Closing the Gap: The Impact of Parental Warmth on Children's Social Competence

by

Kaileah Akker, Nicole Antenucci, and Molly Evered

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Kaileah Akker, Nicole Antenucci, and

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Erin Pahlke

Whitman College
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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Children living in poverty are more likely than their wealthy peers to experience social rejection. One point of possible intervention lies within the family. Parental warmth has been linked to children's social competence in past psychological research, so our study was designed to explore whether parental warmth closes this socioeconomic (SES) gap in children's social competence. To investigate our hypotheses, six- to nine-year-old children and their parents ($N = 39$ and 31, respectively) were recruited to participate in this multi-method study. Overall, parents' perceptions of children's social competence were correlated with children's perceptions of parental warmth. Additionally, parents' perceptions of warmth were greater than children's perceptions of parental warmth. No relation was found between SES and children's levels of social competence, and no moderation was found for parental warmth on the relationship between SES and children's social competence. The implications of this study include intervention strategies that target parenting practices and children's social and emotional learning.

Keywords: parental warmth, social competence, socioeconomic status (SES), parenting styles, psychosocial ecological systems theory

Closing the Gap: The Impact of Parental Warmth on Children's Social Competence

Popularity is not all about good looks; a child's ability to build and maintain successful relationships with peers and friends at a young age predicts levels of social competence later in life (Pettit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988). Research shows that strong interpersonal relationships among peers are associated with positive child outcomes (Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Griesler, 1990). The social skills that help children build peer relationships are further developed when children enter educational environments where peers play a critical role in their lives (Hay, Payne, & Chadwick, 2004; Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Griesler, 1990; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). As children begin primary education, peer groups become more salient, which often highlights some children's difficulties in dealing with their peer relationships (Hay, Payne, & Chadwick, 2004). Before entering an institutional education setting, parents generally serve as the most important relationship in a child's life. Therefore, the way in which parents interact with their child likely influences children's social skills as they develop peer relationships.

A key aspect of parenting is parental warmth, which is a parent's demonstration of support, consistency, communication, and involvement in their children's lives (Fine, Voydahoff, & Donnelly, 1993; McLoyd, 1998; Yates et al., 2003). High parental warmth has been related to a variety of positive childhood outcomes, including higher levels of children's social competence (Pettit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988). Furthermore, ample parental resources may enhance children's social competence by encouraging healthy child emotional development through psychologically validating behaviors including nurturance, empathy, and support (Skinner, Johnson, & Snyder, 2005). In

addition, socioeconomic status (SES) can impact access to and the availability of parenting resources, such as reducing the ability for parents to be warm with their children (McLoyd, 1998; Yates et al., 2003). Children from families with fewer economic resources are more likely to be socially rejected, as compared to children from families with more resources (Pettit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988). Research suggests that parental warmth is tied to both SES and social competence. The goal of the current study is to extend previous research by examining parent-child relationships and their impact on a child's development (Pettit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988).

Background Literature

Bronfenbrenner's Psychosocial Ecological Perspective Model

Many complex environmental factors can impact an individual's development throughout life. Bronfenbrenner's psychosocial ecological perspective model demonstrates how microsystems (such as families, teachers, and peers), mesosystems (such as religious settings and neighborhoods), exosystems (such as school boards and local politics), and macrosystems (such as cultural attitudes and ideologies) all interact and influence an individual's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

According to Bronfenbrenner's model, the microsystem consists of the most direct and immediate relationships in a child's life. These relationships develop within family, school, neighborhood, and childcare environments. Parents are one of the most active social influences in their children's lives because they typically spend the most time with their children before they enter academic environments. Therefore, parent-child connections have lasting effects on children's behavior and developmental processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Early Socialization and Parenting Styles

As one of the microsystems in a child's life, the family unit plays a key role in a child's development, especially in early socialization (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Socialization occurs when a child learns the attitudes, values, and actions appropriate to be a functioning member of a particular culture; these include interpersonal skills, leadership abilities, and self-regulation (Hoglund & Leadbeater, 2004). As the primary

source of social and emotional support in children's early development, parents lay the groundwork for all future socialization and relationships in a child's life.

The ways in which parents develop relationships with their children can also be related to parenting styles (Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Four main parenting styles have been identified: authoritative, permissive, authoritarian, and uninvolved (Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Within these four styles, family scientists and practitioners have identified parental warmth as a primary and positive aspect of parental responsiveness (Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Both authoritative parenting, characterized by shared communication and decision making, and permissive parenting, characterized by child autonomy and control, include relatively higher levels of parental warmth (Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The latter two styles, authoritative parenting, characterized by controlling and punitive parenting, and unattached parenting, characterized by absently fulfilling the child's basic needs, include relatively lower levels of parental warmth (Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Parental Warmth

Parental warmth is generally regarded as a parent's demonstration of support, consistency, communication, and involvement in their children's lives (Fine, Voydahoff, & Donnelly, 1993; McLoyd, 1998; Yates et al., 2003). Parental warmth is associated with a variety of positive outcomes such as strong parent-child bonds, an emotional climate that fosters successful socialization, achievement motivation, and emotional and academic development (Deater-Deckard et al., 2011; Suzzio et al.,

2016). On the other hand, research shows that low parental warmth is associated with a variety of negative child outcomes, such as heightened feelings of helplessness and rejection, which may lead to depression or emotional withdrawal (Hipwell et al., 2008). Associations between parental warmth and childhood outcomes demonstrate the important role that parents play in a child's development.

High parental warmth positively impacts children's social competence, mostly through emotionally validating behaviors such as nurturance, empathy, reciprocity, and support (Eiden, Colder, Edwards & Leonard, 2009; Fine, Voydahoff, & Donnelly, 1993; Skinner, Johnson, & Snyder, 2005; Wright, 2017; Zhou et al., 2002). For example, parental warmth has been shown to foster mutual respect and collaborative work between children and parents (Bornstein & Zlotnik, 2008). Mutual warmth and close parental relationships tend to instill interpersonal attitudes and values in children, which positively impact socialization and childhood friendship formation (Bornstein & Zlotnik, 2008). Both parents' and children's perceptions of parental warmth have been found to be an essential factor in children's early socialization, specifically children's social competence (Bornstein & Zlotnik, 2008; Zhou et al., 2002). However, the ways in which parents and children perceive these relationships may differ. Previous research has emphasized that children's perceptions are more influential than parents' perceptions (De Los Reyes, Ohannessian, & Laird, 2016; Fine, Voydahoff, & Donnelly, 1993). When parents are reporting, they may be subject to self-serving biases and overestimate their own warmth. For these reasons, the current research focuses on parents' perceptions of their children's social competence and children's perceptions of their parents' warmth.

Children's Social Competence

Social competence is defined as the social, emotional, and cognitive skills and behaviors that children need for successful social adaptation (Hoglund & Leadbeater, 2004; Zhou et al., 2002). Examples of these skills and behaviors include social interactions, perspective taking, self-regulation, and leadership abilities (Hoglund & Leadbeater, 2004; Zhou et al., 2002).

Early childhood socialization is crucial because it sets the groundwork for all future social interactions. Previous research has found that children who are socially rejected in school grow up to have fewer positive interactions with peers and adults (Pettit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988). Furthermore, moderate stability in peer competence throughout kindergarten, third and sixth grades, and high school has been demonstrated in previous research (Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004). The stability of peer relationships provides evidence that the social competence developed early in a child's life will persist into later social environments.

As previously stated, parental warmth has been found to be significantly correlated with children's social competence (Eiden et al., 2009). For example, third- and fourth-grade children with less supportive parental relationships have been shown to perceive lower levels of their own social competence (Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Griesler, 1990). In contrast, close parental interactions and parent's transmission of social values, such as empathy and emotional regulation, positively influence children's social competence (Pettit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988; Zhou et al., 2002). Parental warmth may be particularly relevant to child's social competence because it encourages child development through emotionally validating behaviors (Skinner,

Johnson, & Snyder, 2005). Demonstrating links between parental warmth and children's social competence may show that parental warmth moderates other environmental factors that impact children's development, namely socioeconomic status (SES).

Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Poverty

Socioeconomic status (SES) is defined as one's access to resources, measured by income, occupation, and education (American Psychological Association, 2018). Poverty is a prominent issue in today's society. The official 2016 poverty rate in the United States is 12.7 percent, meaning that about 40.6 million people are living in poverty (Semega, Fontenot, & Kollar, 2016). There are multiple mechanisms through which poverty may reduce a parent's ability to demonstrate warmth towards their children. Living in poverty not only limits economic resources but may also reduce access to parenting education and quality time available to spend with children (Bradley et al., 2001; McLoyd, 1998). Simultaneously, poverty may increase the likelihood of stress, as well as harsh and punitive parenting styles (Anthony et al., 2005; Brookes-Gunn et al., 1997).

There are multiple psychosocial and physical risk factors associated with childhood poverty that play a vital role in children's development (Evans, 2004). For example, families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have smaller support networks compared to families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Bö, 1994). Smaller support networks limit the resources available to families in need (Bö, 1994). Children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to depend more often upon

peers for social support instead of their own parents, compared to children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Bö, 1994).

Research also suggests that social class is related to parental speech patterns and that parents from higher SES groups are less likely to direct or order their children's behavior (Hart & Risley, 1995). Instead of directing or ordering their children, parents from higher SES groups tend to speak to their children in order to initiate or sustain conversation, which helps develop social skills (Hart & Risley, 1995). Family discord, unresponsive parenting, and chaotic households negatively affect children's socioemotional growth, cognitive development, and physical health, both at home and at school (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Evans, 2000; Fiese & Kline, 1993; Repetti et al., 2002). Furthermore, forms of harsh discipline and paternal abuse are more frequently found in persistently poor families, which may account for aspects of children's mental health problems (Kruttschnitt, McLeod, & Dornfeld, 1994). Stressors associated with poverty, such as poor nutrition, hazardous environments, and exposure to violent crime, negatively affect positive and consistent parenting, which contribute to children having relatively lower levels of emotional and physical well-being (Lia-Hoagberg et al., 1990; Valenzuela, 1997). Socioeconomic disadvantage and poverty have been found to hinder positive parenting behaviors, and potentially harm children's cognitive, intellectual, social, and emotional development (Yates et al., 2003). For example, children living in less advantageous situations are more likely to be unpopular or socially rejected (Pettit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988).

Children raised in economically disadvantaged families are at risk for lasting negative outcomes, such as problematic peer relationships, lack of peer acceptance, and

delinquent and antisocial conduct (Ackerman et al., 1999). Children rejected at a young age are less likely to have opportunities for positive peer and parent interactions, which carry into interpersonal relationships in adolescence and adulthood (Pettit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988). However, the relationship between lower SES outcomes and social interactions has been found to be partially mediated by positive early childhood experiences (Pettit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988).

Parental warmth serves as a prime prevention and intervention strategy because positive parenting impacts children's physical and psychological development and may buffer some of the negative effects of poverty (Morris et al., 2017; Yates et al., 2003). Nurturing parenting practices such as sensitivity, responsiveness, and warmth have been found to positively influence life outcomes of both parents and young children living in poverty (Morris et al., 2017). These parenting practices are most influential when intervention strategies target parents' social support networks and encourage positive parent-child interactions (Morris et al., 2017). The present study adds to the current body of literature relating parental warmth and children's social competence.

The Present Study

Research shows that parental warmth moderates the relationship between poverty and child outcomes, such as children's nutrition (Valenzuela, 1997), stress (Blair et al., 2008; Blair et al., 2011; Clearfield et al., 2014), executive functioning and IQ (Blair et al., 2008), attention and learning (Evans, 2004), and social competence (Pettit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988). Although previous research has found connections between parental warmth and children's social competence (Pettit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988), the current study differs because we focus on parents' and children's

perspectives separately. Additionally, the current study focuses on children between the ages of six and nine years old, whereas previous studies have focused on different age groups. This study explores the question of how parental warmth affects children's social competence in lower, middle, and higher SES families.

We make several predictions regarding parent-child relationships within the microsystems, looking specifically at parental warmth as a component of parenting styles (Baumrind, 1966; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). We also make predictions based on the effects of broader contextual factors, such as SES, on children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Our first hypothesis is that parental warmth is related to children's social competence. Secondly, we hypothesize that parents' perception of their warmth will be greater than children's perceptions of their parents' warmth. We focus on children's perceptions of parental warmth rather than parents' self-reports of warmth because previous research has emphasized that children's perceptions of parental warmth are more influential (De Los Reyes, Ohannessian, & Laird, 2016; Fine, Voydahoff, & Donnelly, 1993). Next, we hypothesize that SES is positively related to children's levels of social competence. Finally, we hypothesize that parental warmth will moderate the relationship between SES and children's social competence. The implications of these findings include possible intervention strategies that target children's social and emotional learning skills, as well as parenting practices to reduce the current gaps in parental warmth, children's social competence, and socioeconomic status.

Method

Participants

We recruited children between the ages of six and nine years old and their parents from a rural town in southern Washington to participate in our study. The sample included 39 children (16 girls, 22 boys, 1 preferred not to answer; M age = 7.44 years, SD = 1.19 years) and 31 parents (26 women, 5 men). Parents reported being less than 20 years old (2.6%), between 20 and 29 years old (7.7%), between 30 and 39 years old (38.5%), between 40 and 49 years old (48.7%), and between 50 and 59 years old (2.6%). The children in our sample identified as 61.5% White (n = 24), 15.4% Hispanic or Latino (n = 6), 12.8% mixed race (n = 5), and 7.7% did not report (n = 3).

In addition to age, gender, and ethnicity, we asked parent participants to answer questions about their marital status and highest degree or level of school completed. Parents identified marital status as single (n = 0), married or domestic partnership (n = 25), widowed (n = 0), divorced or separated (n = 5), and other (n = 1). To gather information about socioeconomic status, we used education level as a proxy (American Psychological Association, 2018). Parents identified their highest level of school completed, ranging from some high school, no diploma (n = 3), high school graduate or the equivalent (e.g., GED; n = 3), some college, no degree (n = 1), associate's degree (n = 2), bachelor's degree (n = 8), master's degree (n = 9), professional degree (n = 1), to doctorate degree (n = 4).

Materials

Social competence. The social competence scale for parents and children was a modified version of the Self-Perception Profile (Harter, 2012). Our scale for parents' perceptions of children's social competence showed high internal reliability ($\alpha = .79$). Parents were asked to rate six statements regarding their child's social competence, such as "my child knows how to make their classmates like them," with response options of *strongly agree* (5), *somewhat agree* (4), *neither agree nor disagree* (3), *somewhat disagree* (2) to *strongly disagree* (1). Children were asked to rate six similar statements about their social competence, with the same response options ($\alpha = .69$).

Behavior. We included the behavior scale as distractor items for the parents to combat demand characteristics. Additionally, we included the behavior scale to help the children understand response options prior to responding to statements about social competence. The behavior scale for parents and children was a modified version of the Self-Perception Profile (Harter, 2012). Our scale for parents' perceptions of children's behavior showed high internal reliability ($\alpha = .70$). Parents were asked to rate six statements regarding the way their children behave, such as "my child usually acts the way he or she is supposed to," with response options of *strongly agree* (5), *somewhat agree* (4), *neither agree nor disagree* (3), *somewhat disagree* (2) to *strongly disagree* (1). Children were asked to rate six similar statements about their own behavior, with the same response options ($\alpha = .56$).

Perceived parental warmth. The perceived parental warmth scale was a modified version of the Memories of Parents questionnaire (EMBU), which is an assessment of perceived parenting styles (Muris et al., 2003). Our scale for children's

perceptions of parental warmth showed high internal reliability ($\alpha = .88$). We based our surveys for both children and parents on this scale. Children were asked to report on the parent who filled out the parent survey. Children were asked to rate ten statements regarding how they perceived their parent's support and care for them, such as "my parent says nice things about me," with response options of *never* (1), *rarely* (2), *sometimes* (3), *most of the time* (4), to *always* (5). Parents were asked to rate nine statements about how they perceive their warmth for their child, such as "I show my child that I love them," with response options of *strongly disagree* (1), *somewhat disagree* (2), *neither agree nor disagree* (3), *somewhat agree* (4) to *strongly agree* (5) and *never* (1), *rarely* (2), *sometimes* (3), *most of the time* (4), to *always* (5). Additionally, parents were also asked nine questions about how often they show their children support and care, such as "how often do you praise your child," with response options of *not very often* (1), *once or twice a month* (2), *once every week* (3), *once every day* (4), and *multiple times a day* (5). To create a composite measure of parental warmth, we correlated the two measures of parental warmth in terms of time and communication, which were strongly correlated, so we combined them together to created one overarching measure of parental warmth ($r(37) = .49$, $p = .002$). Our composite scale for parents' perceptions of parental warmth showed high internal reliability ($\alpha = .71$).

Procedure

We recruited participants by sending letters to local after school programs, the Children's Home Society, Parent Teacher Associations, and faculty at Whitman College. Additionally, we used snowball sampling to recruit participants through

friends and family of the first participants. We recruited six- to nine-year-old children

because, according to Piaget (1977), children at this age are in the beginning of the

concrete operational stage of cognitive development. At this stage of life, children's

egocentrism begins to decline and the ability to engage in perspective-taking increases

(Piaget, 1977). Additionally, we chose this age group because parents are more likely

to demonstrate greater warmth towards younger, more dependent children compared to

older, more independent children (Bradley et al., 2001). Within psychology, there is a

problematic tendency to emphasize internal validity over external validity due to an

underrepresentation of minority groups (Sue, 1999). To mitigate this problem in our

study, we made conscious efforts to recruit participants from several diverse groups.

After receiving parental consent and child assent, a researcher from our team

monitored and assisted child participants through the survey. We asked parents to

complete their surveys on their own time. However, if a parent expressed interest in

being present at the time of their child's survey, we made accommodations so that both

child and parent could be within eyesight. Parents identified their child's name on their

questionnaire to ensure that child-parent pairs were accurately matched, but all

information was kept confidential. Once the parent and child questionnaires were

matched up, we assigned each an ID number and kept the names in a separate file from

the data to ensure confidentiality (for example, a mother with an ID of 1 had a child

with an ID of 101).

Once participants were recruited, we sent out an electronic summary of the

study, informed consent forms, and questionnaires to the parents. Parents filled out

online questionnaires on their own time and the researchers filled out questionnaires

with the children either at the after-school program, at Whitman College, or a public space in town. If the parents were present during their child's interview, we gave parents the option to sit in a separate room with a window to view their child while they filled out the questionnaire with the researchers. Versions of these forms and questionnaires were also available in Spanish.

All participants were fully debriefed about the purpose of the research after the study. Participants were thanked for their time and children were offered a toy or trinket from a toy box as compensation. Parents did not receive compensation for participating.

Results

The primary goal of the present study was to examine the relationship between parents' and children's perceived parental warmth and children's social competence, as well as the potential effects of SES.

Overall, the average reported parental perception of parental warmth was very high ($M = 4.37$, $SD = .45$ on a scale of 1 to 5). Children also reported on their perceptions of their parents' warmth. Overall, children perceived their parents to have relatively high levels of warmth as well ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.60$ on a scale of 1 to 5).

To examine whether parents' and children's perceptions of parental warmth differed from one another, we ran a paired samples t-test. Consistent with our hypothesis, parents perceived themselves to be significantly warmer than their children perceived them to be, $t(38) = 3.14$, $p = .003$. However, there was not a significant correlation between children's perceptions of parental warmth and their parents' perceptions of their warmth (Table 1).

Next, we examined both parents' and children's perceptions of children's social competence skills. Overall, both parents and children thought that the children had relatively high social competence skills ($M = 4.10$ and 3.65; $SD = 0.86$ and 1.07; respectively). To examine whether parents' and children's perceptions of children's social competence differed from one another, we ran a paired samples t-test. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference. Parents perceived their children to be significantly more competent that the children perceived themselves to be, $t(38) = 2.20$, $p = .03$. However, there was no significant correlation between children's and parents' perceptions of social competence (Table 1).

As a first step in investigating the relationship between parental warmth and social competence, we ran a series of correlations. As can be seen in Table 1, the relationships between parental warmth and social competence varied depending on whether the parents or children are the reporters. In thinking about which variables to utilize to test our hypotheses, we focused on children's perceptions of parental warmth because previous research has demonstrated that children's perceptions are more strongly related to child outcomes than parents' self-reports of their own warmth (Fine, Voydahoff, & Donnelly, 1993). Furthermore, we focused on the parents' perceptions of social competence because we thought parents had a better comprehensive understanding of the questions. Consistent with our hypothesis, children's perceptions of parental warmth were positively related to parents' perceptions of children's social competence (Table 1).

To examine the role of SES, we first divided participants into relatively lower, medium, and higher socioeconomic groups based on parental education level. Our lower SES group consisted of parents who had up to an associate's degree ($n = 8$), our medium SES group consisted of parents who had a bachelor's degree ($n = 12$), and our higher SES group consisted of parents who had a master's degree or above ($n = 19$). Because of concerns regarding our small n values, unequal groups by a two to one ratio, and unequal variances, we ran a Kruskal-Wallis test instead of a one-way ANOVA. The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was not a statistically significant difference in children's perceptions of parental warmth scores between the different SES groups, $\chi^2(2, 37) = 2.43$, $p = .30$, with a mean rank perception of parental warmth score of 17.94 for lower SES, 24.25 for medium SES, and 18.18 for higher SES.

In order to test our hypothesis that SES is related to parents' reports of children's social competence, we ran another Kruskal-Wallis test. The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was not a statistically significant difference in parents' perceptions of children's social competence scores between the different SES groups, $\chi^2(2, 37) = 2.46$, $p = 0.29$, with a mean rank perception of children's social competence score of 14.88 for lower SES, 22.92 for medium SES, and 20.32 for higher SES.

We hypothesized that parental warmth would moderate the relationship between SES and children's social competence. To examine this hypothesis, we ran a linear regression model predicting parents' perceptions of their children's social competence. After centering children's perceptions of their parents' warmth, creating an SES dummy code variable (where 0 = associate's degree or lower, and 1 = bachelor's or higher), and computing the parental warmth-SES interaction term (Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991), the two predictors (SES and parental warmth) and the interaction variable were entered into the model. The model explained 28% of the variation in social competence, $R^2 = 0.28$, $F(3, 36) = 4.45$, $p = .009$. Results indicated that parental warmth was positively associated with social competence ($\beta = .47$, $p = .003$) and SES was not associated with social competence ($\beta = .11$, $p = .47$). The interaction between parental warmth and SES was not significant ($\beta = .26$, $p = .18$).

Discussion

Parents have lasting impacts on their children's development by creating some of the closest relationships in an individual's life. In line with previous literature, our results reflect the fact that the microsystem in an individual's life, such as family, may have a greater impact on children's development compared to contextual factors, such as SES (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Parenting styles, such as demonstration of parental warmth, have also been shown to greatly impact a child's development (Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). While there is a growing body of literature that examines the effects of parenting styles on children's development, few studies have examined the effect of parental warmth on children's social competence, specifically during early childhood. Considering that parents play a crucial role in their children's lives and may be particularly influential in transferring social skills, it is imperative to study the link between parent-child relationships and children's social competence (Bornstein & Zlotnik, 2008; Zhou et al., 2002). The goal of the present study was to add to previous literature on parent-child relationships by examining the correlations between perceived parental warmth, children's social competence, and SES.

We hypothesized that parental warmth would be related to children's social competence. This hypothesis was supported, meaning that parents who viewed their children as having higher levels of social competence tended to have children who perceived their parents to have higher amounts of warmth. This finding mirrors previous research by Eiden and colleagues (2009), who found significant positive correlations between parental warmth and children's social competence. Our findings add to prior research and suggest that parental warmth has a positive influence on

childhood outcomes (Bornstein & Zlotnik, 2008; Zhou et al., 2002). Our study involved self-reports from both parents and children, which was one of the strengths of our methodology. Since we had separate reporters for both perceptions of parental warmth and children's social competence, we decided to choose one perspective for each to focus on. We chose to focus on children's perceptions of parental warmth instead of parents' perceptions of their own warmth in order to avoid self-serving biases that may have influenced parents' responses. Parents may be more likely to overestimate levels of warmth, and the ways in which children perceive the reality of their parents' demonstrated warmth is more likely to be related to their social and behavioral outcomes (De Los Reyes, Ohannessian, & Laird, 2016; Fine, Voydahoff, & Donnelly, 1993). Interestingly, we found a significant correlation between parents' perceptions of their own warmth and children's perceptions of their own social competence. Not only was the correlation between children's perceptions of parental warmth and parents' perceptions of children's social competence significant at an alpha level of $p < .01$ as compared to an alpha level of $p < .05$, but also the parents' perceptions of children's social competence were less likely to be biased, and children's perceptions of parental warmth were more likely to be accurate based on children's understandings of the response items. For these reasons, we chose to focus on these two factors specifically.

Moving to our second hypothesis, we predicted that parents' perceptions of their warmth would be greater than their children's perceptions. This hypothesis was supported, meaning that parents perceived their warmth to be greater than their children perceived their parents' warmth. This finding aligns with previous research,

suggesting that parents and children's perspectives of their family dynamics may be vastly different throughout significant developmental changes, such as during children's adaptation to social norms and behaviors (De Los Reyes, Ohannessian, & Laird, 2016). One way that our study enhances previous research is that we collected reports from both parents' and child's perspectives. Our findings that parents' perceptions differed from children's perceptions suggest that more research needs to be done considering how, why, and during what developmental stages these discrepancies occur.

We further hypothesized that SES would be related to children's levels of social competence. This hypothesis was not supported, meaning that we found no correlation between SES and children's levels of social competence. We divided participants into lower, medium, and higher SES groups, but the children in these groups did not have statistically different levels of social competence. The first potential source of this finding is that we exclusively used education level as a proxy for SES. Another potential explanation for this finding is that our sample was fairly small, and most parents had a bachelor's degree or higher. It should also be noted that most of the parents in the lower SES group had enrolled their children in rigorous after school programs, which may indicate higher levels of parental investment. This dedication to enhancing their children's development and education may not be representative of the general population.

Finally, we hypothesized that parental warmth would moderate the relationship between SES and children's social competence. Due to a lack of support for our previous hypothesis regarding a relationship between SES and children's social

competence, the moderation of parental warmth could not be assessed. Previous literature has demonstrated that parental warmth buffers the negative impacts of lower SES on several childhood outcomes (Morris et al., 2017; Yates et al., 2003). Although we did not find support for our final hypothesis, future studies should explore the potential moderating effects of parental warmth on the relationship between SES and children's social competence with larger and more diverse samples.

Previous studies have looked at the relationship between children's social competence and parental warmth in preschool aged children (Pettit et al., 1988). Our study adds to the previous literature by including a sample of children that are at an age when perspective taking is more developed (Piaget, 1977). By focusing on children ages six to nine, we were able to assess children's perceptions of their social competence and their perceptions of their parent's warmth during a developmental stage when children are more likely to think outside of themselves, which is important in developing social skills. Additionally, children who are able to take on different perspectives may have a greater understanding of how to build reciprocal relationships. Taking on other people's points of view is central to social competence, so this age group served as a prime subject pool for our study (Zhou et al., 2002).

Potential limitations should be considered when evaluating our study. First, we only looked at correlational relationships between variables. Therefore, we cannot say that parental warmth causes children to be more socially competent, or vice versa. For example, one could speculate that parents may be more likely to demonstrate warmth towards their children who are easier to get along with compared to children that are difficult and unresponsive. Future research needs to assess the directionality of the

relationship between parental warmth and children's social competence.

It is also important to consider that our sample is relatively small and homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, gender, and relationship between participants. For example, the majority of our participants identified as white, which is problematic when trying to generalize research to larger populations (Sue, 1999). Additionally, the majority of the parent participants in our study were mothers, but future studies could assess gender differences in warmth. Finally, all of the parents who participated in our study were the biological parents of the children participating, so future research should look at differences between biological and non-biological caretakers. Future research should strive for a more diverse sample that furthers understanding of the relationship between parental warmth and children's social competence.

While our study has several limitations, there are also multiple strengths. Through self-report surveys, we were able to assess parental warmth and children's social competence from both parents' and children's perspectives, providing unique comparisons between the two reporters. The fact that there were significant differences between parents' and children's perceptions gives reason for future research to examine these relationships more closely. A longitudinal study regarding perceptions of parental warmth and children's social competence would allow researchers to more accurately assess why and at what age these discrepancies in perceptions may occur. Another strength of our study was meeting with each participant in person and having the researchers go through the surveys with the children, which allowed us to make sure that our participants understood what we were asking of them so that they could respond to statements accurately. This differs from anonymous online surveys in which

participants and researchers do not have personal interactions or controlled environments.

Future research should also consider exploring the influence of parental warmth on childhood outcomes cross-culturally. Past research has found that different cultures may place emphasis on the importance of different parenting styles. For example, authoritarian parenting, typically lower in warmth, in a collectivist culture may influence childhood outcomes differently than authoritarian parenting in an individualistic culture (Rudy & Grusec, 2001). Future research should go beyond investigating populations of Western cultures to identify different roles that systems within the psychosocial ecological perspectives model play in an individual's life in different cultures (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Finally, there may be effects of birth order and the number of children in a family. Parents with one child may have different resources and availability compared to parents of larger families (Downey, 1995). These differences in parents' available time as well as physical and emotional resources are important factors to consider. Familial resources may also differ in families of children with disabilities or special needs. It may be that parents of children with special needs direct more warmth and attention to these children, potentially limiting a parent's ability to show similar amounts of warmth towards other children in their family (Spratt, Saylor, & Macias, 2007). In future studies, researchers should consider these factors as they may influence childhood outcomes.

Overall, our results suggest that the effects of parental warmth on children's social competence are complex, especially when considering SES. The impact of

parent-child relationships on children's social competence remains a crucial topic of inquiry. Future research should strive to identify potential moderators of these relationships in order to find intervention strategies for families with fewer resources. Our study builds upon research highlighting the importance of parental warmth for children's social development. Our findings could also contribute to intervention strategies that encourage parents and caretakers to use warmer methods of parenting practices to foster both strong parent-child relationships and future peer relationships.

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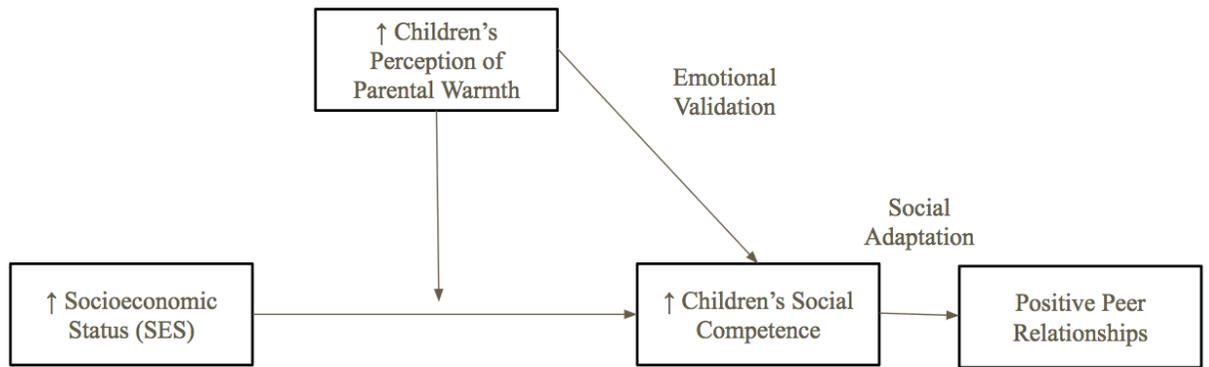*73*, 893–915.

Tables and Figures

Figure 1

Figure 1. Hypothesized Moderation Model. This figure shows the predicted correlation between SES and children's social competence, which may be moderated by parental warmth.
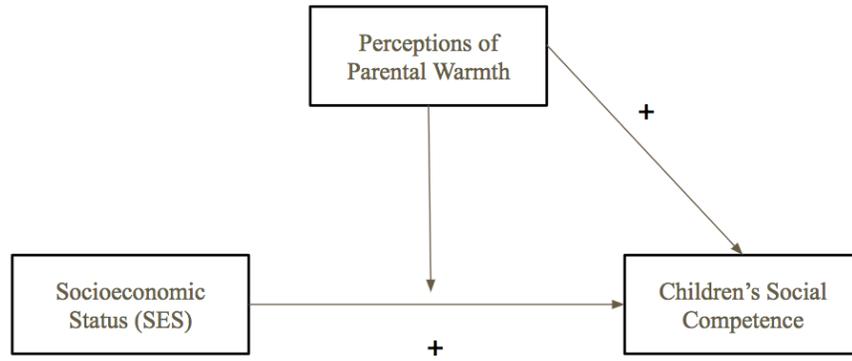
Figure 2

Figure 2. Moderation Model. This figure shows the positive correlation between SES and children's social competence, which is moderated by perceptions of parental warmth.

Table 1

Table 1
Correlations Between Parents' and Children's Perceptions of Parental Warmth and Children's Social Competence

Measure	1	2	3	4
1. Parents' perceptions of parental warmth	–			
2. Children's perceptions of parental warmth	.16	–		
3. Parents' perceptions of children's social competence	.19	.48**	–	
4. Children's perceptions of children's social competence	.37*	.23	.12	–

*p < .05. **p < .01

Appendix A

Child Survey

Child Assent Form

We are doing a study to learn about family relationships. We are asking you to help because we want to learn more about how parents or other people who take care of you spend time with you.

If you agree to be in our study, we are going to ask you some questions about your family relationships. For example, we will ask you if your parent or caretaker cheers you up when you are sad. We will also ask questions about how you play with your friends.

You can ask questions about this study at any time. If you decide at any time not to finish, you can ask us to stop.

The questions we will ask are only about what you think. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test.

If you write your name, it means that you have read this and that you want to be in the study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't write your name. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don't write your name or if you change your mind later.

Please write your name and today's date below if you would like to be in the study.

Your name _____

Today's date (mm/dd/yyyy) _____

1. How old are you?
   ○ 6

- o 7
- o 8
- o 9

2. What is your ethnicity?
- o White
- o Hispanic or Latino
- o Black or African American
- o American Indian or Alaska Native
- o Asian/Pacific Islander
- o Mixed race
- o Another group not listed here:_____

3. With which gender do you most identify?
- o Male
- o Female
- o Another group not listed here:
- o Prefer not to answer

4. How many people live in your house (not including yourself)?

_____

5. Who will you be answering questions about?
- o Mother
- o Father
- o Grandmother
- o Grandfather
- o Aunt
- o Uncle
- o Step-mother
- o Step-father
- o Other (Please say who) _____

6. I usually like the way I behave.

- o Strongly agree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Strongly disagree

7. I usually do not do the right thing.

- o Strongly agree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Neither agree nor disagree

- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. I usually act the way I am supposed to.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

9. I usually get in trouble because of the things I do.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

10. I hardly ever do things I know I shouldn't do.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

11. I find it hard to behave myself.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

12. I find it hard to make friends.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

13. I know how to make my classmates like me.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

14. I do not have the social skills to make friends.

- o Strongly agree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Strongly disagree

15. I understand how to get my peers to accept me.

- o Strongly agree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Strongly disagree

16. I wish I knew how to make more friends.

- o Strongly agree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Strongly disagree

17. I do not know how to become more popular.

- o Strongly agree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Strongly disagree

18. When I am unhappy, my parent makes me feel better and cheers me up.

- o Never
- o Rarely
- o Sometimes
- o Most of the time
- o Always

19. My parent likes me just the way I am.

- o Never
- o Rarely
- o Sometimes
- o Most of the time
- o Always

20. My parent is interested in my activities.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- Always

21. My parent listens to me and considers my opinion.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- Always

22. My parent wants to spend time with me.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- Always

23. My parent shows that they love me.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- Always

24. My parent and I like each other.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- Always

25. When I have done something wrong, I can fix the problem with my parent.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- Always

26. My parent says nice things about me.
- Never

- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- Always

27. My parent helps me when I have to do something difficult.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- Always

Debrief: The reason you answered these questions!

We asked you to answer these questions because we are interested in learning more about how parents and kids work together, and how that leads to happiness in relationships with family and friends.

Thank you for your helping us today. If you have any questions, please ask the person who helped you take the survey (Nikki, Molly, or Kaileah.)
Thank you again for participating in our study!

Appendix B

Parent Survey

Informed Consent Statement

This research is being conducted as part of Nikki Antenucci, Molly Evered, and Kaileah Akker's senior psychology thesis. This research is overseen by psychology professor Erin Pahlke.

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of parent-child relationships. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked questions through an online survey about parenting strategies, time spent with your child, interactions with your child, and your child's social competence. If you agree to let your child participate, your child(ren) will answer questions on a separate online survey. Before the study begins, if you would like to see the questions that your child will be asked, please notify the researchers and they will provide you with a copy to review.

TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME OF PARTICIPATION: The parent component of this study takes about 5 minutes to complete. The child component of this study takes between 5 and 10 minutes to complete.

DATA: All of the information that you provide will be kept completely confidential. You and your child(ren) will be assigned ID numbers and these numbers will be kept to match you and your child(ren) based on your ID numbers (for example, a mother with an ID of 1 will have a child with an ID of 1001). Your name and your child's name will be kept separately from the research material. We are interested in people's responses at the group level (e.g., average survey responses), and therefore no collected information will be identified with you.

RISKS & BENEFITS:
RISKS: The risks involved in participating in this study are not believed to be greater than those associated with everyday activities. However, it is possible that some

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questions might make you feel uncomfortable. You and your child(ren) do not need to answer any questions that you do not want to and either of you can end the session at any time, for any reason, without penalty.

BENEFITS: Your child will receive a small toy of their choice from a basket of toys. Your participation benefits the researchers' education.
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can stop participating at any time. You are free to refuse to be in the study, and refusal will not influence your current or future relationships with Whitman College.

If you have any questions about the research, feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form or feel that your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Nikki Antenucci (antenunc@whitman.edu, 720-891-6631), Molly Evered (everedme@whitman.edu, 503-970-7991), Kaileah Akker (akkerkn@whitman.edu, 509-440-9790), or our faculty sponsor Professor Erin Pahlke (pahlke@whitman.edu, 202-907-6247). For questions concerning research ethics, please contact the chair of the Whitman College Institutional Review Board, Dr. Matthew Prull, at irb@whitman.edu.
IF YOU CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY AND YOU CONSENT TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY, PLEASE ENTER YOUR NAME, YOUR CHILD'S NAME, AND TODAY'S DATE BELOW.

Your name _____

Your child's name _____

Today's date (mm/dd/yyyy) _____

1. What is your ethnicity?
   o   White
   o   Hispanic or Latino
   o   Black or African American
   o   American Indian or Alaska Native
   o   Asian/ Pacific Islander

o Mixed race
o Another group not listed here:

_____

o Prefer not to answer

2. With which gender do you most identify?
o Male
o Female
o Another group not listed here:

_____

o Prefer not to answer

3. What is your marital status?

o Single
o Married or domestic partnership
o Widowed
o Divorced or separated
o Other _____
o Prefer not to answer

4. How old are you?

o 19 years old or younger
o 20-29 years old
o 30-39 years old
o 40-49 years old
o 50-59 years old
o 60-69 years old
o 70 years old or older

5. What is the birthday of the child you are answering these questions about? (mm/dd/yyyy)

_____

6. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? (If currently enrolled, highest degree received.)
o Some high school, no diploma
o High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
o Some college credit, no degree
o Trade/technical/vocational training
o Associate degree
o Bachelor's degree
o Master's degree
o Professional degree
o Doctorate degree

7. Employment Status: Are you currently…?

- o Employed for wages
- o Self-employed
- o Out of work but not currently looking for work
- o A homemaker
- o A student
- o Military
- o Retired
- o Unable to work

8. What is your relationship to the child you are answering this survey for?
- o Mother
- o Father
- o Aunt or uncle
- o Grandparent
- o Step-parent
- o Other: _____

9. Please select the option you most agree with.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I usually like the way my child behaves.	o	o	o	o	o
When my child is unhappy, I make them feel better and cheer them up.	o	o	o	o	o
My child finds it hard to make friends.	o	o	o	o	o
My child usually acts the way they are supposed to.	o	o	o	o	o
My child usually does not do the right thing.	o	o	o	o	o

My child doesn't have the social skills to make friends.	○	○	○	○	○

10. Please select the option you most agree with.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
My child usually gets in trouble because of the things they do.	○	○	○	○	○
I do not like my child just the way they are.	○	○	○	○	○
My child hardly ever does things they know they shouldn't do.	○	○	○	○	○
My child finds it hard to behave themselves.	○	○	○	○	○
I am interested in my child's activities.	○	○	○	○	○

11. Please select the option you most agree with.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I do not listen to my child or take their thoughts into account.	○	○	○	○	○

My child does not know how to become popular.	o	o	o	o	o
My child knows how to make their classmates like them.	o	o	o	o	o
I want to spend time with my child.	o	o	o	o	o
My child wishes they knew how to make more friends.	o	o	o	o	o

12. Please select the option you most agree with.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
My child and I like each other.	o	o	o	o	o
I show my child that I love them.	o	o	o	o	o
My child understands how to get peers to accept them.	o	o	o	o	o
When my child has done something wrong, I can fix the problem with them.	o	o	o	o	o

I say nice things about my child.	o	o	o	o	o
I do not help my child when they have to do something difficult.	o	o	o	o	o

13. Please select the option you most agree with.

	Not very often	Once or twice a month	Once every week	Once every day	Multiple times a day
How often do you tell your child that you love him or her?	o	o	o	o	o
How often do you praise your child?	o	o	o	o	o
How often do you tell your child that you appreciate what he or she did?	o	o	o	o	o
How often do you tell your child that you are proud of him or her?	o	o	o	o	o
How often do you have private talks with your child?	o	o	o	o	o

14. Please select the option you most agree with.

	Not very often	Once or twice a month	Once every week	Once every day	Multiple times a day
How often do you play or work on a project with your child?	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you hug your child?	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you read to your child?	○	○	○	○	○
How often do you eat a meal with your child?	○	○	○	○	○

If you have more than one child, please ask for another copy of this survey for your other child(ren).

Debrief

The study you have just completed was designed to investigate parental warmth and children's social competence. Previous research has shown that parental warmth positively impacts children's development. We are particularly interested in what aspects of parental warmth, whether physical, emotional, or time spent with child, most impact children's social skills.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the questionnaire with other parents or children. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Nikki Antenucci (antenunc@whitman.edu, 720-891-6631), Molly Evered (everedme@whitman.edu, 503-970-7991), Kaileah Akker (akkerkn@whitman.edu, 509-440-9790), or our faculty sponsor Professor Erin Pahlke

(pahlke@whitman.edu, 509-527-5750). If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact one of the researchers in May, 2018.

There are resources available related to families, parenting, and mental health in Walla Walla. Please visit Early Learning Coalition (ELC) or view the programs on the Walla Walla Public Schools website for a list of parenting resources and mental health services. You can visit the websites at http://earlylearningwallawalla.org/ and http://www.wwps.org/programs, or contact Deborah Peters (509.527.4453, Deborah.Peters@wwcc.edu) at ELC or Walla Walla Helpline ((509) 529-3377) for more information.

Thank you again for participating in our study!