

Differentiating the Dimensions of Social Competence across Childhood

Study Aims:

- To examine a developmental process model whereby mothers' and fathers' sensitivity toward their children shapes the quality of children's friendships via children's social skills
- The first of a series of studies aimed at differentiating social competence dimensions, such as social skills and friendship interactions

Hypotheses:

- Both maternal and paternal sensitivity will be positively associated with cooperation, assertiveness, and self-control.
- Cooperation, assertiveness, and self-control will be positively associated with positive friendship quality and negatively associated with negative friendship quality.
- There will be indirect effects from maternal and paternal sensitivity to positive and negative friendship quality via cooperation, assertiveness, and self-control.

Study Design:

- Secondary data analysis
- 982 children and their families
- Longitudinal: 3rd, 5th, and 6th grades
- Naturalistic observations of parental sensitivity and friendship interactions
- Teacher, mother, and father report of social skills were used to create latent variables

Results:

- A series of path analysis models were conducted to examine the associations between parents' sensitivity and children's friendship quality through children's social skills utilizing Mplus (Version 7; Muthen & Muthen, 2012). Three separate models were run, each with a different social skill as mediator (see figures above).
- Similar effects were found in each of the models, such that maternal and paternal sensitivity were positively associated with social skills and social skills were associated with friendship interactions, fully supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2.
- There were significant indirect effects from maternal and paternal sensitivity to positive and negative friendship interactions via cooperation and self-control, but the indirect effects were not significant for assertion. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported.

