

SOCIAL FUNCTIONING OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS:
ARE THEY RELATED?

by

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This study examined whether parents' social support was related to their children's peer acceptance and likability. The moderating role of the parent's and the child's gender was also examined. Father (N = 146-150) and mother (N = 201) reports of social support and peer reports of peer acceptance were obtained from 107 boys and 96 girls (7.92-16.76 years, M = 11.77). Aspects of fathers' and mothers' social support were observed to be differentially correlated with their children's friendships and likability. While fathers' social support was moderately correlated with their children's friendships, mothers' social support was not. The implications of these findings for the role of fathers in children's social functioning are discussed.

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Preface

I would like to thank Robert Noll for his continuous efforts to guide and help me during the research process. He has not only refined this project, but also my understanding of the world as framed by psychology. I would also like to thank the members of my thesis committee: William Bukowski, Craig Peebles, and Jennifer Waller. Their recommendations, commitment, patience, and enthusiasm were demonstrative of their true gifts as educators.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Empirical evidence shows that peer relationships are important for the psychological development of children (Ladd, 2005). Notably, a number of studies have consistently demonstrated that social functioning with peers tends to be stable when information about a child's social functioning is obtained from peers; social functioning with peers is associated with concurrent functioning in emotional and behavioral domains; and social functioning with peers is predictive of future functioning. For example, poor peer acceptance in childhood is predictive of a child's dropout status in high school (Coie, Lochman, Terry, & Hyman, 1992; Ollendick, Greene, Weist, & Oswald, 1990), later juvenile or adult criminality (Parker & Asher, 1987), depressive symptomatology in adulthood (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998), and aspiration level and job performance in adulthood (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998). As a result of the stability and the important outcomes that are predicted by earlier measures of children's functioning with peers, there has been considerable interest in trying to understand possible predictors of social success or failure.

Assessment of Social Functioning

Various methods have been used to study the social functioning of children with their peers, including naturalistic observation (Simpkins & Parke, 2001), analogue tasks (Ladd & Oden, 1979), peer assessments (Masten, Morrison, & Pelligrini, 1985), and teacher ratings (Ollendick, Greene, Weist, & Oswald, 1990). Regardless, reports from peers are especially reliable and valid for identifying children's social functioning and predicting long-term social adjustment (Asher, 1990; Bukowski & Newcomb, 1984; Coie & Dodge, 1983; Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982; Newcomb & Bukowski, 1983). A major advantage of utilizing data from peers is the ability to obtain ratings from multiple raters (i.e., peers, typically classmates) who have had many hours of observation in numerous settings. Peers also have opportunities to observe low frequency, but psychologically significant behaviors that could easily elude an adult observer (Carlson, Lahey, & Neeper, 1984).

Strategies to obtain data from peers include measures of social acceptance (Is the child liked?) and social reputation (What is the child like?) (Parker & Asher, 1987). A child's social acceptance is related to friendships and likability among peers; a child's social reputation is related to social behavior and behavioral reputation with peers. Measures used to determine a child's social acceptance focus on friendships (i.e., list your three best friends in the class) and likability (i.e., rate how much you like each child in the class). Measures used to assess social reputation focus on social behavior with peers (i.e., Class Play). These measures allow peers to choose which of their peers fits specific roles in a hypothetical play.

While social reputation with peers is important, this research will focus on friendships and social acceptance. This decision was made because of an interest in why peers are attracted to a child as a friend. Conversely, examining social behavior would reveal a child's social competence with his peers without specifically focusing on the presence of friendships.

What Affects Social Acceptance and Friendships?

Because of the clear importance of children's friendships and acceptance by peers, gaining insight into what might contribute to successful or problematic relationships with peers has both clinical and theoretical importance. Previous work has suggested that a child's likability and friendships may be affected by their social behavior (Morison & Masten, 1991), physical appearance (Langlois & Stephen, 1981; Vannatta, Zeller, Noll, & Koontz, 2010), or the child's temperament (Murphy, Shepard, Eisenberg, & Fabes, 2004; Sterry et al., in press). In addition to these factors that are intrinsic to the child, it seems feasible that children's acceptance and friendships may be associated with parental factors.

Children's success with peers may be associated with parental social support networks. One potential mechanism for the linkage between a child's peer relationships and parental social functioning could be that parents are role models for their children. Parents provide examples of social behavior with peers and family that are modeled for their children may be imitated. Parents who have many friends and a large support network of peers may have children who emulate their behavior, and in turn, also have many friendships.

In addition to modeling competent social behavior and promoting social learning, parental participation in social networks may create opportunities for children. Specifically, parents who report involvement in larger social networks may provide more opportunities for their children to interact and participate in peer-related activities. Parental network members may function as a resource, which directly benefits children growing up in homes where parents have broader social networks. Children may form and maintain friendships with the children of their parents' friends. Finally, parents with strong social support networks may experience less distress and the quality of parent-child relationships may be more supportive (Szykula, Mas, Crowley, & Sayger, 1991).

The purpose of this research is to examine associations between parental social support and network size, and the friendships and social acceptance of their children. It is not known whether children of a certain age group will have friendships more greatly influenced by their parents. Children of all ages will be included to examine the possible association between children and parent social functioning. It is predicted size and supportiveness of parental social support will be associated with their children's friendship and social acceptance.

The role of parent and children's sex will be explored by examining same sex and other-sex pairs of parent and child. A child may be more strongly influenced by a parent of the same sex, and their friendships might be more reflective of this parent's social network than of the parent of opposite sex.

This study examines possible linkages between parents' (mothers and fathers) self-reported social support and their child's peer acceptance based on peer nominations. This research utilizes data collected from a larger, longitudinal study that examined psychosocial adjustment in chronically ill children and a non-chronically ill comparison peer (i.e., Noll, Vannatta, Koontz, & Kalinyak, 1996; Noll, Kozlowski, Gerhardt, Vannatta, Taylor, & Passo, 2000; Noll, Garstein, Vannatta, Correll, Bukowski, & Davies, 1999).

2.0 METHOD

The data used in this study was collected as a part of a larger, longitudinal study, which examined the psychosocial adjustment of children with a chronic illness and their peers (Noll et al., 1996; 1999; 2000). The original research study compared the social functioning of the child with a chronic illness to a comparison peer (child closest in date of birth, same race and gender) from their class (one-to-one matching). Data regarding the children's social functioning was collected from their peers at school; data regarding the parents' social functioning was collected during a visit to each child's home. The local Institutional Review Board approved all assessments made in the classroom and in the homes of children.

Participants and Procedures

Children with chronic illness (cancer, sickle cell disease, hemophilia, migraine disorder, neurofibromatosis, or juvenile rheumatoid arthritis) between the ages of 8-16 years who were receiving care at a large, pediatric medical center were recruited to participate. If both the parents and the school of the child agreed to participate, a trained research assistant went to the child's school to collect data about the child's social functioning from her/his peers.

The study was presented to the children as a friendship study without mention of chronic illness or any specific child in order to protect the privacy of the target child with chronic illness and to ensure they were not stigmatized. All children in the room who returned a consent form participated. Approximately 89% of the peers of a child with a chronic illness provided parental consent (N = 5,993 of 6.734) and were present on the day data was collected.

After collecting peer data in the classrooms, staff contacted parents of the child with chronic illness and the parents of one comparison child. Families were asked to participate in an additional study in their homes. If the parents of the closest date of birth classmate declined participation, staff contacted the parents of the child who was next in closest date of birth to the target child, and so on, until a comparison peer was identified. Approximately 80% of first choice families agreed to participate. Once identified, families were screened to ensure that none of the comparison children had a severe chronic illness. During the home visit, parents provided information about a number of issues for themselves, their families, and their child's functioning (Gerhardt et al., 2003; Noll et al., 1994; Noll, Garstein, Hawkins, Vannatta, Davies, & Bukowski, 1995).

The current study uses data collected from the non-chronically ill comparison peers and their parents. Children whose parents reported between married were included in the sample, even if one of child's parents did not participate. The resultant sample consisted of 203 children ranging in age from 8 – 16 years (boys, M = 11.91, SD = 1.99; girls, M = 11.78, SD = 1.96) at the time of data collection. Fifty-three percent of the children (n = 107) were boys.

Measures—Parents

Demographic Questionnaire (Noll, Vannatta, Koontz, & Kalinyak, 1996). Parents provided information about their age, marital status, and family size. This instrument also required participants to give information about their education level and occupation, which were used to determine socioeconomic status according to the Revised Duncan (Nakao & Treas, 1992).

Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire (NSSQ). Parents' social support was evaluated using the NSSQ (Norbeck, Lindsey, & Carrieri, 1981; Norbeck, Lindsey, & Carrieri, 1983). The NSSQ asks participants to list the names of people who provide them with social support and the nature of their relationship with each person (e.g., spouse, friend, neighbor, relative, etc.). After providing 0-20 names of people who provide them with social support, the respondent is asked six questions about the functional properties of support they receive from each person they selected. The set of six questions is made up of three pairs of questions assessing three different aspects of functional social support: two questions focus on affective support, two on affirmation, and two on physical aid. For each question, the respondent is asked to rate the amount of support they receive from each person from their list on a 5-point rating scale from 1, "not at all," to 5, "a great deal."

The NSSQ is scored directly from the questionnaire. To determine network size, the number of individuals listed by each participant is tallied. The functional support scores are obtained by adding ratings given to each network member for the item. In order to score a participant's total functional support, the final scores of the three functional items are added together. After providing information about functional properties of support, respondents were asked how long they had known each person listed, and how often they interacted with the individual.

The NSSQ has been proven to be a valid and reliable measure. Statistically significant correlations exist between the NSSQ subscales and another questionnaire purported to measure social support (Norbeck & Anderson, 1989; Norbeck, Lindsay, & Carrieri, 1983; Norbeck, Lindsey, & Carrieri, 1981). The proposed model of the NSSQ produced strong linear relations with the designated factors (Gigliotti, 2002). Functional items and network property items had a high degree of test-retest reliability ranging from .85 to .92 (Norbeck, Lindsey, & Carrieri, 1981). Correlations between the two questions measuring the three dimensions of functional support (affective, affirmation, aid) have also shown internal consistency. Each set of questions per item was highly correlated (affect, .97; affirmation, .96; aid, .89), and the correlations among the three network properties (network size, duration of relationships, and frequency of contact) ranged from .88 to .96 (Norbeck, Lindsey, & Carrieri, 1981).

Measures—Friendships and Acceptance at School

All participating children in the classroom of the target child completed three measures of peer relationships. This project focused on two of the measures.

Three Best Friends (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989). Children were asked to choose three best friends from all of their classmates in the participating classroom. They were permitted to select both boys and girls from among their peers in the class. Each child received two scores based on these data. Children were given an acceptance score based on how many times the child was chosen as a best friend by his or her peers; and a mutual friendship score, which assessed the reciprocated friendships of the child (for each child they selected as a best friend, was the nomination reciprocated?). This sociometric measure is useful for assessing a child's overall acceptance and friendships with peers. It has been shown to be stable and predictive of future social adjustment (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998; Bukowski & Hoza, 1989).

Like Rating Scale (Asher, Singleton, Tinsley, & Hymel, 1979). Children were given a class roster listing all of the children in the classroom and asked to rate all of their classmates on a five-point scale, in which “1” was someone they did not like a lot, “2” was someone they sort of did not like, “3” was someone in between, “4” was someone they sort of liked, and “5” was someone they liked a lot. From these data, each child was given an average likability score based on the ratings, which was calculated by averaging the ratings the child received from peers. This measure was used in conjunction with the sociometric measure to assess peer acceptance and overall likability. Past research has shown that this measure is a reliable way of calculating a child’s social acceptance, with acceptable test-retest correlations over a 4-week interval (.81 to .86) (Asher, Singleton, Tinsley, & Hymel, 1979; Ladd, 1981).

3.0 RESULTS

Demographics

Background information is provided in Table 1. Overall, our sample of families had some post high school education. Duncan scores (Nakao & Treas, 1992) suggested occupations in retail sales or semi-skilled labor.

Table 1. Demographic and Background Information

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Family SES ¹	46.26	19.51	15.00 - 82.67
Age of mother (N = 203)	40.13	5.79	27.10 - 65.00
Age of father (N = 203)	41.80	6.81	26.68 - 71.88
Age of child			
Boys (N = 107)	11.91	1.99	7.92 - 16.76
Girls (N = 96)	11.78	1.96	8.42 - 16.59
Years of Education			
Mother (N=198)	13.72	2.48	8.00-20.00
Father (N=159)	13.93	3.06	6.00-22.00
Number of Children Living at Home	2.56	1.09	1.00 - 6.00

¹Revised Duncan Socioeconomic Index (Nakao & Treas, 1992) used as an indicator of occupation ranking. A score of 46 is indicative of semi-skilled laborer, retail sales, or service.

Children's Social Functioning

Like ratings, best friend nominations, mutual best friend scores were standardized within each child's classroom and are reported as a z score, where the expected score was $M = 0$; $SD = 1$ (Table 4). While scores are standardized for each child's classroom to account for different class sizes, boys in the sample had an average of 2.67 best nominations ($SD = 2.15$), and an average of 1.41 reciprocated friendships ($SD = 1.12$). On the 5 point scaled used to measure likability (1 = does not like to 5 = like a lot), boys received an average rating of 3.17 ($SD = .88$). Girls had an average best nomination score of 2.87 ($SD = 1.85$); an average reciprocated friendship score of 1.58 ($SD = .97$); an average like rating score of 3.30 ($SD = .79$).

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges of Scores of Like Ratings, Best Friend Nominations and Reciprocated Friendships

Sociometric Measure	Mean	SD	Range
Like Rating Scale			
Boys (N = 106)	-.04	1.07	-2.63 - 1.93
Girls (N = 96)	.07	.95	-2.47 - 1.97
Best Friend Nominations			
Boys (N = 107)	.11	1.01	-1.95 - 2.14
Girls (N = 96)	.19	.97	-1.88 - 2.24
Mutual Best Friends			
Boys (N = 105)	.09	1.02	-1.85 - 2.08
Girls (N = 95)	.24	1.00	-1.50 - 1.99

Note. Like ratings, best friend nominations, and mutual best friends are scores derived from peer data collected from children in their classrooms. Each score was standardized within each child's classroom, and is reported as a z score where the expected $M = 0$; $SD = 1$.

Mothers' and Fathers' Functional Social Support Scores and Reported Network Size

Means, standard deviations, and ranges of scores of the parents' responses to the Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire are provided in Tables 3 and 4. While mothers named more people as supportive and reported experiencing greater support from these individuals, differences between mothers and fathers were not significant for network size or functional support.

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges of the Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire – Mothers (N = 201)

Social Support Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Network Size	7.31	4.22	0 - 20
Total Functional Support	183.26	102.46	27 - 580
Affect	66.53	38.78	9 - 199
Affirmation	58.28	32.57	8 - 184
Aid	58.45	32.79	9 - 197

Note. Functional social support variables (e.g., affect, affirmation, aid) were calculated by summing the individual scores given to each listed source of support, 0 = no support to 200 = maximum support. Total functional support was determined by summing the individual totals of affect, affirmation, and aid.

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges of the Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire – Fathers (N =146-150)

Social Support Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Network Size	5.37	5.05	0 - 20
Total Functional Support	176.12	104.25	18 - 498
Affect	62.80	37.99	8 - 188
Affirmation	60.07	34.88	8 - 172
Aid	56.07	31.68	4 - 159

Note. Functional social support variables (e.g., affect, affirmation, aid) were calculated by summing the individual scores given to each listed source of support, 0 = no support to 200 = maximum support. Total functional support was determined by summing the individual totals of affect, affirmation, and aid.

To examine the association of parents' social support with their children's peer acceptance and likability, correlations between parents' reported social support qualities and children's friendship measures were computed. In these bivariate regression analyses, same-sex and other-sex child-parent pairs were used.

Association between Parents' Social Support and Children's Peer Acceptance

Of note, the correlations between paternal social support and children's social functioning with peers were consistently lower for mothers versus fathers (30 pairs of correlations; Fisher Exact Test, $p < .0001$). While differences were small, the size of the father-child correlation was always larger than the size of the mother-child correlation. Based on this unexpected finding, we report results for fathers and their children separately from our results for mothers and their children.

Paternal Social Support and Children's Friendships and Likability

Correlations between fathers ($N = 146-150$) and their daughters ranged from $r = .16$ to $.30$, and from $r = .17$ to $.26$ for sons (Table 5). While some of these correlations were significant ($p < .05$) and others were not, none of the correlations was significantly different from one another.

Maternal Social Support and Children's Friendships and Likability

Correlations between mothers ($N = 201$) and their daughters ranged from $r = -.04$ to $.11$, and from $.00$ to $.20$ for sons (Table 6). Of note, every one of the correlations between mothers and sons was larger than the comparable correlation for mothers and daughters (15 pairs of correlations; Fisher Exact Test, $p < .001$). Regardless, differences between the pairs of correlations were never significant. A weak pattern emerged suggesting more significant correlations between maternal support and their sons total best friend nominations and likability versus maternal support and the reciprocated friendships of their sons.

Table 5. Correlation Between Parents' Social Support and Their Daughters' Social Functioning

Parent Variable	Best Friend Nominations	Mutual Friends	Like Rating Scale
Mother^a			
Network size	.01	-.04	.04
Total functional support	.05	-.04	.09
Affect	.05	-.04	.09
Affirmation	.04	-.04	.06
Aid	.06	-.03	.11
Father^b			
Network size	.22*	.30**	.21*
Total functional support	.19	.24	.16
Affect	.21	.30*	.25*
Affirmation	.18	.25*	.18
Aid	.21	.26*	.18

^a $n = 94$. ^b $n = 62 - 66$.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; two tailed tests.

Table 6. Correlation Between Parents' Social Support and Their Sons' Social Functioning

Parent Variable	Best Friend Nominations	Mutual Friends	Like Rating Scale
Mother^c			
Network size	.14	.001	.18
Total functional support	.17	.04	.20*
Affect	.18	.04	.20*
Affirmation	.16	.03	.19
Aid	.16	.05	.19*
Father^d			
Network size	.17	.12	.19
Total functional support	.26*	.22*	.22
Affect	.25*	.21	.21
Affirmation	.26*	.21	.21
Aid	.24*	.24*	.21

^c $n = 107$. ^d $n = 84$.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; two tailed tests.

4.0 DISCUSSION

The study was conducted to add to existing literature about potential linkages between parent social support and children's friendships, peer acceptance, and likability. It was hypothesized that parents who have larger support networks that are more supportive will have children with more friends at school and are more well liked by their peers. This seems feasible since parents and their friends may act as behavior role models and facilitate social interactions that encourage the social functioning of their children. This research improved on previous work as it used a large heterogeneous sample, independent sources of information, and psychometrically sound measures.

The findings of significant relationships between parental self-reports of social support and their child's friendships and acceptance from peers broadly confirmed a linkage between parental social support and children's functioning with peers at school. Contrary to our initial expectations, our data suggest considerable complexity based on the gender of the child and parent. Linkages between parental social support and children's functioning with peers varied considerably between fathers and mothers, and daughters and sons.

Social Networks of Fathers and Children's Peer Acceptance/Friendships

Fathers' social support significantly correlated with their sons and daughters' best friend nominations, reciprocated friendships, and likability ratings (r 's ranged from .12 to .30; average correlation for network size was .20 and .22 for functional support). The variability between individual correlations was minimal and not statistically significant. While the correlations between paternal social support and actual peer nominations were modest, given the independent nature of these data, these findings seem more significant. The homogeneous findings suggest that the linkages between paternal social support and their children's peer friendships/acceptance are similar for boys and girls. We do note that linkages between the network size for fathers and their sons ($r = .16$) was slightly smaller than the linkage between paternal network size and the acceptance of their daughters ($r = .24$), but this difference was not significant.

Social Networks of Mothers and Children's Peer Acceptance/Friendships

Correlations between maternal social support and their daughters' friendships and acceptance were small (r 's ranged from $-.04$ to $.11$). For mothers and their sons, the linkages were slightly stronger (r 's ranged from $.14$ to $.20$), except for a lack of correspondence between their son's reciprocated friendships and all of our indicators maternal social support. These findings did not support previous research, which suggested that maternal social support was related to their children's mutual friendships (Doyle, Markiewicz, & Hardy, 1994). Doyle, Markiewicz, & Hardy (1994) measured mothers' friendships using the Acquaintance Description Form, which evaluates mothers' perceptions of their friendships. The NSSQ measures perceptions of social support and does not limit measurement of social network to friendships. These criteria may have affected the association between mothers' social support and their children's sociometric status.

Measures of mothers' social support were correlated with their sons' peer acceptance and likability to a stronger degree than to their daughters' acceptance and likability. A possible explanation for this difference is mothers may have more play interactions with their sons than with their daughters. Mothers identify with their daughters' thoughts because of shared gender and experience as a female. When they spend time with their daughters, they may prefer to talk with them rather than engage in play interactions. For the same reasons, mothers may have fewer conversations with their sons, so when they spend time with their sons they engage in fewer verbal interactions and more physical interactions.

Fathers and Mothers Differential Relationships with their Children's Friendships

While not predicted, we found that linkages between fathers' social support and mothers' social support and their children's peer relationships varied in a consistent manner. Paternal social support was always linked more strongly to our measures of social functioning than maternal social support. Research has shown that mothers and fathers contribute differently to children's psychological development (Simpkins & Parke, 2001). Specifically, while mothers tend to spend more time caring for their children, during the time fathers do spend with their children, they participate in more animated play interactions than mothers (MacDonald & Parke, 1984; Parke, Dennis, Flyr, Morris, Leidy, & Schofield, 2005). It seems feasible that play interactions with fathers could be the basis for the impact of fathers on their children's friendships and likability. The lack of correlation between mothers and daughters is consistent with previous research that suggests fathers have a stronger impact on children's social functioning than mothers (Gottman et al., 1997; Simpkins & Parke, 2001).

Fathers who have more social support may also have more quality play interactions with their children, especially their sons. The skills that allow them to interact successfully with their adult friends and family may also contribute to their skills with their children. Past research has shown that children with fathers who demonstrate patience, greater playfulness, understanding, mutuality or balance in their play are associated with less aggression, more competence, and greater sociometric status (Hart et al., 1998, 2000; Mize & Pettit, 1997). These characteristics also make the fathers desirable as friends. It seems feasible that fathers who are more positive with their children are more successful with adult peers.

Does a child's personality affect the importance of parents' social functioning?

The association between parents' social support and children's peer acceptance may differ depending on a child's personality and general disposition. Children with lower activity levels, positive mood, greater adaptability, and enjoy novel situations may need less direct or indirect help from their parents to make friends. However, children who are shy, inhibited, less adaptive, and more behaviorally active may struggle more in their social interactions with peers. Parents with larger support networks may play a larger role for these children. A less socially inclined child who has socially adept parents may observe his parents' social behavior and could endeavor to replicate it later with his peers. If his parents are very social and they notice that he struggles with peers, they might go to greater lengths to encourage him to be more social

(i.e., play dates) than they would with a child who typically fits in better with peers. In order to better understand the relationship between parents' social functioning and children's social functioning, it would be helpful to also look at the role of children's personality and general disposition.

Limitations

The significance of these findings may only be applicable to two parent households. Findings may also vary for different ages of children. Children who are elementary aged may be influenced differently than children of an older age. Future work might also explore actual parent-child interactions to better understand potential linkages between parental support and children's peer relationships.

Missing social support data for fathers. Of the 203 eligible two parent families included in the study, approximately 70% of fathers participated and completed items of the Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire. Fathers who did not complete the questionnaire may have been unable to participate when data were collected because they were away from the home or they were not interested in participating. The refusal to participate was modest. Since approximately 30% of eligible fathers did not participate and every effort was made to collect data when convenient for families, it is feasible that the sample was biased toward families with fathers who are more

involved with their children and wanted to participate. In order to determine whether there is a difference between fathers who were not present versus those who were missing, analyses of the missing data would need to be conducted.

Implications

In a single parent household, when child rearing is the sole responsibility of one parent, different results may emerge. Single parents may have more social support from friends and family who assist them in raising their children than two parent households. Children may be introduced to more behavior role models or be placed in situations that require them to demonstrate social skills. Single parents may also overcompensate for the missing parent attempting to fulfill the missing parent's responsibilities to the child.

In the absence of a father, mothers may not be able to compensate for the fathers' gendered effects on children's peer acceptance and likability. Past research has shown that both presence of a father and the quality of the parental relationship affect outcomes of children, but when quality is controlled for, fathers' presence is unrelated to outcomes (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993). Children who do not see their fathers frequently, but spend quality time interacting with their fathers when they do see them may not have any differences in their friendships than children from two parent households. A similar study would need to be

conducted including single parent households in order to see if this is true or not, and the possible implications a missing father would have on a child's social functioning.

Currently, little research exists about fathers and their children. More work needs to be done in order to understand the role of father-child interactions in child development, and how they might be related to children's peer acceptance/friendships. The current findings highlight a significant role that has not been identified in the literature to date. Future analyses should look at the role of the age of the child. Since elementary aged children spend more time with their parents, their parents might influence their social functioning differently than older adolescents who spend more time away from home. Single parent families were excluded from the sample used for this study. It would be interesting to include them in the sample to further study the role of a father in children's friendships, and the effect of an absent father.

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