

## **Predicting the Effect of Parent and Peer Attachment towards Global Self-Worth among Adolescents**

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*Over the years, the term global self-worth, which discusses on the adolescent's overall evaluation on general happiness and satisfaction, becomes important. Recent literature suggests that both the parent's and peer's attachments to the adolescent may be a key determinant and a positive relationship in their global self-worth. The current study aimed to examine the importance of perceived attachment in relation to the adolescent's global self-worth. A self-report survey was administered to a total of 100 adolescents in a public middle school. The questionnaires used in the survey are from the Revised Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA-R; Gullone & Robinson, 2005) and Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA; Harter, 2012). The validity and reliability of both questionnaires were verified. The Standard Multiple Regression analysis was conducted to determine the best predictor for the global self-worth. The results of the analysis allow us to answer the research question of the study, which indicate that the parent's attachment makes a significant contribution to the prediction of an adolescent's global self-worth ( $\beta = .295, p > 0.01, p < 0.05$ ). Surprisingly, the finding revealed that there is no significant influence of peer's attachment on the adolescent's global self-worth. The current study also noted that the role of the parent's attachment is important in predicting the global self-worth of an adolescent, which shows to be inconsistent with other studies. The conclusions and implications in the impact of the parent's and peer's attachment on the adolescent's self-worth were discussed.*

**Keywords:** adolescent development, parent and peer attachment, global self-worth.  
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### **Introduction**

Over the years, global self-worth becomes extremely important for an adolescent. Global self-worth or self-esteem is the evaluation of how much a person likes oneself, is happy with the way one is leading one's life, and is generally happy with the way they are (Harter, 2012). Thus, it constitutes a general perception of one's self, which is similar to the Rosenberg's (1979) notion of self-esteem. These two categories of self-evaluations can be coexisting. However, the term global self-worth is more appropriate and specific for the adolescent ages from 13 to 18 (Harter, 2012).

Although the terms "self-concept" and "self-esteem" are often used interchangeably, they represent a different but related constructs. Self-concept refers to a student's perception of competence in academic and nonacademic (such as social, behavioural, and athletic) domains and is best represented by a profile of self-perceptions across domains (Manning, Bear, & Minke, 2006). Self-esteem or global self-worth is a person's overall evaluation of him or herself, which includes feelings of general happiness and satisfaction (Harter, 1999).

Some of the researchers suggested that the student's ability to go above and beyond their personal constraints relate to their self-concept, self-esteem or self-worth, self-determination and motivation (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002), the teachers' expectation (Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2001), parent's attachment (Moula, 2010), peer's relationship (Adeyemo & Torubeli, 2008) or some other unknown factors. Therefore, one of the most persistent confrontations among parents and teachers are uneven academic achievement and self-

discipline among adolescents. Parents, teachers and administrators are commonly concerned about the adolescents' academic achievement, where they complained on the adolescents' lack of motivation to learn and blaming the students' for their behavioural problems.

In fact, there are many factors that contribute to the different academic achievements and behavioural problems of the adolescents. However, the significance is often exaggerated to the extent that a low self-esteem is viewed as the cause of all evil and a high self-esteem as the cause of all good (Manning, Bear, & Minke, 2006). In other word, promoting a high global self-worth is important because it is related to the academic competence, social competence, and life success.

According to Harter (1999), young children or primary school students tend to have less self-concept due to overestimating their competence and overly positive self-perceptions that are the characteristics of a childhood. However, as students that are in transit to high school, their self-concept increase as they have more freedom to participate in activities in which they are competent in. At the same time, they have a better understanding in how others view their skills and can better distinguish between their efforts and abilities. Therefore, the increasing perspective-taking abilities enables them to gain more support from others by having more socially acceptable ways, especially when the adolescents might spend more time with their peers than their parents.

Hence, adolescence is often marked by the decline in the academic performance due to the changes in the developmental processes, family relationships, teacher-student relationships, peers' relationships, and the transition from primary to secondary school (Hill & Tyson, 2009). A lot of research has examined the children's experiences as they move from the primary to secondary school. The transition to a new school setting often is accompanied by a decline in the grades and school activities participations (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Students may also experience a drop in their self-esteem and an increase in their psychological distress (Crosnoe, 2011; Rudolph & Flynn, 2007).

On the other hand, completing high school is one of the most critical developmental tasks faced by adolescents. The consequences of dropping out are most likely to exhibit behavioural problem, including delinquency, criminal, substance abuse, and self-injury or suicide (Wald & Losen, 2007). According to the 2010 Malaysia Millennium development goals report from The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the drop-off in the secondary school enrolment can be linked to other threats such as substance abuse, which poses a risk to some adolescents. Statistics from the National Drug Agency (ADK) showed that 65% of drug users in 2009 had only completed their secondary school education up to the age of 15.

Over time, the issue of the adolescent's internal and external behavioural problems have received attention from the researchers in the developmental psychology field (Cicchetti & Cohen, 1995). It has been found that the internal behavioural problems like anxiety or depression and withdrawal tend to have maladaptive emotional outcomes, such as negative perceptions of self-worth and depression (Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995; Rubin, Chen, McDougall, Bowker, & McKinnon, 1995).

Generally, the assumption for these behavioural problems is that adolescents have a low global self-worth and use aggression as a mean to increase it. Although the global self-worth is not a major predictor or cause of all kinds of behavioural problems, there is still some evidence suggesting that a low self-worth may be one of the risk factors for depression or anxiety in girls, and supported the relationship between self-worth and the use of alcohol and drugs, especially among boys (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003).

Therefore, without proper guidance and skills to cope with the growth to adulthood, an adolescent will increase their risk in unwanted behavioural problems such as out of wedlock pregnancy, drug abuse, unprotected sex, self-injury or suicide, and others. In addition, adolescents with a lack of life-skills also contribute to other social problems, such

as running away from home, dropping out from school, vandalism, bullying in school, and juvenile delinquency. Furthermore, low self-worth will lead to a negative emotional and psychological well-being.

### **Dimension of parent attachment**

Numerous studies have documented that parents' perceptions of students' competence will predict the students' own academic self-concept and school performance (Eccles, 1993). The role of the parents and peers as socializers of achievement belief is the centre of the expectancy-value that predicts the children's self-worth (Bouchey & Harter, 2005). The researchers assumed that the adolescents reflected the appraisals of what their parents and peers think about them, which would predict their own academic and non-academic self-perception and would in turn, predict their overall self-worth (Bouchey & Harter, 2005). However, some researchers posited that parental involvement is the key factor in helping adolescents make the transition to secondary school, which will not only have an effect with the adolescent, but also with the school (Hurd, Sanchez, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2012). The researchers found that the parental involvement in the education system, especially during the period of adolescence is positively correlated with the children's academic progress and also help to reduce negative behaviours. Among the various types of parental involvement, the most important component was communication and close attachment in the parent-child relationship in order to reduce the child's behavioural problems. It was expected that the parent's attachment would have more influence in explaining the behavioural problems in the adolescent (Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 2000).

The association between the attachment quality of parents and the psychosocial adjustment in adolescence has been documented in several empirical studies (Laghi, D'Alessio, Pallini, & Baiocco, 2009; Tambelli, Laghi, Odorisio, & Notari, 2012). It has been established that the positive perceptions of one's self and others in the attachment relationships with the parents are associated with numerous indicators of psychosocial adjustment in adolescence (Laghi, D'Alessio, Pallini, & Baiocco, 2011; Simons, Paternite, & Shore, 2001), such as negatively behavioural problem (Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 2000), low perception of social support (Larose & Boivin, 1998), feelings of loneliness, and psychological distress (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998). Attachment quality has been positively related to the adolescent's self-esteem (Cassidy, 1988; Clark & Symons, 2000; Verschueren, Marcoen, & Schoefs, 1996), feelings of competence (Papini & Roggman, 1992), perceived social support (Blain, Thompson, & Whiffen, 1993; Larose & Boivin, 1998), and a sense of mastery over their worlds (Paterson, Pryor, & Field, 1995).

However, it was argued that the adolescents need peer relationship since the information and support from their parents may no longer be so relevant (Cotterell, 1992), and may not be able to help them to establish their identity by comparing opinions and views with others, especially in the school context (Laghi, Pallini, D'Alession, & Baiocco, 2011). Adolescents increasingly turn to their friendships with their peers for emotional support during stress, which meant that the adolescents no longer rely on their parents' support (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

### **Dimension of peer attachment**

During adolescence, attachment behaviour is also directed towards non-parental (non-caretaking) figures (Goodvin, Meyer, Thompson, & Hayes, 2008), especially peers, who may be considered as important on a situational or temporary basis. Particularly, peers may become the new source of trust. A particularly important aspect of the adolescent's peer attachment is the peer's ability to support and encourage the adolescent's assumption of the growth-promoting challenges (Laghi et al., 2011; Cotterell, 1992).

Researchers have confirmed that the adolescents continue to rely on their parents for emotional support and advice (Byers, Sears, Voyer, Thurlow, Cohen, & Weaver, 2003;

Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst, Guerin, & Parramore, 2003; Nickerson & Nagle, 2005) and that the attachment security with their parents predict an individual's well-being across their lifespan (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996).

Laible et al. (2000) have argued for the hierarchical organisation in which the child's representation of the most salient attachment figure is the most influential and therefore, the most predictive of their developmental outcomes. Parents directly structure and select their children's peer contacts, where they indirectly influence the norms and beliefs of their children about appropriate social behavior and the relationship models based on their own attachment experiences (Carson & Parke, 1996; Laghi, Liga, Baumgartner, & Baiocco, 2012; Whitbeck, Conger, & Kao, 1993; Zimmermann, 2004).

Conclusively, there is a gap in the existing literature concerning the questions of how the parents' and peers' beliefs are linked to the adolescents' own self-worth. Consistent with two dimensions of attachment as mentioned above, the current study aimed to examine the role of the parent's and peer's attachment towards the global self-worth among adolescents. The present study enables the researcher to explore and discuss a more in-depth understanding of adolescents' evaluation of general happiness and satisfaction. It could be hypothesised that a positive effect of the parent's and peer's attachment towards the global self-worth among adolescents.

Based on the fact mentioned above regarding the dimensions of parental and peer's attachments and its effect on the global self-worth among adolescents, the hypotheses were formulated as follows:

H1: There is a positive effect of the parent's attachment towards the global self-worth of adolescents.

H2: There is a positive effect of peer's attachment towards the global self-worth of adolescents.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The research design for this study is a quantitative survey with questionnaires. In the current study, we aimed to predict the roles of the perceived attachment from parents and peers toward the global self-worth. The sample of the study was selected using purposive sampling.

### **Sample and Location**

A self-report survey was administered to 100 adolescents aged 13 to 17 years old from a public middle school, SM Tinggi Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The sample was representative of girls (N = 60) and boys (N = 40) from the same secondary school. The overall survey administration by the researcher takes up to 15 minutes.

### **Instrument**

A set of self-administration questionnaire that consists of three different parts was used in the present study. Part 1 was about the demographic background of the respondents (such as age, gender, race, and parents' occupation). Part 2 is the Revised Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA-R: Gullone & Robinson, 2005), which consists of 28-items for the parent's attachment and 25-items for the peer's attachment with the 3-points Likert scale. Part 3 is the Self-Perception Profile for the Adolescents (SPPA: Harter, 2012).

The content validation for both the Revised Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA-R) and the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA) were verified by two experts from the field of psychology. The reliability test indicated that the instrument of IPPA-R was high with the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.894, while the result of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for instrument SPPA showed a moderate level of reliability of 0.793.

## Analysis

The data were entered using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), window version 21.0. A Standard Multiple Regression was used to answer the research question as mentioned previously.

## Research Finding

A Standard Multiple Regression was conducted to determine the best linear combination of the parent's and peer's attachment for predicting the global self-worth. The hypothesis is tested for the significance level at 0.01 and 0.05 margin of error. The first hypothesis stated that there is a positive effect on the parent's attachment towards the global self-worth among adolescents. The result in Table 1 revealed that 7.8% of the total variances in the global self-worth was explained by the parent's attachment ( $\Delta R^2 = .078$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The results in Table 1 demonstrated that the parent's attachment ( $\beta = .295$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) have significant influences on the global self-worth. Hence, hypothesis 1 is accepted.

The second hypothesis of the current study examined the positive effect of peer's attachment towards the global self-worth among adolescents. The hypothesis posited that there is a positive effect of peer's attachment towards the global self-worth. The results shown in Table 1 illustrated that only 4.5% of the total variance in global self-worth was explained by peer attachment ( $\Delta R^2 = .045$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The result showed that there is no significant influence of peer's attachment on the global self-worth of adolescents ( $\beta = .261$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), hence hypothesis 2 is rejected.

**Table 1:** Regression Analysis Predicting the Roles of Parent's and Peer's Attachment towards Global Self-Worth

Predictor	Global Self-Worth		
	Adjust R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$
Parent attachment	.078	.087	.295*
Peer attachment	.045	.055	.234

Note: Significant levels: \*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.05

## Discussion

This study examined whether the effect of the parent's and peer's attachments perceived by the adolescents will positively influence their global self-worth. The result supported hypothesis 1 that the adolescents' global self-worth is significantly influenced by their parent's attachment. Consistent with the previous studies, the results of the current study suggested that the parent's attachment contributes significantly in predicting the global self-worth, in which adolescents who have a higher parental attachment will tend to pose a higher global self-worth (Liu, 2008). Additionally, parent's attachment was proven to be powerful in predicting the child's problem solving, social competence, and overall interpersonal cognition in peers' interaction (Zimmermann, 2004).

Hence, we can suggest that the influences of the parent's attachment are important for the adolescents in terms of their general feelings of happiness and satisfaction no matter they are girls or boys. This statement is also supported by Kenny and Gallagher (2002), which reported that the parent's attachment was positively and significantly associated with the adolescents' self-esteem, social and scholastic competence. Past research has indicated that the adolescents with secure relations with their parents will not only have fewer

depression symptoms and negative social expectations (Simons, Simons & Wallace, 2004; Hair, Garrett, Kinukawa, Lippman, & Michelson, 2005; Allen et al., 2002), but will also perceive positive perceptions of self-worth and self-competency (Liu, 2008).

Surprisingly, the finding revealed that there is no significant influence of the peer's attachment on the adolescent's global self-worth. This suggests that although the influence of peers increases during adolescence, the impact of the parent's attachment is not declined, which the adolescents' perception of their parent's support is even more important to their self-worth (Manning, 2007). This is because the parent's attachment is particularly prominent with the adolescents' friendship-support and self-worth, in both boys and girls (Liu, 2008). There is also some evidence that indicated the parental attachment is even more important to the self-worth development and the development of peer's relations of adolescents (Dekovis & Meeus, 1997). They also suggested that in the traditional families or Asian families, the parents play a role as the socialising agent for the adolescents' entrance to society. Based on the findings in the current study, we can conclude that the parent's attachment is more influential in relation to the adolescents' global self-worth.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, our findings indicated that the parental attachment seems to have a more influence on the global self-worth among Malaysian adolescents, as compared to the peer's attachment. For adolescents, parents are important for their developmental consequences, however, the influence of their peers should not be ignored. There is also an extended attachment network, such as the teacher's support and the feeling of belonging either at school or home, which are also powerful in the prediction of adolescents' global self-worth, besides the parent's and peer's attachment (Goodenow, 1993; Mc Kay, 2007; Anne & Marilyn, 2011; Narger, 2014). Thus, the inclusion of the teacher's support and the sense of belonging at school will be necessary for future studies. Since this study only adopted self-report measures, it was arguably limited in its acquisition of deep information about the interactions in the relationship. It is also difficult to accurately reflect the actual qualities of the parents' and peers' attachment. Observational and parent-report measures may be helpful in assessing and clarifying the process of attachment in future research.

In spite of the possible limitations that might occur in the present study, this current study did highlight some important factors that might be helpful in the prediction of adolescents' global self-worth, especially among Malaysian adolescents. Apart from that, the current study may provide some supportive empirical evidence to reduce the previous research gaps, which could have important implications for either the academic field or the public awareness of the adolescents' development in Malaysia.

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