that we can be 95% confident that the adolescents in the DLSU Senior High School population who are compared by their parents to others often/always will experience a more pervasive sense of comparison in their lives than those who are compared less frequently.

These findings suggest that the more consistently adolescents' parents compare them to others, the more they experience downward identification and upward contrast. Adolescents who are frequently associated with those who perform poorly may experience reduced self-esteem and increased anxiety about their abilities. Meanwhile, adolescents who are constantly contrasted with those who perform well are more prone to feel frustrated and embarrassed. The desire to match the accomplishments of people viewed as superior can cause individuals to feel excessive stress.

3.3. Correlates of ASE and ASH

A forward multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify which among the four types of PPSC correlate significantly with academic self-handicapping and academic self-efficacy, controlling for sex and frequency of PPSC. The datasets for ASH and ASE were checked for linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, residual independence, normalcy, and outlier presence. They revealed no violations, except for two outliers in the dataset for ASE, which were removed from the analysis.

Academic Self-Efficacy. Sex and frequency of PPSC were entered into the analysis first to control for their possible effects. The results reveal that these 2 variables did not correlate significantly with ASE. The forward regression analysis in Table 3 reveals that, after controlling for sex and the frequency of PPSC, only downward contrast was significantly negatively correlated with ASE, contributing 7.7% of the variance in academic self-efficacy ($R^2 = .077, F(1, 194) = 12.529, p < .001$). Upward identification, upward contrast, and downward identification did not significantly correlate with ASE.

Table 3

Regression Analysis on Academic Self-Efficacy and Perceived Parental Social Comparison (PPSC), Controlling for Sex and Frequency of PPSC

Model	Predictor Variables	R ²	R ² change	F change	df ₁	df ₂	Significance of F change (p)	Semi-partial correlation
1	Sex							-.115
	Frequency of PPSC	.017	.017	1.696	2	195	.186 ^{ns}	.069
2	Downward Contrast PPSC	.077	.062	12.529	1	194	<.001 ^{***}	-.244

Note. *(p < .05), **(p < .01), ***(p < .001), ns (p > .05)

Sex was coded female - 1, male - 2. Frequency of PPSC was dummy coded as sometimes - 1, often/always - 2.

The results suggest that the more the parents engage in downward contrast comparison, the lower the academic self-efficacy of adolescents. When parents compare their children to those they perceive as inferior, their children doubt their abilities and become discouraged. Parents convey a message of limitation rather than potential when they set as a benchmark for their children those who are worse off, leading to discouragement. This corroborates the findings of Hasan et al. (2014), which found that as students experience this type of comparison, they may feel a lack of challenge, reducing their motivation and hindering them. It also aligns with the study of Wills (1981), which revealed that comparisons such as downward contrast undermine children’s confidence and motivation to excel, resulting in poorer academic outcomes.

It should be noted, however, that although downward contrast is a significant correlate of ASE, it only explains 7.7% of the variance in ASE, indicating that a large proportion of the variance remains unexplained and needs to be explored further.

Academic Self-Handicapping. Sex and frequency of PPSC were again entered into the regression analysis first to control for their possible effects. Table 4 shows the regression analysis results after controlling for sex and frequency of PPSC. The results reveal that sex and frequency of PPSC did not correlate significantly with ASH. After controlling for these variables, only downward identification was significantly associated with ASH and contributed 4.8% of the variance in ASH ($R^2 = 0.48$, $F(1, 196) = 9.701$, $p = .002$). While this is so, it should also be noted that downward identification explains only 4.8% of the variance in ASH, and a large proportion of the variance remains unaccounted for. Further studies need to be undertaken to identify the other factors associated with academic self-handicapping, which would explain the remaining variance in ASH.

Table 4

Regression Analysis on Academic Self-Handicapping and Perceived Parental Social Comparison (PPSC), Controlling for Sex and Frequency of PPSC

Model	Predictor Variables	R ²	R ² change	F change	df ₁	df ₂	Significance of F change (p)	Semi-partial correlation
1	Sex							-.023
	Frequency of PPSC	.001	.001	.067	2	197	.936 ^{ns}	.014
2	Downward Identification PPSC	.048	.047	9.701	1	196	.002 ^{**}	.217

Note. *(p < .05), **(p < .01), ***(p < .001), ns (p > .05)

Sex was coded female - 1, male - 2. Frequency of PPSC was dummy coded as sometimes - 1, often/always - 2.

The results suggest that the more the parents employ downward identification, the more likely their children are to exhibit higher academic self-handicapping. By equating their children with someone perceived as inferior and suggesting that they will face a similar unfortunate outcome, parents reinforce the belief that their child’s potential for success is improbable, prompting the child to adopt self-handicapping behaviors as a preemptive measure to safeguard their self-esteem. The results support the findings of Xing et al. (2022), which revealed that adolescents whose parents’ social comparisons were negative, such as downward

identification, reported higher self-handicapping. Wills (1981) also found that downward identification could lead to decreased motivation and increased self-handicapping behaviors. They engage in this behavior to maintain a self-productive narrative (Baumeister & Scher, 1988).

4. Conclusion

The study's findings revealed several points regarding perceived parent social comparison's role in adolescents' academic self-efficacy as well as academic self-handicapping. Adolescents, regardless of sex, experience being compared by their parents, but only to a moderate extent. Upward identification was perceived by adolescents as the predominant type of parent social comparison that they experienced. This suggests that in the perception of adolescents, their parents are more likely to compare them with those performing better academically and see these superior comparison targets as role models that they can emulate.

On the other hand, adolescents consistently compared by their parents to others experienced more downward identification and upward contrast than those less frequently compared by their parents to others. As a result, these adolescents may be discouraged when they are identified with someone inferior to them and frustrated when contrasted with those who are better off academically, as they may feel pressure to perform just as well as those perceived as superior.

Results also revealed that downward contrast was the only significant negative correlate of ASE. The more the parents contrast their children with those perceived as inferior, indicating that they are better than them, the lower the adolescents' academic self-efficacy. As parents contrast their children with those who perform poorly, it reduces adolescents' confidence in their capabilities to achieve academic success. It decreases their motivation as their parents set a benchmark referencing adolescents who are inferior to them. Conversely, downward identification was found to be the only significant positive correlate of ASH. This suggests that the more the adolescents experience being compared by their parents to those who are worse off and point out that they may have the same future as those who are performing poorly, the more they tend to engage in self-handicapping strategies to protect their self-esteem against potential failure which undermines their academic performance.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of cultivating a positive and supportive parent-adolescent relationship rather than a culture of comparison. Parents should be conscious of the language they use and the actions they model to promote a healthy environment for children that will boost their self-esteem and foster positive coping strategies that will support their academic success. They should also engage more in constructive comparisons that can emphasize personal growth rather than competition, reinforcing students' self-efficacy and reducing their anxiety in relation to their academic performance.

It should be noted, however, that the sample used in this study limits its external validity. The sample of adolescents was drawn from one academic institution and came from the middle and upper socio-economic strata of Philippine society in a highly urbanized metropolis. Consequently, caution must be taken when generalizing the results to all Filipino adolescents. Much still needs to be learned about parent social comparison and the factors affecting academic self-efficacy and academic handicapping, so the following recommendations for future research are made:

- (1) Do a study of adolescents from different socioeconomic classes and urban and rural areas to investigate the role of perceived parent social comparison on academic self-efficacy and academic self-handicapping to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon and determine whether some groups are more vulnerable to the effects of PPSC.
- (2) Employ an explanatory mixed methods design by combining quantitative techniques like surveys and qualitative techniques like focus group discussions or in-depth interviews to provide a richer and more comprehensive understanding of PPSC and its role in academic self-efficacy and academic self-handicapping.
- (3) Include other variables apart from PPSC to identify other factors that can affect academic self-efficacy and academic handicapping among adolescents. Potential variables to consider can include peer impact, mental health, and teacher expectations.

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ORCID ID (Stella P. Go): <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4998-2095>

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