

Examining Intergenerational Links Between Parent and Adolescent Self-Esteem: A Family Process Model

Mengya Xia, Gregory M. Fosco, & Mark E. Feinberg

Introduction

❖ Youth self-esteem has long-term implications

- For their health, economic strain, relationship, and life satisfaction for later life stages (e.g. Boden et al., 2008; Trzesniewski et al., 2006)

❖ Family as the key developmental context

- Is linked with self-esteem development in various facets (e.g., Whitbeck et al., 1991; Plunkett et al., 2007)
- Family process model (Belsky, 1984)
- “Spillover” (Erel & Burman, 1995)
- Key determinants of healthy family functioning
 - Parent characteristics
 - Interparental relationships
- Key family functioning → positive youth development
 - Parenting behaviors
 - Family climate

❖ Innovation

- Focus on a developmentally salient domain—**self-esteem** during adolescence
- Include **multiple-reporters** and explore the possible **distinguished roles for mother and father**
- Evaluate a **family process model** that traces pathways from **parents’ self-esteem**, through **interparental relationship quality**, **parenting** and **family climate**, to **adolescent self-esteem** in a 4-wave **longitudinal** study

The Current Study

Aim 1: Parent Self-Esteem → Marital Interaction

- to examine how mother’s and father’s self-esteem are associated with both mother’s and father’s marital behaviors during their interactions

- **Hypothesis:** higher levels of mother’s and father’s self-esteem in 6th grade are associated with more positive behaviors during their marital interactions half year later.

Aim 2: Marital Interaction → Family Dynamics

- to examine how both parents’ marital behaviors are associated with Mother’s parenting, Father’s parenting, and family climate

- **Hypothesis:** more positive behaviors in marital interaction from both mother and father in 6th grade are associated with better mother’s parenting and father’s parenting, as well as more positive family climate in 7th grade.

Aim 3: Family Dynamics → Youth Self-Esteem

- to examine how mother’s parenting, father’s parenting, and family climate are associated with youth self-esteem

- **Hypothesis:** Mother’s and Father’s acceptance toward the youth and positive family climate in 7th grade are associated with higher level of youth self-esteem in 9th grade.

Method

Participants and Procedure

- Families were drawn from the PROSPER project; Approximately 43% of those invited participated
- In-home written questionnaires were completed independently by each family members during in-home interviews
- Only include two-parent families
- 59.3% (N=414) were in intervention group at W1; Good retention for the whole sample (75.6% at T4)

	T1	T2	T3	T4
Data collection time	6 th grade (2004 Fall)	6 th grade (2005 Spring)	7 th grade (2005 Fall)	9 th grade (2007 Fall)
Adolescent age M(SD)	11.27 (SD=.48)	11.94	12.95	14.92
Retention	Control	80.3%	79.9%	75.7%
	Intervention	--	84.8%	84.1%
Missingness associates demographic	Parents’ education	--	.31**	.28**
	Household income	--	Ns	Ns

Demographic Information

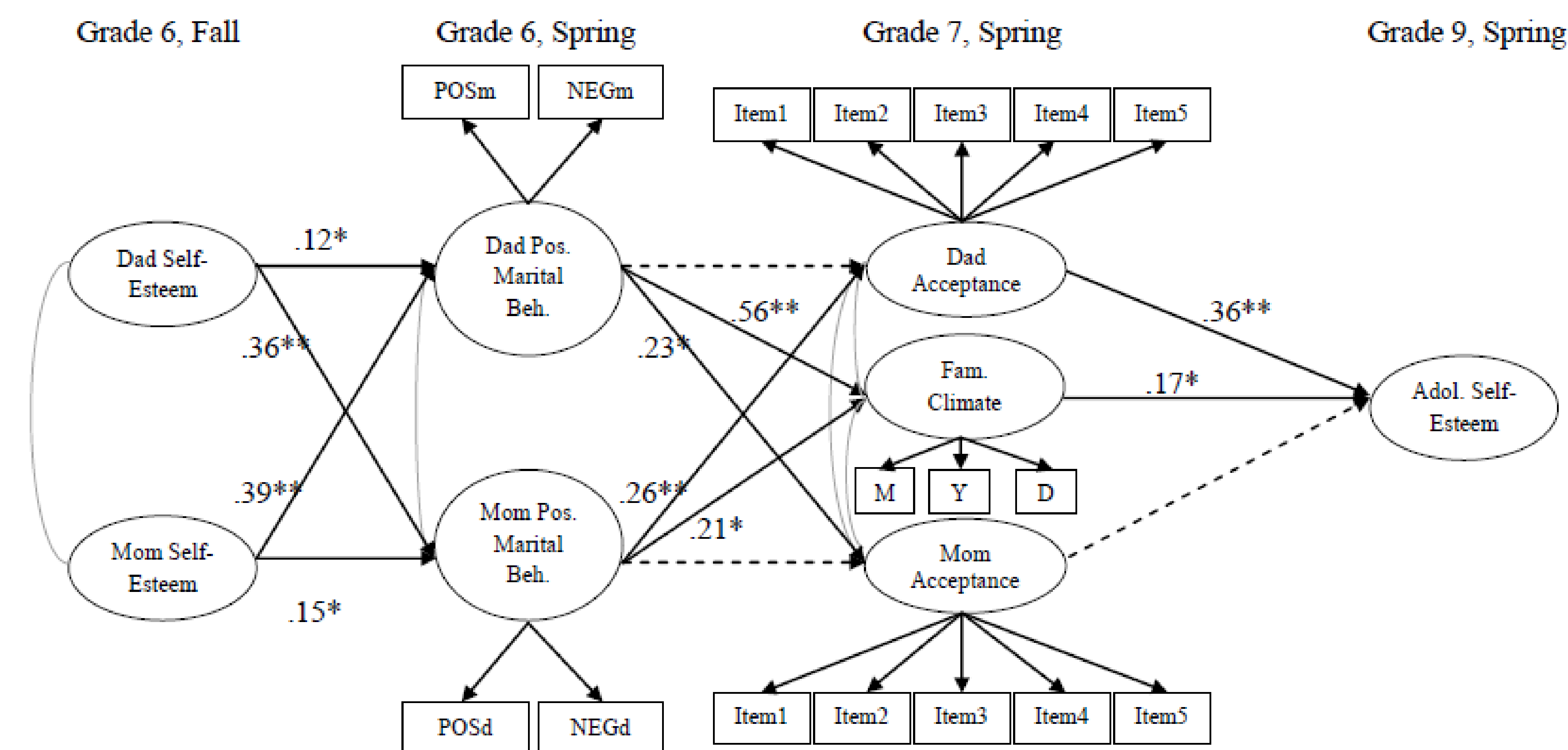
	W1
N	698
Gender	48% male, 52% female
Location	59% IA, 41% PA
Parents’ education	32.5% high school graduate
	58.9% post-secondary education
	8.6% higher degree
Ethnicity	89.0% White, 6.3% Hispanic, 1.0% African American, 0.6% Asian, 1.7% Other, 1.4% Missing

Measures

Variables	Reporter	Time	Measures	α
Mother Self-Esteem	Mother	T1	Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)	.87
Father Self-Esteem	Father	T1	Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)	.84
Mother Marital Behavior	Father	T2	Affective Quality of the Relationship (Spoth, Redmond, & Shin, 1998)	.90-.92
Father Marital Behavior	Mother	T2	Affective Quality of the Relationship (Spoth, Redmond, & Shin, 1998)	.90-.92
M→Y Warmth	Mother	T3	Elliot’s Parental Rejection Scale (Brennan, 1974)	.80
F→Y Warmth	Father	T3		.80
Family Climate	M,F,Y	T3	Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994)	.84-.86
Youth Self-Esteem	Youth	T4	Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)	.90

Results

Figure 1. SEM Model for Transmission of Self-Esteem through Family Processes



Model fit:

$\chi^2/df=1577.210/974, p<.001, RMSEA=0.032 (90\% 0.029-0.035), CFI=0.942, TLI=0.936, SRMR=0.060$

Note. For the sake of saving space, manifest indicators for Dad, Mom, Adol., Self-Esteem are omitted in this figure.

Discussion

❖1. Parent Self-Esteem → Marital Interaction

- Higher level of mother’s/father’s self-esteem are associated with more positive behaviors for herself/himself and her/his partner during the marital interaction
 - Evidence for family process model
 - Parents’ personal characteristics are factors that influence family processes (Belsky, 1984)
 - Innovatively include positive aspects
 - Extended existing literature that largely focus on negative characteristics (e.g., depression, psychopathology, Cumming et al., 2005; Berg-Nielsen et al., 2002) to include positive aspects (i.e., parent’s self-esteem)

❖2. Marital Interaction → Family Dynamics

- The parent’s positive marital behavior is associated with one’s partner’s acceptance toward the youth (for both parents)
 - Interdependence
 - The results highlight the interdependence between interparental subsystem and parent-child subsystem (e.g., Erel & Burman, 1995; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000)
 - “Spillover” process
 - The parent’s perception of his/her partner’s behavior directly influence his/her acceptance toward the youth
 - Consistent with existing studies on the spillover process between marital interaction and parenting behavior (e.g. Katz & Gottman, 1996; Malik & Rohner, 2016) but extended to positive aspects (i.e., parental acceptance)
- Positive behaviors from both parents in their marital interactions are associated with better family climate
 - Evidence for family systems framework
 - Both parents’ behaviors in their marital interaction set the foundation for the whole family climate and whole family functioning (e.g., Lindahl et al., 1997; Mitchell et al., 2016)

❖3. Family Dynamics → Youth Self-Esteem

- Father’s acceptance toward youth is a significant predictor for youth self-esteem
 - The distinguished role of father’s warmth
 - One of the first studies demonstrate the unique effect of father-youth relationship rather than mother-youth relationship
 - Consistent with studies showing that the father has his distinguished role in youth positive development (e.g., Jeynes, 2016; Lamb, 2004)
- Better family climate is associated with higher level of youth self-esteem
 - Family climate as the nexus for family dynamics
 - Family climate is a family-level variable that represents the whole family functioning (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Olson et al., 1979)
 - Expanded current literature of family climate’s influence on youth positive development (specifically, self-esteem)

❖ Limitation and Future Direction

1. Primarily comprised by White sample (limited generalizability)
2. Future studies can explore the family processes in the time range between prior to pregnancy and having a child

❖ Implications for Intervention Research

- To improve youth self-esteem
 1. design different modules targeting on each family subsystems simultaneously
 2. use family climate as the indicator for the whole family functioning
 3. intervention program should especially highlight father’s unique contribution to youth self-esteem and have relevant module to improve father’s warmth