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Shaping Citizenship in the Classroom: Peer Influences on Moral Disengagement, Social Goals, and a Sense of Peer Community

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Abstract

Despite the important role of peers in the social process of classroom citizenship, the peer influence related to moral disengagement, social goals, and a sense of peer community remain unclear. To this end, it was examined to what extent youth become similar to their friends in moral disengagement, social goals, and a sense of peer community. Participants were 283 South Korean third to sixth graders ($M_{\text{age}} = 9.60$ years, $SD = 0.97$; 51.6% girls) who completed an online survey for moral disengagement, social goals, the sense of peer community and friendship network across the beginning (Time 1) and end (Time 2) of the school semester (September to December). Longitudinal social network analyses indicated that youth became more similar to their friends concerning moral disengagement and a sense of peer community, but did not select friends based on these aspects. The strength of these influence effects varied in terms of different levels of these aspects. Specifically, youth were more likely to become similar to their friends at lower levels of moral disengagement. Youth tended to be similar to the friends' level of sense of peer community. This tendency was relatively strong at the lowest and the highest levels of a sense of peer community. Future research should address the role of friendship in shaping classroom citizenship and the importance of classroom daily teaching practice in youth citizenship development.

Keywords Moral disengagement · Social goals · A sense of peer community · Longitudinal social network analysis · Friendship dynamics

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in classroom citizenship in mid-childhood and early adolescence (Metzger & Smetana, 2009). Primary school is an important social setting to foster cooperation, mutual trust, and social belonging (Mayes et al., 2016). Psychological aspects such

as moral disengagement (Sijtsema et al., 2014), social goals (Mayeux, & Kraft, 2018), and a sense of peer community (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005) have gained attention as important social-cognitive motives of peer behavior. These psychological aspects are especially relevant to civic engagement given their close connection to moral competence, prosocial goals, and valuing community (Thornberg et al., 2017; Visconti et al., 2015). Friendship is also a vital socio-emotional process, and prominent peer interactions are associated with fostering positive interpersonal ties in the classrooms (Bukowski et al., 2009). Through interactions with friends and peers, youth can adapt to the social norms of the group and as such acquire a sense of normative behavior (Kwon & Lease, 2009). As youth spend more time with their friends, peers are more likely to exert influence over their behavior and attitudes (Laninga-Wijnen & Veenstra, 2023; Laursen & Veenstra, 2021). Thus, friendship is a crucial avenue for shaping citizenship by interacting with diverse peers in the classroom (Farmer et al., 2011). The goal of this study is to investigate peer influence on moral disengagement, social goals, and a sense of peer community. The peer influence of moral disengagement,

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social goals, and a sense of peer community is not only an important avenue for shaping citizenship in the classrooms but also offers insight into how these social-cognitive motives would be influenced by friendship. The focus is also on the cross-cultural replication of previous work on the peer influence of moral disengagement and social goals.

Peer Influences on Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement, a cognitive self-justification process of transgressive behavior, is an important psychological mechanism for understanding negative peer interaction (Bandura et al., 1996). There are various mechanisms by which youth can exonerate their transgressive behavior; for instance by attributing transgressive behaviors to others, diffusing the responsibility, distorting the consequences, dehumanizing the victim, reframing actions and their consequences, and justifying behavior by advocating more fundamental moral values. Accordingly, moral disengagement has been linked to greater peer aggression among children and adolescents (Killer et al., 2019). Longitudinal studies have found that changes in moral disengagement are associated with changes in bullying behavior during middle childhood (Bjärehed et al., 2021; Thornberg et al., 2019) and changes in antisocial behavior during adolescence (Sijtsema et al., 2009).

Moral agency, which refers to the capacity to refrain from inhumane behaviors and to engage in prosocial, caring, and humane behaviors, is learned and fostered in the social context in which youth interact and build social relationships (Bandura, 2016; Bussey, 2020). Moral agency is dependent on motivational and self-regulatory processes to translate moral conceptions into moral behaviors. Moral disengagement, in turn, decreases moral motivation and deactivates moral self-regulation (Bandura, 2016). Peers exert a major influence on the socialization of youth in general (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007), and on their moral development specifically (Laible et al., 2019). Previous works on moral disengagement documented that moral judgment is learned and modeled in the social context in which youth interact and build social relationships (Bandura & Cherry, 2020).

This suggests that friendship and peer context would serve as a critical context for developing moral agency. Although the psychological process related to morality may not be a focal factor for the establishment of friendship, such cognition may be enhanced through interaction with existing friends. For instance, displaying behaviors that deviate from moral standards, such as aggression and bullying, may be perceived as normative in some peer groups (Almeida et al., 2009), or may generate high social status (Sentse et al., 2015), which may be associated with the development of cognition that justifies such behaviors

(Bjärehed et al., 2021). As friendship provides the context of social learning and comparison, the justification of moral behavior can be encouraged by peers.

The evidence that moral disengagement can be influenced by the peer group is based on one study, and this study was conducted in a Western sample (Caravita et al., 2014). According to this study, the influence of friendship on the development of moral disengagement over time was observed during early adolescence, but neither selection nor influence processes were found during late childhood. This study suggests the possibility that youth can adopt peers' moral disengagement and that this friendship process is evident during adolescence. However, it is not yet clear whether the peer influence process of moral disengagement is consistent across different cultures, which can differ in terms of the acceptability of transgressive behavior and their justifications. Therefore, more replication studies in a non-Western sample are needed to validate the influence that peers have on moral disengagement.

Peer Influence on Social Goals

Social goals, represented as agentic and communal goals, are trait-like social motives closely related to peer relationships (Locke, 2000; Ojanen et al., 2005). As youth tend to achieve their social goals through friendship, social goals are more likely to be activated as behavioral strategies in the friendship context (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997; Ojanen et al., 2013). For instance, youth with agentic goals tend to engage in status-seeking behaviors such as bullying, aggression, and popularity (Sijtsema et al., 2009, 2020). At the same time, communal goals are associated with affiliation and intimacy, such as prosocial behavior, helping, and friendship (Mayeux & Kraft, 2018). Peers can provide a unique social context in which social goals are fulfilled through peer interactions.

Social goals invite behavior that fulfills primary social motives (Ojanen et al., 2013). In addition, desired behavior will strengthen social goals, leading to associations of social goals and behavior (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997). Meanwhile, behavior is discouraged without the fulfillment of social goals. Throughout this cyclic process of social goals and behavior, youth generate, evaluate, and select behaviors based on their desired outcomes. Empirical studies supported the cycle process of social goals and peer behavior. Agentic and communal goals uniquely predicted peer status and social behavior in a sample of Italian children (Caravita & Cillessen, 2012). Agentic goals were associated with increases in perceived popularity and aggressive behavior. In contrast, communal goals were associated with increases in social preference and prosocial behavior. Another study investigated the longitudinal associations of social goals to

peer behavior and status (Ojanen and Nostrand (2014)). In this study, agentic and communal goals affected the ability to gain and maintain peer status through overt and relational aggression in early adolescence. Together, these studies evidenced that social goals are associated with behavioral strategies to fulfill desired outcomes.

Norm theory and self-appraisal theories of social influence (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011) propose that social goals can be strengthened and motivated through social learning. Youth establish a positive sense of self through peer-valued social goals and increased motivation through goal-fulfilling behaviors. An increasing number of studies (Laniga-Wijnen et al., 2018; Ojanen et al., 2013) suggest that social motives are fostered and reinforced by friendship dynamics. That is, peers with similar goals are attracted to each other because of their preexisting similarities, and social learning processes would increase the similarities of social goals within the friendship network (Dijkstra et al., 2010). Thus, friendship is a crucial peer context in which social goals are reinforced and evaluated.

Despite the salient role of friendship in the development of social goals, there is a lack of empirical support for the friendship dynamics of social goals. To date, one study investigated the link between friendship dynamics and the development of social goals in a sample of US adolescents (Ojanen et al., 2013). In this study, neither agentic nor communal goals were associated with friendship selection, but youth high in agency tended to terminate their friendship ties over time. Instead, peer influence effects suggested that youth tended to become more similar to their peers in terms of agentic and communal goals. This study supports the notion that intrapsychological aspects related to social motivation can change as a result of peer influence.

Peer Influence on a Sense of Peer Community

A sense of peer community is an important psychological aspect related to classroom citizenship. It entails the perception of social bonding, mutual trust, and intimacy with peers (Battistich et al., 1995) and an individual's feeling of and membership toward the peer group (Madill et al., 2014). A sense of peer community is distinct from social belonging or communal goals, as it specifically measures the relational climate of the peer group. Youth who perceive their peer group to be a caring community are likely to develop stronger group memberships, and attraction toward the group (Hogg, 1993). Friendship ties can be a building block to shape the positive perception toward the group. Youth who have a positive sense of peer community would be more active in establishing friendships. Moreover, the more friends they have, there is higher the chance to perceive their classrooms as a community. The co-construction

of group membership would be characterized as the interplay between friendship ties and the sense of peer community. Friends often share their perceptions toward the group members and we expect this dyadic and group interaction will create shared perceptions about the group members.

A sense of peer community is associated with a range of outcomes at student and classroom levels. At the individual level, youth who perceived a positive sense of peer community were more engaged, actively internalized group norms, and were prosocial when they perceived intimacy with and social connection to peers in their classrooms (Solomon et al., 1996). Students were willing to offer more help and exhibited more prosocial behavior when they perceived a positive sense of peer community in classrooms (Battistich, 2003). At the classroom level, the peer community functions as a protective context against negative peer interactions (Solomon et al., 2000). For example, a positive, caring, and supportive peer climate at the classroom level has been related to less bullying perpetration (Dietrich & Cohen, 2021; Thornberg et al., 2019) and victimization (Thornberg et al., 2022; Thornberg et al., 2018). According to recent empirical investigations, associations between aggression and peer status were contingent upon the degree of peer community in the classrooms (Kim & Cillessen, 2023). Specifically, aggressive youth lost their popularity and were less liked in classrooms with a positive sense of peer community, whereas aggressive behavior was associated with more popularity and higher social preference in classrooms with a lack of peer community.

When youth experience positive self-views and emotions toward classmates, a positive membership attitude and attraction toward the peer group can also be developed (Hogg & Hains, 1998). Throughout this process, youth have opportunities to develop intimacy and attachment toward their peers. Friendship dynamics can be related to promoting positive interpersonal ties but also shape membership attitudes toward peers in the classrooms. However, there is a lack of empirical support as to what extent peer influence is associated with the development of a sense of peer community in the classroom. Therefore, it still needs to be studied how a sense of peer community is socially developed within friendship networks.

Current Study

Given the importance of peer processes in relation to classroom citizenship, the present study aimed to investigate peer influence on moral disengagement, social goals, and a sense of peer community. The first aim was to replicate previous work on peer influence of moral

disengagement and social goals in Western samples as little attention has been given to this topic in other cultural contexts. Guided by previous findings on peer influences in moral disengagement and social goals in Western countries, it was hypothesized that adolescents would adopt moral disengagement and social goals from their peers through friendship processes. Moreover, this study investigated the peer influence of a sense of peer community as a fundamental, yet understudied, element of classroom citizenship. Similar to moral disengagement and social goals, it was hypothesized that a sense of peer community in classrooms would be associated with peer influence because friends are likely to share their social perceptions and group membership attitudes.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Data were collected online across two waves, at the beginning (T1: September) and the end (T2: December) of the 2019 school semester. The online survey took place during regular school hours in computer labs under the supervision of classroom teachers. A research assistant visited the schools and provided training to class teachers for the survey. If teachers had concerns or questions, support was provided by research assistants. Active consent was obtained from participants and their parents. The parents of all participants provided written informed consent for the children and the participants themselves provided informed assent on the day of testing. Students were assured that their answers would remain confidential. The current research project was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the first author.

The number of participants differed slightly through the two waves because students moved to different schools or new students came to the school. There were 270 participants in Wave 1 (139 girls, 51.5%) and 254 participants in Wave 2 (128 girls, 50.4%). Across two waves, 11 students moved to a new school while 30 students came to the school. Therefore, the total number of unique participants was 283 third- to sixth-grade students (146 girls, 51.6%) from 10 classrooms from 3 elementary schools in Seoul and Gyeonggi in South Korea. The mean age in wave one was 9.6 years ($SD = 0.97$), and most participants were South Korean; the proportion of multi-ethnic participants was 0.03%. The participation rate ranged from 96% to 100% across classrooms. Although information on individual socioeconomic status was not collected, two participating schools were located in middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds, and one participating school was located in an economically disadvantaged area.

Measures

Friendship Network

Classroom friendship networks were measured by asking students to nominate their friends. Participants were given class rosters and told to select as many classmates as applicable. Korean primary school students are educated in a self-contained classroom with the same classmates throughout the school semester. Primary school students in Korea typically spend most of their school hours in a single classroom with a class teacher. The nomination was only made within the classrooms. Friendship networks were converted into adjacency matrices for network analysis to study friendship dynamics. To distinguish nominations from different classrooms, the adjacency matrices for the classroom without the friendship nomination were coded as 10 to indicate the structural zero. Class size ranged from 22 to 30, and missing data for friendship network information was less than 2%. Missing data were handled through the SIENA missing data method (Huisman & Steglich, 2008). Specifically, participants who were present at only one-time point were considered to be structurally missing, which is distinguished from missing participants due to non-participation.

Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement was measured using the Moral Disengagement Scale, initially developed by Bandura and colleagues (1996). The scale consists of 32 items that encompass different kinds of behavioral transgressions, such as verbal abuse, physically injurious and destructive conduct, deception, and theft in different contexts: educational, familial, community, and peer relations. Participants' responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Examples of items are: "It is alright to fight to protect your friend," and "It is alright to beat someone who bad mouths your family". In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.93, suggesting good internal consistency. Moral disengagement scores were rounded up to whole integers to fulfill the data requirements for the SIENA analysis.

Social Goals

Social goals in the peer context were assessed using the Interpersonal Goals Inventory for Children (IGI-C) (Ojanen et al., 2005). Following existing literature (e.g., Ojanen et al., 2005), the information represented in the eight goals scales (agentic, communal, separate, submissive, agentic-communal, agentic-communal, submissive-communal, submissive-separate, and agentic-separate) was

summarized into overarching agentic and communal vector scores in the circumplex space. Participants were asked to rate the subjective importance of 33 interpersonal outcomes on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (not important to me at all) to 5 (very important to me). Items included “The others respect and admire you,” “You feel close to the others,” “You do not make the others angry,” and “You do not show your feelings in front of your peers”. All scales were internally consistent across time (alpha coefficients ranged from 0.81 to 0.93). Agentic and communal vector scores were calculated using the procedure used by Locke (2003). Calculated vector scores were rounded up for the SIENA analysis.

A Sense of Peer Community

A sense of peer community was defined as the degree to which students felt that their classroom was a place where children respected and helped one another. It was assessed by four items rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Likely). Four items were drawn primarily from the Sense of Community Scale (Battistich et al., 1995), and reworded to focus on the classroom rather than the school context. Items included “Kids in my classroom work together to solve problems,” “Kids care about each other in my classroom,” “Kids in my classroom do nice things for each other,” and “Kids in my classroom help each other”. The scale showed high reliability ($\alpha = 0.95$), similar to other measures, and items were recoded to the original scores by rounding them up to whole integers.

Analytic Strategy

A series of longitudinal social network analysis were conducted using Rsiena (Snijders et al., 2010). The longitudinal social network approach models actors’ (here: participants’) friendship and behavioral choices. At each modeled iteration, actors maintain, select, or deselect relationships (*peer selection process*) and/or may change their behaviors and attitudes to be more similar or dissimilar to their peers (*peer influence process*). In addition, an essential strength of the longitudinal social network approach is that it accounts for the effects of structural characteristics of the friendship network, such as the tendency to reciprocate friendship nominations (*reciprocity*) and the clustering of friends, which enables rigorous examination of peer selection and influence dynamics. In this study, therefore, peer influence on the intra-psychological processes (moral disengagement, social goals, and a sense of peer community) was mainly analyzed while controlling for general changes in individual behavior and peer selection of classroom citizenships. Classroom networks were analyzed simultaneously in one larger matrix to guarantee sufficient statistical power to

estimate network dynamics over time. To restrict the simulation across different classrooms, structural zero was used.

Structural network effects

Four network effects were included to examine structural network features: density, reciprocity, transitive triplets, and 3-cycles. *Density* describes the overall tendency of adolescents to nominate classmates as friends. *Reciprocity* describes the tendency of adolescents to reciprocate a relationship. *Transitive triplets* represent the tendency of friends of friends to become friends. Finally, the *3-cycles effect* is associated with network closure. A negative coefficient indicates a hierarchy within friendship triplets, whereas a positive coefficient implies generalized reciprocity within the friendship triplet.

Peer influence effects

For peer influence effects, the analysis included general longitudinal development such as linear and quadratic shapes as well as an average similarity effect for moral disengagement, social goals, and a sense of peer community. This effect estimated to what extent youth changed their moral disengagement, social goals, and a sense of peer community over time to be either more similar or dissimilar to their friends’ moral disengagement, social goals, and sense of peer community. To control the potential developmental and gender differences, the effects of developmental stage and gender on three key variables were analyzed in the Rsiena model. Effects of friendship nominations both given (ego effect) and received (alter effect), and peer selection effects in moral disengagement, social goals, and sense of peer community were controlled to have a clear picture of peer influence process. Gender was included as a covariate to control for selection effects due to being of the same gender.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of all study variables are provided in Table 1. As can be seen, moral disengagement, agentic goals, communal goals, and a sense of peer community were relatively stable over time. Moral disengagement at T1 was negatively associated with a sense of peer community at T1 & T2, whereas agentic goals and moral disengagement were only positively correlated at T1.

Descriptive information about the sample and network characteristics is presented in Table 2. The density indicates

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Among the Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. MD at T1								
2. Agentic Goals at T1	0.22***							
3. Communal Goals at T1	0.11	0.32***						
4. Peer Community at T1	-0.19**	-0.02	0.31***					
5. MD at T2	0.33***	0.19**	-0.01	-0.16*				
6. Agentic Goals at T2	0.11	0.45***	0.10	-0.02	0.08			
7. Communal Goals at T2	-0.10	0.13*	0.30***	0.35***	-0.17*	-0.25***		
8. Peer Community at T2	-0.21**	-0.05	0.25***	0.61***	-0.20**	-0.04	0.32***	
<i>M</i>	2.15	-0.75	1.06	3.95	2.17	-0.64	1.15	3.94
<i>SD</i>	0.44	1.33	1.64	0.88	0.50	1.29	1.54	0.86

MD moral disengagement

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2 Description of Network and Behavior Characteristics

	Wave1 ($n = 270$)	Wave2 ($n = 254$)
Friendship		
Density	14%	13%
Average degree	4.03	3.68
Number of reciprocated ties	114 (4.2)	104 (4.1)
Friendship change		
Absence of tie ($0 \rightarrow 0$)	78266	
Creating tie ($0 \rightarrow 1$)	400	
Resolving tie ($1 \rightarrow 0$)	500	
Stable tie ($1 \rightarrow 1$)	640	
Jaccard index	0.42	
Hamming distance	900	
Behavior Change		
Moral disengagement	2.15	2.17
Agentic goals	-0.75	-0.64
Communal goals	1.06	1.15
Sense of peer community	3.95	3.94

Reciprocated ties per child are in parentheses

that youth nominated around 13%–14% of their classmates as friends over the two waves. The average out-degree (average number of friend nominations) indicates that youth nominated an average of 4.03 friends at wave 1 and 3.68 friends at wave 2. The number of ties shows that participants had about 114 (4.2 per child) reciprocal friendships on wave 1 and 104 (4.1 per child) on wave 2. The Jaccard index in friendship networks was 0.42 and the hamming distance was 900. The Jaccard index is used to measure the proportion of common ties between two adjacent waves or time points in a friendship network. The hamming distance also represents a network change static the number of tie changes across time points. Both the Jaccard index and

hamming distance in this study indicated sufficient network change for Rsienna analyses.

Longitudinal Social Network Analysis

Friendship Network Structure

As shown in Table 3, the negative density effect indicated that youth selected their friends based on certain preferences rather than random choices. The positive reciprocity effect showed that friendships tend to be reciprocated. The positive transitive ties effect expressed the tendency for friends of friends to become friends. The 3-cycle effect was negative and significant, implying a tendency to maintain ties among friendship groups.

Peer Selection on Moral Disengagement, Social Goals, and Sense of Peer Community

According to the peer selection effects for moral disengagement, social goals, and sense of peer community, youth did not select their friends based on these characteristics. Whereas, moral disengagement were negatively associated with nominating friends, indicating that those who scored higher on these characteristics were less likely to nominate others as friends. The non-significant similarity effects indicate that youth did not select friends who were similar (or dissimilar) to them on moral disengagement, social goals, and sense of peer community. Youth were more likely to select friends of the same gender.

Peer Influence on Moral Disengagement, Social Goals, and Sense of Peer Community

To test the peer influence effects, general changes in the three characteristics over time by computing a linear and a quadratic effect were estimated (see Table 3). With the

Table 3 Peer Selection and Influence Effects of Moral Disengagement, Social Goals, and a Sense of Peer Community

	<i>Est</i>	<i>SE</i>
Selection Dynamics		
Outdegree (density)	-3.27***	0.26
Reciprocity (mutuality)	1.67***	0.18
Transitive triplets (closure)	0.48***	0.06
Three-cycles (anti-hierarchy)	-0.55***	0.08
Gender		
Nominations received	-0.17	0.17
Nominations given	-0.04	0.17
Same gender nominations	1.27***	0.18
Moral disengagement		
Nominations received	-0.01	0.13
Nominations given	-0.43*	0.20
Similarity nominations	-0.10	1.52
Agentic goals		
Nominations received	0.04	0.11
Nominations given	-0.41	0.15
Similarity nominations	-0.21	0.95
Communal goals		
Nominations received	0.22	0.34
Nominations given	-0.53	0.32
Similarity nominations	3.34	2.12
Sense of peer community		
Nominations received	-0.14	0.07
Nominations given	0.06	0.09
Similarity nominations	0.43	0.77
Influence dynamics		
Moral disengagement		
Linear shape	-0.11	0.07
Quadratic shape	-0.09	0.10
Peer influence	4.84**	1.54
Agentic goals		
Linear shape	0.17	0.13
Quadratic shape	-0.61	0.24
Peer influence	3.26	1.90
Communal goals		
Linear shape	0.10	0.18
Quadratic shape	-1.28	0.73
Peer influence	1.74	1.99
Sense of peer community		
Linear shape	0.14	0.08
Quadratic shape	0.16**	0.05
Peer influence	3.90*	1.51
Covariates		
Effect of Gender at T1 on Moral Disengagement at T2	-0.13	0.07
Effect of Gender at T1 on Agentic Goals at T2	-0.04	0.28

Table 3 (continued)

	<i>Est</i>	<i>SE</i>
Effect of Gender at T1 on Communal Goals at T2	0.08	0.13
Effect of Gender at T1 on Sense of Peer Community at T2	0.08	0.13
Effect of Developmental Stage at T1 on Moral Disengagement at T2	0.26	0.17
Effect of Developmental Stage at T1 on Agentic Goals at T2	0.42	0.27
Effect of Developmental Stage at T1 on Communal Goals at T2	0.09	0.13
Effect of Developmental Stage at T1 on Sense of Peer Community at T2	0.09	0.13

****p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, **p* < 0.001

Table 4 Moral Disengagement Ego-Alter Influence

	Friends' Moral Disengagement				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	0.74	-0.23	-1.20	-2.17	-3.13
2	-0.26	0.71	-0.26	-1.22	-2.19
3	-1.42	-0.45	0.51	-0.45	-1.42
4	-2.76	-1.79	-0.83	0.14	-0.83
5	-4.27	-3.31	-2.34	-1.37	-0.41

Gray boxes indicate the likelihood of similarity among friends who have the same level of moral disengagement

linear shape, the increase or decrease of behavior over time can be examined. In contrast, the quadratic shape indicates whether the outcome regresses to the mean (negative value) or shows a greater difference over time based on the initial value (positive value). Moral disengagement, social goals, and a sense of peer community did not show a linear developmental trend over time. A sense of peer community showed a significant and positive quadratic shape, implying that high initial values of this characteristic were associated with larger increases over time. In contrast, moral disengagement and social goals did not show a significant quadratic shape. In terms of peer influence effects, significant effects for moral disengagement and a sense of peer community were found. This indicates that youth changed their level of moral disengagement and sense of peer community to become more similar to their friends.

Table 4 shows the relative strength of the peer influence effect at various levels of friends' moral disengagement. Comparing values across diagonals shows the likelihood of the similarity between the youth and their friend who scored similarly on moral disengagement. The likelihood of the similarity between ego and alter is strong at low levels of moral disengagement (score: 1–2) compared to friends at

Table 5 Sense of Peer Community Ego-Alter Influence

Self -Sense of Peer Community	Friends' Sense of Peer Community				
	1	2	3	4	5
1	1.75	0.97	0.19	-0.59	-1.37
2	0.39	1.17	0.39	-0.39	-1.17
3	-0.65	0.13	0.91	0.13	-0.65
4	-1.36	-0.58	0.20	0.98	0.20
5	-1.74	-0.96	-0.18	0.60	1.38

Gray boxes indicate the likelihood of similarity among friends who have the same level of a sense of peer community

high levels of moral disengagement (score: 4–5). Negative similarity effects are found in dyads with the highest level of moral disengagement ($Est = -0.41$). This indicates that moral disengagement tends to be socialized at lower moral disengagement levels, while youth are less likely to be similar to friends with the level of highest moral disengagement.

Table 5 also shows the relative likelihood of similarity for the various levels of friends' sense of peer community. In general, youth tend to be similar to their peers on a sense of peer community at all levels of the scale. Youth with the highest sense of peer community (score: 5) tended to be similar to their peers with the highest sense of peer community. Similarly, youth with the lowest sense of peer community (score: 1) are likely to become similar to their peers with the lowest sense of peer community. This indicates that both weak and strong sense of peer community would result in strong peer influence.

Discussion

Peers may play an important role in developing classroom citizenship. This study aimed to investigate peer influence processes of classroom citizenship using longitudinal social network analysis within a school semester in primary school by focusing on the development of moral disengagement, social goals, and a sense of peer community in the classroom. Peer influences of moral disengagement and a sense of peer community were found, but not for social goals. Specifically, peer influence effects were weaker for adolescents with high levels of moral disengagement than for those with lower levels. Peer influence effects were generally strong in relation to the sense of peer community, regardless of whether youth scored at the high or low end of the scale.

Peer Influence on Moral Disengagement

Friends became more similar in moral disengagement over time, but youth did not select peers with similar levels of

moral disengagement. This finding is in line with previous research, indicating that friendships influenced the change of moral disengagement over time among Italian youth (Caravita et al., 2014). The current results thus replicated the previous work on the peer influence process of moral disengagement and confirmed the consistent finding across two different cultures. The similarity of moral disengagement varied by the level of moral disengagement between friends. Specifically, moral disengagement was influenced by peers who are low or average in moral disengagement but not high in moral disengagement.

This indicates that morally disengaged youth seem to have less influence over their friends, whereas youth seem more prone to adopt average or low levels of moral disengagement from their peers. High moral disengagers are much more involved in aggressive behaviors (Gini et al., 2014). Therefore, their "habituation to cruelty" (Bandura, 2016, p. 98) requires the high, persistent, and self-convincing habitual activities of moral disengagement to maintain a good self-image and self-approval and to avoid self-sanctions like self-condemnation and feelings of guilt, shame, and remorse (cf., Bjärehed et al., 2021). This psychological need might contribute to explaining why they are less susceptible to decreasing their moral disengagement as a result of peer influence. As Bandura (2016) puts it, they need it to continue to do harm and live with themselves. A ceiling effect might exist in the peer influence process of moral disengagement, making it difficult to adopt the highest level of moral disengagement. Because moral disengagement is learned to avoid negative self-sanctions like guilt, highly moral disengagers do not need to acquire higher levels of this process, as they already use it. In contrast, peer influence of moral disengagement is higher for youth low in this process who need to deal with negative self-sanctions.

Peer Influence on Social Goals

Contrary to expected findings, the peer influence of both agentic goals and communal goals was not significant. This suggests that social goals are not influenced by friends during mid-childhood and early adolescence. These findings might be associated with a developmental difference in the peer influence process of social goals. Although the role of friendship becomes more important during mid-childhood and early adolescence, youth still have limited experience endorsing their social goals with corresponding behavior with friends in this developmental stage. A study about peer influence on social goals with a sample of middle school students indicated that both agentic and communal goals are influenced by friendship networks during adolescence (Ojanen et al., 2013). Adolescents tend to have an advanced understanding of friendship dynamics and relationships,

enabling them to endorse their social goals by showing corresponding behavior. Furthermore, the role of friends as a socializer of social goals could peak during adolescence. Compared to mid-childhood and early adolescence, adolescents not only spend more time with peers but also share more social contexts to endorse their social goals. In this regard, peer influence on social goals is more evident during adolescence, not mid-childhood and early adolescence.

Peer Influence on a Sense of Peer Community

According to the results, youth become more similar in their sense of peer community to their friends over time. This indicates that friendship functions as a crucial context to develop a positive sense of peer community toward classmates during mid-childhood and early adolescence. The current results can be interpreted in light of social referencing processes and emotional exchange among peers. Friends are an essential source of social information regarding norms, peer status, and behaviors (Hendrickx et al., 2017). Youth can gain a social understanding of peers, classrooms, and teachers by interacting with their friends. Similarly, youth can use the perception of friends on their sense of peer community as a reference and subsequently shape their own perception of the classroom climate. Emotional exchanges between friends can co-develop attraction between them and the group. Hence, a positive membership attitude like peer community can be mutually developed. This affective exchange is critical for children and early adolescents in fostering social belonging and group cohesion.

Furthermore, friends tend to be similar in their perception of a peer community across all levels of sense of peer community. In general, youth would have a similar level of a sense of peer community with their friends. This finding confirms that friendship is a crucial avenue for youth to develop mutual trust, and group membership in the classrooms. Interestingly, the similarity of a sense of peer community between peers was relatively high at the lowest and the highest levels in their sense of peer community. It is expected that both groups would build a strong consensus in their perception toward classmates and group membership. The normative peer influence in these groups might be heightened to maintain group cohesion and membership attitude.

One additional explanation for this finding is the role of peer preference concerning the peer influence of a sense of peer community. A study that examined the predictors of a sense of peer community showed that preferred youth developed a favorable view of their classmates (Madill et al., 2014). Rejected youth can also co-ruminate together and establish a reputation bias to elevate the negative views of their classmates (Rose, 2002). It is possible that either

rejected or preferred youth would strengthen their perception of the group with peers who share a similar level of a sense of peer community.

Putting together, the peer influence of social-cognitive motives could contribute to classroom citizenship development. By befriending other peers, youth could strengthen healthy moral judgment and foster group membership and mutual trust among peers. Moral judgment and group membership are key indicators of classroom citizenship. The current findings confirmed that youth can develop positive social-cognitive motives through friendship. Unexpectedly, peer influence on the sense of peer community tended to be strongest among students who lacked the sense of peer community. Teachers should pay closer attention to the friendship dynamics, particularly with students who have a lack of chance of belonging to the group.

Strengths, Limitations, and Implications for Future Research

This study had several strengths. First, this study rigorously analyzed friendship dynamics by disentangling peer selection and influence using longitudinal social network analysis. Second, the focus on the peer influence of moral disengagement, social goals, and a sense of peer community is an apparent strength of this study, considering these social-cognitive motives are crucial markers of citizenship in the classrooms. Third, this study was conducted in a collectivistic culture where group harmony is emphasized. Previous studies were mainly conducted in individualistic cultures like Western Europe or North America. Lastly, the current study provided more insight into how peer influence on moral, social, and group cohesion during childhood and early adolescence can be affected in a Korean school context.

Despite its strength, this study also had some limitations that need to be addressed in future studies. First, the current research captured longitudinal change over a single school semester. This provided valuable information for short-term changes in friendship and social-cognitive motives. Some changes may either be more pronounced or more appropriate over a longer period. In future research, longer intervals such as between semesters and across years should therefore be tested. Second, the role of peer status in these peer influence processes was not considered in the current study. Previous research indicated that social standing in the peer group is an essential moderator in the peer influence of moral disengagement and social goals (Caravita et al., 2014). For instance, popular youth might have stronger peer influence from peers to achieve and maintain their social standing in the classroom. Future studies need to consider the potential moderating effects of peer status on the peer influence of classroom citizenship. Third, although

friendship has influenced the development of a sense of peer community, contextual factors such as peer norms would also be associated with peer influence of a sense of peer community. For instance, the peer influence of a sense of peer community might be salient in the classroom in which prosocial behavior is normative. Future studies should examine the role of peer group context in the peer influence of a sense of peer community. Fourth, the current findings investigated only within school contexts. Youth could face various social environments related to peer influence regarding moral disengagement, social goals, and a sense of peer community, such as extra-curricular activities and neighborhoods. In future research, friendships in more diverse contexts such as local community and club activities should be investigated. Fifth, the current study investigated the peer influence process of classroom citizenship during middle childhood and early adolescence. in a primary school context. For classroom citizenship development, adolescence is the period to advance understanding of the peer group, civic engagement, and moral judgment. Considering these developmental and contextual changes, it is essential to replicate the current study among adolescents to understand how peers influence citizenship during adolescence. Lastly, the surveys were administered by teachers during extra-curricular activities and this would potentially cause potential bias such as social desirability in students' responses. To minimize the potential bias in teacher-administered surveys, a trained lab assistant should administer the surveys in the future.

Conclusion

Consistent with studies in Western contexts, peer influence effects were related to the development of moral disengagement among Korean primary school students. This indicates that the role of peers in the peer influence of moral disengagement is equally important both in Western and non-Western contexts. Contrary to previous work among Western adolescents, social goals were not influenced by peer relationship dynamics in childhood and early adolescence in Korean students. This supports the notion that peer influences on social goals are more likely to be an adolescent phenomenon. Moreover, peer influence processes were related to the development of a sense of peer community. As expected, a sense of peer community was shared and socially learned among friends. Indeed, friends were the major socializers of social belonging and positive group membership. The role of peers as socializers of moral disengagement and a sense of peer community sheds new light on daily teaching practices in shaping classroom citizenship in primary schools. For example, teachers can enhance moral competence and prevent moral disengagement by

facilitating peer-led group discussions through lessons and classroom activities. To provide additional support for students who may not feel a sense of peer community in the classrooms, teachers can foster positive interpersonal ties by encouraging group work with classmates who already possess a positive sense of peer community.

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Authors' Contributions J.K. conceived the study, collected the data, participated in its design, performed the statistical analysis, and drafted the manuscript; J.S. conceived the study, participated in its design, and helped to draft the manuscript; R.T. conceived the study and helped to draft the manuscript; S.C. conceived the study and helped to draft the manuscript; J.H. participated in its design and helped to draft the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Data Sharing and Declaration The dataset analyzed during the current study is not publicly available but is available from the first author upon reasonable request.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical Approval The study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Jungbu University and was conducted in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed Consent Written informed consent was obtained from the parents of all participants.

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