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Relations Between Parent-Child Interactions and Children's Self-Esteem

Lisa D. Parker

Eastern Illinois University

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Relations Between Parent-Child Interactions and Children’s Self-Esteem

BY

Lisa D. Parker

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1998
YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

6/3/98
Date

6/29/98
Date
Relations Between Parent-Child Interactions and Children’s Self-Esteem

Lisa Parker

Eastern Illinois University
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how time spent between parents and children in various activities may be related to self-esteem in children. The specific objectives were to explore whether there was a relationship between children's self-esteem and total time children reported spending with mothers and fathers; whether there were relations between time spent participating in activities and self-esteem for each of the four parent-child dyads (Mother-Daughter, Mother-Son, Father-Daughter, and Father-Son); whether there were relations between specific activities done with parents and children's self-esteem; and whether enjoyment levels reported by children participating in each activity were significantly correlated with self-esteem. Subjects were 97 4th and 5th grade children from regular education classrooms. The questionnaires used for the study included the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Short Form) and two questionnaires created for the purposes of this research for recording activities with parents, amounts of time spent with parents, and enjoyment levels for each activity reported. No significant relationships were found between the level of self-esteem and how much overall time children reported spending with their parents or between the level of self-esteem and the total amount of time spent participating in activities among each of the four dyads. Significant positive correlations found between self-esteem and activities done with mothers included meals at home, meals out of the home, housework indoors, homework, and shopping; and with fathers included meals at home, meals out of the home, and hobbies/interests. Significant positive correlations found between self-esteem and the enjoyment level of activities reported with mothers included doing homework, going out for meals, going out to see movies, and reading; and with fathers included doing homework and housework. A significant negative correlation was found between self-esteem and the enjoyment level of fighting reported with mothers. Implications of the findings and suggestions for further research are addressed.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Russell Gruber and Dr. Christine McCormick for all their help and input into this study. A special thanks goes to Dr. Cheryl Somers for her supportive guidance and encouragement she provided throughout the many months spent pursuing this project. Finally, I would like to thank my family for all their patience and loving support they gave me as I pursued my educational goals, for their help made it all possible!
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Parent-Child Interactions and Children's Self-Esteem

Relations have been found between how parents and children interact and children's self-esteem. In past research models of parental influences on children, three broad characteristics of parents have been identified in determining the processes through which parenting style influences child development: "...the values and goals parents have in socializing their children, the parenting practices they employ, and the attitudes they express toward their children" (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). Baumrind, for example, authored several studies using preschool children and their parents that found certain broad parenting dimensions (Baumrind, 1967, 1970). One dimension, demandingness, involves parents establishing high standards for their children and insisting that their children meet those standards. Another dimension, responsiveness, involves parents being accepting of, and responsive to, their children. From Baumrind's studies, three styles of parenting have been labeled: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Maccoby and Martin (1983) have further elaborated on Baumrind's work and termed the "uninvolved" parent as a fourth type of parenting style. The various styles of parenting affect children's well-being in a variety of areas, including self-esteem. The practices that parents employ all combine to form types of styles that parents use.

Parenting practices are "behaviors defined by specific content and socialization goals" (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). There are many studies that measure parental behavior toward children and the relationship of children's self-esteem. Graybill (1978) studied maternal child-rearing behaviors from the child's perspective. The study found children, ranging in age from seven to 15 years old, who saw their mothers as using psychological pressure techniques to discipline them (such as agreeing with the statement, "Says if I loved her, I'd do what she wants me to do") had significantly lower self-esteem than children who saw their mothers as accepting and nurturing (such as agreeing with the statement, "Gives me a lot of care and attention"). Peterson, Southworth, and Peters (1983) found that maternal loving and demanding dimensions toward 5th and 6th grade
children exhibited positive relationships with children's self-esteem, while maternal punishment was negatively correlated with children's self-esteem. The loving dimension studied was maternal nurturance, affective reward, and companionship, while the demanding dimension measured achievement demands, principled discipline, reasoning, and firm control (power). The punishing dimension was composed of social isolation, physical punishment, and expressive rejection by the mother. Scott et al. (1991) explored how family harmony, parental nurturance, protectiveness and punitiveness might affect self-esteem in adolescents ranging from twelve to 20 years old. The study found significant positive relations between self-esteem and adolescents' reported family harmony and parental nurturance.

Other parent-child relational characteristics have been linked to children's self-esteem. Dickstein and Posner's (1978) study asked children ages 8 through 11 years old about their relationship with their parents and found that parent-child closeness, characterized by parents knowing information about the child such as who the child's friends are, had a significant positive relationship with children's self-esteem. A study by Loeb, Horst, and Horton (1980) found that parental warmth, defined as positive family interactions and mutual respect within the family, toward children in fourth and fifth grades is significantly correlated with children's high self-esteem.

Family influences on children's self-esteem have also been studied. Cooper, Holman, and Braithwaite (1990) found that family cohesion, which assesses family's functioning, correlates significantly with children's self-esteem across many children's age categories. Amato (1989) studied family cohesion, defined as "frequency of joint activities and children's feelings of closeness to their families," and found that it was not significantly associated with self-esteem in middle childhood but was associated with adolescents. Felson and Zielinski (1989) measured the frequency with which parents praised, criticized, engaged in physical affection, and punished 4th through 8th grade children. The study found that amount of support parents gave children, as reported by children, correlated
positively with self-esteem in the children. The study found that although self-esteem was affected by support from parents, they were "not able to say with much certainty exactly what types of supportive behaviors affect self-esteem." Furman and Buhrmester (1992) focused on age differences and perceived parental support and found children in 4th grade reported they relied on parents most for support. Many other studies have found that family support correlates with children's self-esteem (Amato, 1989; Bachman et al., 1978; Coopersmith, 1967; Gecas, 1971; Gecas, Thomas, and Weigert, 1970; Hoelter and Harper, 1987).

Family structure and the effects on children's well-being, including self-esteem, have also been studied. A study by Paul Amato (1987) looked at how family structure in divorced families may affect children within those families. They found that children's relationships with mothers within divorced and non-divorced families did not differ significantly with the amount of support mothers gave to their children. Specific to self-esteem, different types of family structures have also been compared within families to see if differences in children's self-esteem exist. Clark and Barber (1994) studied adolescents and their families of different family structure and found no significant differences between family structures and self-esteem in adolescents. The study noted that contextual differences may exist that are more influential to the adolescent's self-esteem than family structure alone or interest/disinterest from fathers. Duckett and Richards (1995), however, found different results when studying the effects of maternal employment on 5th- through 9th-grade children's self-esteem when their mothers were single. The study found lower self-esteem in children whose mothers were not employed while children whose mothers were employed full-time had higher self-esteem and reported enjoying activities with mothers to a greater degree. The study used "subjective experiences," such as enjoyment level and alertness level (whether the child was sleepy vs. alert), when the children answered the questions for the study, which may have resulted in more accurate responses based on the context within which the children answered.
Parent-child gender differences have been studied and revealed mixed results. Dickstein and Posner (1978) explored the relationships between the gender of parents and various factors in children ages eight through 11. For boys, self-esteem was significantly related to perceived closeness with the father but not with the mother. For girls, self-esteem was significantly related to perceived closeness with the mother but not with the father. Elrod and Crase (1980) studied the relationship of reported behaviors toward parents of four- and five-year-olds and found mothers interacted in similar ways with both sons and daughters and fathers interacted more with boys than girls. The study also found high self-esteem in girls was associated with mothers engaging in behaviors such as active involvement with the child, immediate assistance to the child, and setting limits to the child. Some behaviors from fathers toward sons that were associated with low self-esteem included some of the same behaviors mothers did with daughters, such as setting limits or immediate assistance toward the son. Hoffman et al. (1988) found that maternal supportive behavior has the most significant influence on adolescent's self-esteem rather than paternal or peer's supportive influences. However, Buri et al. (1992) differentiated between mothers and fathers and found mixed results of parental nurturance because of different statistical testing used.

It is clear that parenting and parent-child relationships can impact self-esteem in children. There are also related areas to explore which may provide an even more distinct picture of how parents can influence their children's self-esteem. Researchers have studied the amount of time parents spend with children and children's self-esteem in a variety of ways. Montemayor (1982) looked at the relationships between amount of time adolescents spent with parents, peers, and alone, and the amount of conflict reported between parents and adolescents. Although they did not measure self-esteem in adolescents, the relationship between amount of time spent between parents and adolescents appeared significantly related to the parent-child relationship. Clark and Barber (1994) studied the outcomes of adolescent self-esteem in two-parent vs. single-
parent homes and the effects of less time spent with the father. The study measured the fathers' direct interest through the question, "My father takes an interest in my activities." Responses were in a 7-point Likert format. Parental interest that the adolescent perceived to be directed more or less toward a sibling, defined in the study as "differential interest," was also measured. The study revealed that adolescents in two-parent families with low interest from fathers had lower self-esteem than other adolescents from other types of family structures, indicating that adolescents who spend more amount of time with the father do not always have higher self-esteem. Studies looking at the influences of maternal employment on self-esteem because of less time spent with children have also been done. Richards & Duckett (1994) examined how maternal work might shape self-esteem in 5th-6th grade and 7th-8th grade children. The study found that 7th-8th grade children of mothers working part-time reported more positive daily moods and higher self-esteem than children with full-time and nonemployed mothers.

The literature on middle childhood indicates that time spent with children decreases dramatically after children exit preschool. Hill and Stafford (1980) asked parents to report how much time they spent with 5- to 12-year-olds and found that they reported spending less than half as much time in caregiving, teaching, reading, and playing as they did with preschoolers. Although parents spend less time with their children, they "reason with their children more, appeal to their self-esteem ("You wouldn't do anything that stupid") or to their sense of humor, and seek to arouse their guilt" (Cole & Cole, 1996). Other studies have focused on how maternal employment might affect the amount of time children spend with mothers and fathers. Richards and Duckett (1994) found that daily experiences reported by children in the 5th through 9th grades whose mothers worked full-time included more overall time doing homework with mothers and less time doing leisure activities, while children whose mothers worked part-time indicated more significant time doing sports activities with both parents. Children whose mothers worked full-time also indicated that they spent more time alone with fathers. The study
emphasized that no significant differences were found for either the quantity of time mothers spent away from home and the quality of time spent with the children when they were home, which indicate "maternal employment by itself does not affect adolescent development" (Richards & Duckett, 1994). Hill and Stafford (1980) looked at activities mothers reported with different ages of children and found mothers who had attained a higher level of education spent more time with their children and provided a wider variety of care for them.

Limitations of Past Research

The existing literature on the effects of parent-child relationships on children has revealed a fair amount regarding the impact on child self-esteem. However, in order to gain a clearer picture of the nature of this relationship, a variety of factors in combination have not been adequately researched.

Parenting practices have been studied in previous research, but many are limited in that they have not looked at specific differences for each subject in the study, as in the Clark and Barber (1994) study. As a result, most studies, with the exception of the Richards and Duckett study (1994), have made assumptions about how children feel about activities they do with parents through their self-esteem levels. Research asking about children's various experiences with their parents and their enjoyment level of each activity together has not been adequately explored in past studies. The review of models by Darling and Steinberg (1993) also confirms that past research on parent-child interactions have been narrow in measuring various aspects of parent-child relations with self-esteem. The studies by Duckett and Richards (1994, 1995) have used contextual differences within their studies and have found differing results from research that did not use the same method, indicating a need to perform similar studies to confirm their findings.

Gecas and Schwalbe (1986) noted,"...our measures of parental behavior were not very concrete." This observation of general assessments and judgments toward parental support, control, and participation in their study is common in past research of similar
Self-esteem

studies. The authors suggest that "greater specificity and concreteness of parental behavior indicators is something future research on this topic should take into account" (p. 45). The questions asked to the children within the Gecas and Schwalbe study forced the children give an overall picture of their relationship with their parents without defining specific behaviors they liked or disliked. The study by Felson and Zielinski (1989) also indicated that their research study could not "say with much certainty exactly what types of supportive behaviors affect self-esteem."

In some studies, only one parent has been evaluated (Coopersmith, 1967; Graybill, 1978; Peterson et al., 1983). This practice limits the evaluations of both parents' influences on children's self-esteem. Other studies only use the perspectives of parents to gain insight into parenting styles and practices (Elrod and Crase, 1980). While parents can report their behaviors and attitudes toward their children, studies have shown that children's perceptions of parental behaviors are more accurate when studying children's well-being (Gecas and Schwalbe, 1986; Scott, Scott, & McCabe, 1991).

Some studies have not looked at gender differences within the children's responses, which limits the interpretable results (Amato, 1989; Scott, et al., 1991). Past research has found that gender differences exist between children (Starrels, 1994; Dickstein & Posner, 1978) and should be considered when collecting data.

Most researchers have focused on adolescent or small children for their studies, which limits the parent-child research of self-esteem for middle childhood ages. If middle childhood has been focused on, the studies have had limitations, such as those mentioned previously.

Description of the Study

Most assumptions made by previous researchers have not taken into account three types of significant details within parent-child relationships: what activities parents do with their children; how often the activities are done together; and if the children enjoy these activities. This limitation was eliminated by studying all three variables within one
study. Specifically, more concrete questions regarding parental behaviors were asked to children, as Gecas and Schwalbe (1986) have suggested. Children were asked on a questionnaire to indicate what activities they do with their parents and how often they did these activities with them. Children were also asked if they enjoyed the activities they reported doing with their parents. Children's parents were excluded from providing input into the study, as past research has indicated children's perceptions were more accurate than parent's perceptions.

Previous research has indicated that gender differences exist within parent-child relationships. In order to evaluate each parent's activities with children, separate questionnaires were given to the children for the mother and father. Children were asked to respond to each parent's activities with them and were instructed before the questionnaires were filled out to report activities with natural parents, regardless whether they lived with only one parent. Some children who did not see one of the natural parents were instructed to leave that parent's form blank and indicate they do not see that parent.

Specific research questions asked were: 1) Is there a relationship between how much overall time children report spending with their parents and the children's self-esteem? 2) Is there a relationship between the total amount of time spent participating in activities and children's self-esteem among each of the four dyads? 3) Are there relations between the amount of time spent participating in the activities reported and the children's self-esteem? 4) Is there a relation between the level of self-esteem in children and the enjoyment level reported by children participating in certain activities together?

Based on past research, it was expected that there would be a significant, positive correlations among children's self-esteem, how much time parents spend with their children, and the enjoyment level reported by the children. However, differences were explored to identify various levels of self-esteem and certain parent-child activities done together. Gender-related differences between mother-daughter and father-son activities done together were expected to correlate significantly with self-esteem levels. Finally, an
interaction between activities done with the parents, how often children reported doing the activities with parents, and the enjoyment level of these activities indicated by the children were expected to correlate significantly with self-esteem reported by the children.

**Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to gain insight into children's preferences for parent-child interactions and if these activities influence children's self-esteem. Gender differences were also explored to determine if parent/child gender differences were significant over the type of activities done with the children. It is hoped that researchers can gain a better view of the parent-child relationships within middle childhood, expanding on the limited amount of research in this area.

Implications from this research can be used by mental health professionals who work with children within this age group. By focusing on specific activities children within a normal population do with their parents, treatment strategies for those children having low self-esteem may involve working on increasing parent-child activities that children enjoy doing with their parents.
Method

Participants

Participants were 101 4th and 5th grade children from regular education classrooms in East-Central Illinois, ranging in age from 9 to 12 (mean = 10.53). Of the total participants, four of the participants' questionnaires were not included in the data analysis due to missing answers on the self-esteem scale, which resulted in a total of 44 males and 53 females in the sample.

Measures

A demographic questionnaire was first administered (see Appendix A).

Self-esteem. Children's self-esteem was assessed with the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI), School Short Form (Coopersmith, 1981) (see Appendix B). The scale consists of 25 items and is based on two-point responses of "Like me" or "Unlike me." Reliability based on internal consistency in a study by Spatz and Johnston indicated coefficients of .81 for grade 5 (Coopersmith, 1981). Fullerton reported a split-half reliability coefficient of .87 for grades 5 and 6 (Coopersmith, 1981). Construct validity has been reported in studies by Kokenes and Kimball (Coopersmith, 1981).

Children's activities with parents. Children were given two identical questionnaires, one for father and one for mother, containing several activities children might do with their parents during middle childhood (see Appendix C and D). Children were asked to mark each activity they did with each parent. For each activity marked, children were asked to indicate how often they do the activity with the parent by marking one of the following: "Never," "Sometimes," or "A Lot." Answers were coded as "Never" = 0, "Sometimes" = 1, and "A Lot" = 2. Children were also asked to indicate whether or not they enjoyed the reported activities with their parents by marking one of the following: "No," "Sometimes," or "Yes." Answers were coded as "No" = 0, "Sometimes" = 1, and "Yes" = 2.
Procedure

Parents were contacted by letter (see Appendix E) explaining the purpose of the research and were asked to sign an attached consent form (see Appendix F) if they agreed to allow their children to participate. The questionnaire sessions were performed during school hours when the participating schools and teachers agreed on a time for the research to occur. The questionnaires were handed out in manila envelopes to participating children and directions were given for every questionnaire before they were asked to begin. The researcher was present during the entire session in order to answer any questions the children had. Children were told they may choose to stop participation at any time without being questioned or provoked to continue. Each questionnaire session took approximately 25 minutes to complete.
Results

Frequencies and percentages of all parent-child activities marked are found on Tables 1 and 2. The first purpose of this study was to explore whether or not relations exist between amount of time that children reported spending with parents and children's self-esteem. Results of the first research question revealed that there were no significant correlations between amount of time reported spending with mothers or fathers and children's self-esteem levels.

The second purpose of this study was to explore the relations between the total amount of time spent doing activities and self-esteem among each of the four dyads: Mother-Daughter, Mother-Son, Father-Daughter, and Father-Son. For both the sons and daughters, no significant correlations appeared between self-esteem and the total time spent with either parent.

The third purpose of this study was to evaluate the relations between time spent with mothers and fathers doing 15 different activities and the child's level of self-esteem. Results revealed significant positive but low correlations between self-esteem and time spent doing five of the individual activities with mothers: meals at home, meals out of home, housework indoors, shopping, and hobbies/interests (see Table 3). Significant positive but low correlations were also found between self-esteem and time spent doing three of the individual activities with fathers: meals at home, meals out of home, and hobbies/interests (see Table 4).

The final purpose of this study was to explore relations between the level of child's reported enjoyment gained from doing various activities with mothers and fathers and the child's self-esteem. A low but significant positive correlation appeared between self-esteem and enjoyment of doing homework ($r = .31, p < .01$) and indoor housework ($r = .29, p < .05$) with fathers. With mothers, significant moderate positive correlations appeared between self-esteem and enjoyment of doing homework ($r = .37, p < .001$) and going out for meals ($r = .31, p < .01$) with mothers. A significant moderate negative...
correlation appeared between self-esteem and enjoyment of fighting \((r = .49, \ p < .01)\) with mothers. Low but significant positive correlations appeared between self-esteem and enjoyment of going out to see movies \((r = .25, \ p < .05)\) and reading \((r = .29, \ p < .05)\) with mothers.
Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Boys Who Reported Participating With Parents in Each of the Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Boys and Mothers</th>
<th>Boys and Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals at home</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>95.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals out of home</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies at home</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>95.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies out of home</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports with just you and parent</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports with a group</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies/interests</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board games</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>79.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>86.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housework indoors</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housework outdoors</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious activities</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  n = 44 boys.
Table 2

Frequency and Percentage of Girls Who Reported Participating With Parents in Each of the Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Girls and Mothers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Girls and Fathers</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meals at home</strong></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>88.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meals out of home</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>83.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Movies at home</strong></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Movies out of home</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sports with just you and parent</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sports with a group</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hobbies/interests</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Board games</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>67.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homework</strong></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>67.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housework indoors</strong></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housework outdoors</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>83.0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>77.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shopping</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious activities</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fighting</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  \( n = 53 \) girls.
Table 3

Correlations Between Time Spent Participating in Various Activities With Mothers and Children's Self-Esteem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Children's Self-Esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meals at home</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housework indoors</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals out of home</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies/interests</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 97. Only correlations significant at p < .05 are included in the table.
Table 4
Correlations Between Time Spent Participating in Various Activities With Fathers and Children's Self-Esteem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Children's Self-Esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meals at home</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals out of home</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobbies/interests</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n = 97. Only correlations significant at p < .05 are included in the table.
Discussion

Results of this study do not confirm the hypothesis that more time spent with parents is related to higher levels of self-esteem in children. Self-esteem was not correlated with total time spent for either fathers or mothers, which is consistent with some past research. It may be useful to reconceptualize the traditional emphasis on quantity of time as the most important factor in child development and on the impact that parents have on children due to less time. Further research is needed in order to determine how quality of time spent with children impacts self-esteem. This study attempted to explore the quality of the parent-child relationship through inquiring about specific activities done with parents, as well as children's reported enjoyment of the time spent engaging in those activities.

The results of this study do offer significant contributions to the literature in that time spent doing certain activities with parents seemed to be more related to self-esteem than spending time doing other activities with parents. Specifically, self-esteem in children was related to time spent participating in activities such as eating meals both at home and out of the home and hobbies/interests together. This was true with both mothers and fathers.

Two additional activities were significantly related to self-esteem, but only when done with mothers: shopping and participating in housework. Engaging in such activities with parents appears to be an important part of spending time together. It may indicate that certain activities shared between children and their parents may play a greater role in children's well-being than time spent doing other types of activities. The finding that a greater number of activities with mothers were associated with better self-esteem may simply be due to mothers spending more reported time with children than with fathers (see Tables 1 and 2 for frequencies and percentages of time spent participating in activities). Also, the nature of the two additional activities, shopping and indoor housework, traditionally are shared more often between children and their mothers than with fathers.
Additionally, the child's level of enjoyment of the individual activities engaged in with both mothers and fathers may also have had some impact on children's self-esteem. Specifically, children who reported greater enjoyment from doing homework with their fathers and mothers tended to have higher levels of self-esteem. This could have important implications for the schools, as both mothers and fathers appear to be significantly important in the development of their children's well-being. It may be useful to educate parents and teachers about how children can benefit from involvement with both parents in school-work activities. It was interesting that, in this sample, actual time spent participating in homework with parents was not related to self-esteem. However, when children reported enjoying time spent with parents working on homework with both mothers and fathers, self-esteem tended to be higher. Therefore, not only should parents be educated about the impact that both mothers and fathers can have on children, but they also may need to realize the importance of making the activity a pleasurable experience.

Similarly, enjoyment of individual housework with fathers and activities such as meals, movies, and reading with mothers were significantly related to children's self-esteem. It may be useful for parents to realize that children can benefit from participating in a variety of activities with both parents.

It was also interesting that those children who reported more enjoyment from fighting with their mothers but not with fathers had significantly lower levels of self-esteem. It is commonly assumed that mothers tend to fulfill the primary role of disciplinarian within the home. However, in this sample, no major differences were reported in the frequency of fighting with each parent. Additionally, the overall percentage of children who reported fighting with parents was low. Another possible explanation of this relation between enjoyment of fighting and self-esteem could lie in the relationship dynamics between some mothers and their children. Perhaps children who are lacking positive interactions with mothers reported actually enjoying fights because it does offer a form of attention. This kind of behavior would also support findings of lower self-
Self-esteem

Esteem in children with these relationship patterns. Future research regarding the nature
of fighting with mothers needs to be conducted to gain a clearer picture of the impact that
adverse mother-child relations can have on self-esteem.

Overall, this study suggested that quality of time spent with parents may be more
important to children's general self-esteem than is quantity of time with parents. Society
has been concerned with the amount of time parents must spend away from their children
due to the increased need for more than one income within the home. Findings such as
these may provide parents with useful information about the importance of specific ways
in which they spend time with children.

Despite the contributions of this study, limitations need to be addressed. Since this
research was not conducted as an experiment, we cannot make causal statements about
why children have low or high self-esteem due to parent-child interactions reported. The
results are purely correlational. Another limiting factor was the group format of handing
out questionnaires to several students within one session. This limited the amount of
direct attention given to subjects by the researcher during the study. This was minimized,
however, by having the researcher in the room during the questionnaire procedure, which
allowed children to ask questions regarding the questionnaire format or wording. Also,
children had difficulty understanding some of the words used within the self-esteem scale,
which caused some confusion but was addressed immediately after the researcher was
aware of the situation. Precautions were taken to ensure that all of the typically difficult
words or phrases were explained before the questionnaires were administered. Future
researchers should adjust for as many of these limits as possible.

In summary, this study offers new insight into parent-child interactions in that it
explored specific activities that children participate in with parents and children's reported
enjoyment of them. These findings add to the literature on middle childhood and should
continue to be explored in an effort to further our understanding of how parents
specifically influence children's development. This research has implications for mental
health professionals who work with children within this age group. By focusing on specific activities that children within a normal population participate in with their parents, treatment strategies for those children experiencing low self-esteem may be improved. These strategies may include working on increasing parent-child activities that children enjoy doing with their parents. In addition, school systems can gain valuable information from this study and implement strategies for encouraging both parents to participate in homework with children.
References


Appendix A
ABOUT YOU

Please answer the following questions:

1. I am a _____ Male _____ Female

2. I was born on _____/_____/_____
   month day year

3. What is your race/ethnicity? (Check one)
   _____ American Indian or Alaskan Native
   _____ White, not of Hispanic Origin
   _____ Asian or Pacific Islander
   _____ Hispanic
   _____ Black, not of Hispanic origin
   _____ Other, please specify __________

4. School grade: ___4th ___5th

6. Check off who lives in your house and how many (for example, 2 sisters, 1 mother, etc.)
   _____ mother _____ father _____ step-mother _____ step-father
   _____ brother(s) _____ sister(s) _____ step-sister(s) _____ step-brother(s)
   _____ half-brother(s) _____ half-sister(s)
   _____ grandmother _____ grandfather

   Who else lives with you? ________________
   ________________
   ________________

7. Does your mother work? ________________
   If she does, describe what your mother does at work (if you know this; if not, that's OK)
   __________________________________________________________________________

8. Does your father work? ________________
   If he does, describe what your father does at work (if you know this; if not, that's OK)
   __________________________________________________________________________
Appendix B

DIRECTIONS:

On the next pages, you will find a list of statements about feelings. If a statement describes how you usually feel, circle the item Like Me. If the statement does not describe how you usually feel, circle the item Unlike Me. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Things usually don't bother me. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
2. I find it very hard to talk in front of the class. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
3. There are lots of things about myself I'd change if I could. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
4. I can make up my mind without too much trouble. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
5. I'm a lot of fun to be with. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
6. I get upset easily at home. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
7. It takes me a long time to get used to anything new. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
8. I'm popular with kids my own age. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
9. My parents usually consider my feelings. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
10. I give in very easily. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
11. My parents expect too much of me. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
12. It's pretty tough to be me. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
13. Things are all mixed up in my life. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
14. Kids usually follow my ideas. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
15. I have a low opinion of myself. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
16. There are many times when I'd like to leave home. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
17. I often feel upset in school. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
18. I'm not as nice looking as most people. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
19. If I have something to say, I usually say it. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
20. My parents understand me. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
21. Most people are better liked than I am. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
22. I usually feel as if my parents are pushing me. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
23. I often get discouraged at school. | Like Me  | Unlike Me |
24. I often wish I were someone else.

25. I can't be depended on.
Appendix C

TIME WITH YOUR MOTHER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I do with my mother? (check all that apply to you)</th>
<th>How often do I do this with my mother? (circle one)</th>
<th>Do I enjoy this activity with my mother? (circle one)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>meals at home</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meals out of home</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>movies at home</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>movies out of home</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sports with just you and mother</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sports with a group (including you and mother)</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hobbies/interests</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>board games</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homework</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housework indoors</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housework outdoors</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shopping</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>religious activities (church, mass, reading Bible, etc)</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fighting</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other activity (please name this)</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other activity (please name this)</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other activity (please name this)</td>
<td>Never  Sometimes  A Lot</td>
<td>No  Sometimes  Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix D
### TIME WITH YOUR FATHER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I do with my father? (check all that apply to you)</th>
<th>How often do I do this with my father? (circle one)</th>
<th>Do I enjoy this activity with my father? (circle one)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>____ meals at home</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ meals out of home</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ movies at home</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ movies out of home</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ sports with just you and father</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ sports with a group (including you and father)</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ hobbies/interests</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ reading</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ board games</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ homework</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ housework indoors</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ housework outdoors</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ shopping</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ religious activities (church, mass, reading Bible, etc)</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ fighting</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ other activity (please name this)</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ other activity (please name this)</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ other activity (please name this)</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Dear Parent,

My name is Lisa Parker and I am a master's student at Eastern Illinois University in the clinical psychology program. I am conducting a study at your child's school during the week of May 4, 1998, for my thesis research that looks at parent-child interactions and the various effects on developmental aspects of children.

My research will involve asking various questions regarding how children spend time with their parents. Children will also be given a self-esteem questionnaire that measures the level of self-esteem at the time of the study. The study will be totally anonymous and no names will ever be matched with any of the data gathered.

I am asking your permission to allow your child to participate in this study. The study will be totally anonymous and no names will ever be matched with any of the data gathered. Results will be discussed about the group as a whole. Attached is a consent form which must be signed by you in order for your child to participate in the study. In addition, your child's participation is completely voluntary. If at any time during the questionnaire session your child is hesitant to complete the study, he/she may choose to stop without question.

As a way of saying thank-you for considering my study as an important issue for today's youth, I will bring snacks to the questionnaire session for the participating children. In addition, I will be offering information sessions to parents regarding the results after the study's completion. A copy of written results will be available to anyone who expresses interest in receiving them. If you have any questions regarding the study, please feel free to call me at home or the Human Resources Center in Paris, Illinois and leave a message with your phone number where you may be reached. Or, if you prefer, you may call my Faculty Supervisor, Dr. Cheryl Somers. We will return your call as soon as possible.

Thanks so much for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Lisa D. Parker, B.A.
Department of Psychology
Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, IL 61920

Telephone: (217) 465-4118 (work)
(217) 967-5642 (home)

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Charleston, IL 61920

Telephone: (217) 581-6615 (EIU)
(217) 345-0182 (home)
Appendix F

CONSENT FORM

The goal of this study, "Parent-Child Influences on Self-Esteem," is to explore a variety of parental influences on children's self-esteem. Parents have different styles of parenting, differing goals for their children, and different attitudes toward their children. The interaction of these factors may influence how children view themselves as a whole. The researcher hopes to further expand the literature on self-esteem in children and the roles parents may play in their children's lives.

Children will complete questionnaires in school individually, which should take approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Participants will not write their names on the questionnaires. All data will be kept completely anonymous.

There are no risks associated with participating in the study. Upon hearing the results, families should gain valuable insight into which factors of parental attitudes, goals, and practices toward their children may contribute to children's self-esteem within this area of East-Central Illinois. Participants are free to withdraw from this study at any time without prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask questions by calling the investigator at any time before, during, or after the study's completion.

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

I, ____________________________, agree to allow my child to participate in this study, "Parent-Child Influences of Self-esteem: Testing a Contextual Model." I have read the description of the study and understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that he/she may withdraw at any time without prejudice from the investigator. I understand that responses on the questionnaires will remain anonymous.

__________________________________  __________________________________
(signature of parent)                  (date)

Principal Investigator:              Faculty Supervisor:
Lisa D. Parker, B.A.                Cheryl L. Somers, PhD.
Deptartment of Psychology            Department of Psychology
Eastern Illinois University          Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, IL 61920                 Charleston, IL 61920
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(217) 967-5642 (home)                (217) 345-0182 (home)