

The Development of Self-Esteem in Relation to Parental and Peer Attachment Among
Low-Income Urban Youth

Vanessa K. Weva

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology

McGill University, Montreal

August, 2017

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
degree of Master of Arts in Educational Psychology Specialization in Human Development

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Abstract

In the face of the adverse living conditions that are associated with economic poverty, such as a lack of access to adequate mental health institutions, the ability to maintain high self-esteem (HSE) is considered to be protective in the development of the affected youth. The multifaceted construct of self-esteem is generally thought to be impacted by social relations. Our study explored the links among essential relationships, those with parents and peers, and various domains of self-esteem among youth from low-SES urban backgrounds. Participants were 59 youth ($M_{\text{age}} = 11.21$, $SD = 1.43$) recruited from a summer camp for low-SES youth from an urban area. The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment was used to evaluate the quality of parent/peer relationships and The Self Perception Profile for Children was used to assess domains of self-esteem. The findings from this study suggest that youth-father attachment promotes HSE in terms of perceptions of social competence among low-income urban youth. Additional analyses revealed that this relationship was significant among youth from non-resident father households. Particularly, secure relations with non-resident fathers should be encouraged among youth from low-income areas to promote HSE and foster adaptive development in high-risk contexts.

Keywords: attachment, self-esteem, youth, poverty

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Résumé

Face aux conditions de vie indésirables associées à la pauvreté économique la capacité de maintenir une haute estime de soi (HES) est considérée comme facteur de protection dans le développement des jeunes affectés. Le développement d'une HES est généralement influencé par les relations sociales. Notre étude a exploré les liens entre les relations essentielles, ceux avec les parents et les pairs, et divers domaines d'estime de soi chez les jeunes issus de milieux urbains à statut socioéconomique faible (SSF). Les participants étaient 59 jeunes ($ageM = 11,2$ jo, $ÉT = 1,43$) recrutés dans un camp d'été pour les jeunes issue de région urbaine à SSF. L'inventaire de l'attachement avec les parents et les pairs (Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment) a été utilisé pour évaluer la qualité des relations avec les parents et les pairs et le Profil de perception de soi pour enfant (Self-Perception Profile for Children) a été utilisé pour évaluer chaque domaine d'estime de soi. Les résultats de cette étude suggèrent que l'attachement paternal favorise le développement d'une HES en termes de perception de compétence sociale chez les jeunes issus de région urbaine à faible SSE. Des analyses supplémentaires ont révélées que cette relation était significative chez les jeunes pour qui le père habitait hors de la résidence familial. En particulier, en context de pauvreté, le contact père-enfant devrait être encouragé afin de promouvoir une HES, ce qui pourrait favoriser le développement adaptatif dans un contextes à risque élevé.

Mots-clés: attachement, estime de soi, adolescent, pauvreté

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help, support, and guidance of many people.

I would like to begin by thanking my supervisor, Dr. Jake Burack, who believed in me and provided countless opportunities for me to grow both academically and personally. His passion for helping marginalized or underprivileged populations, both hands-on and through his research is highly inspiring. I am forever grateful for the opportunities that you have provided me with in the past two years. I would also like to thank Dr. Eve-Marie Quintin for taking the time to share with me her expertise in statistics throughout this process.

I want to express my gratitude for all the members of the McGill Youth Study Team (MYST) for their guidance and support throughout the elaboration of this project. Emily, Jenilee, Rey, and Samantha, I am forever grateful for your friendship. I would also like to extend my most sincere thank you to Shauna and the Camp Amy Molson staff, as well as the youth and their parents. This study would not have been possible without your continued enthusiasm and commitment to participate. Thank you to the students in my cohort, especially Yaxi, Ariunna, Megha, and Dom for making my first graduate experience a memorable one.

A special thanks to my family, both immediate and extended in Canada and around the world, and my friends for believing in me, inspiring me, and providing me with just the right amount of prayers and support to help me complete this degree. A special thanks to the Rochelin-Napoleon family whose kindness and consideration make me feel at home in this city.

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Kafiya Nzeya-Weva, and my father, Kabule Wetu-Weva. Your limitless and unconditional love for me has made my dreams a reality.

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The Promotive Effects of Attachment on the Self-Esteem of Low-Income Urban Youth

In 2007, the proportion of Canadian school-aged youth living in contexts of low-socioeconomic status (SES) was 11% (Statistic Canada, 2011). The construct of SES, measured by one's social and economic standing in a given society, encompasses a wide range of factors that influence an individual's experiences, thus shaping development from childhood through adulthood (Hackman, Farah, & Meaney, 2010). It is a complex construct, based on levels of parental education and occupation, household income, and material resources, all of which are associated with various dimensions of prestige, power, and financial well-being (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Woolfolk, 2007). Although social, emotional, and physical development can be shaped among individuals from high to low-SES backgrounds (Adler & Reckopf, 2008), individuals in lower levels experience higher rates of maladaptation across many levels of development, particularly when poverty is experienced during the early childhood years (Evan & Cassells, 2014).

The risk factors that increase the likelihood of maladaptation among youth from low-SES backgrounds include a variety of adverse conditions that are associated with the context of poverty (Evans, 2004). For example, living in low-SES is related to a lack of, or limited, access to health-related resources (Braveman & Gruskin, 2003), parental unemployment (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010), unfavourable school and classroom conditions (Sirin, 2005), housing in adverse neighborhoods (Milteer, Ginsburg, & Mulligan, 2012), and family environments that are characterized by violence, toxins, and parental turmoil (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). The path to maladaptation in low-SES is also influenced by the duration of impoverishment and the number of adverse experiences, with greater frequency linked to increased threat to development (Evans & Cassells, 2014).

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When poverty is experienced during childhood, some of the dysfunctional outcomes include the development of behavioural and emotional difficulties (Shanahan, Copeland, Jane Costello, & Angold, 2008). For example, as compared to their more affluent counterparts, individuals who spend at least 9 years in contexts of low-SES during childhood are more susceptible to developing behavioral conduct problems, such as aggressivity and impulsivity (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2005) and feelings of powerlessness in the face of distress (Evans & Cassells, 2014). Economically disadvantaged children also exhibit a higher prevalence of ADHD, hyperactivity, and mood disorders (e.g., depression and dysthymia) than their wealthier counterparts (Merikangas et al., 2010). Similarly, among culturally diverse samples of adolescents, anxiety and depression is more common in lower levels of SES (e.g., Najman et al., 2010; Smokowski et al., 2014), with the onset of these emotional problems appearing as early as 14 years of age (Gilman, Kawachi, Fitzmaurice, & Boka, 2003a, 2003b). Other developmental difficulties associated with childhood poverty include academic underachievement (Hair, Hanson, Wolfe, & Pollak, 2015; Reardon, 2011), executive function problems (Noble, McCandiliss, & Farah, 2007), cognitive maladaptation (Dickerson & Popli, 2016), and mortality (Fritzell et al., 2013). In North America, mental disorders are generally about twice as prevalent among individuals from low-income backgrounds as compared to individuals in high-income groups (Alegría, Bijl, Lin, Walters, & Kessler, 2000; Wang, Berglund, & Kessler, 2000).

Yet, in the face of the negative circumstances that are associated with low-SES, many youth are resilient, as demonstrated by their ability to function well across multiple indices of health (Li, Nussbaum, & Richards, 2007). One characteristic of the resilient youth who live in contexts of low-SES is an ability to maintain high self-esteem (HSE) (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2006),

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a multifaceted construct encompassing perceptions of self-competence across multiple domains (Harter, 2012). For youth, perceptions of self-competence are generally thought to be shaped by social factors, such as the quality of parent (mother and father) and peer relations (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). As such, in the context of low-SES, parent and peer relationships that are perceived by the child as being responsive and trustworthy represent a protective factor in the development of global self-esteem (Evans, 2004).

The focus of this study will be on the links between essential relationships, those with parents and peers, and specific domains of self-esteem that are important throughout adolescence among youth from low-SES urban backgrounds. As the effects of poverty are cumulative and consequences at one stage of development can impede development at a later stage to an even more detrimental degree (Yoshikawa & Beardslee, 2012), the identification of the protective aspects that are associated with relationships would help inform about pathways to wellness in this population. This quest would benefit society in the long-term as the effects of poverty are thought to be intergenerational and even more influential than personal traits, such as temperament or intellectual abilities (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Serbin et al., 2010). Thus, the findings from this study will add to the literature and our understanding of the protective role of parent and peer relations and how they relate to both the development of specific domains of self-esteem and general wellness among youth who are at-risk for maladaptation in the context of poverty.

The Concept of Self-Esteem

The concept of self-esteem is described as a cognitive construct, encompassing emotional responses associated with images and beliefs in relation to the self (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). According to Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo (2013), these emotional responses are based on

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self-evaluations of abilities and uniqueness. Historically, this concept was perceived as a unidimensional construct, representing one's general or overall self-esteem (e.g., Coopersmith, 1967; Piers & Harris, 1969). Rosenberg (1979) was among the first to suggest that self-esteem could be multifaceted, although he deemed the global evaluation of the self as being a sufficient forecast of developmental outcomes. Among other researchers (e.g., Bracken, 1992; Marsh, 1988, 1991), the importance of the multifaceted approach to analyzing the self in relation to developmental outcomes was highlighted by Harter (2012a) who demonstrated that, as we get older, self-esteem becomes multifaceted and individuals associate specific self-ratings to specific domains of their life. These domain-specific evaluations of the self are relevant in developmental outcomes throughout the lifespan. In her work, she delineates six periods of development all of which are associated with an increase in the number of domains of self-esteem with age. For example, Harter (1999) suggests 5 domains of self-esteem in early childhood and 14 in late adulthood. In one conceptualization of self-esteem during adolescence, Harter (2012a; 2012b) identifies six distinct domains – scholastic competence, social competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, and a general perception of the self (e.g., global self-esteem).

Global and Domain-Specific Self-Esteem

Harter (1999) employs various terms interchangeably in relation to the construct of global self-esteem. Global self-worth, self-perceptions, self-representations, and self-descriptions represent some of these terms. In the past, some scholars have argued that distinctions must be made among self-representations and self-perceptions, as the former represents "who you are" and the latter "how good you are" (Gordon, 1968; McGuire & McGuire, 1980). Harter (1999) suggests that specific distinctions between each of these two terms are rather arbitrary and

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unclear, as in both cases, they are associated with an affective meaning and all representations fall along an evaluative continuum. Thus, she proposes that self-descriptors are self-definitions that can either be deemed favourable or unfavourable. Harter also suggests that term global self-esteem encompasses evaluations of representations, perceptions, and descriptions of the self. According to her conceptualization, this global evaluation of the self (i.e., global self-esteem) is not a combination of the results of domain-specific evaluations but rather one's perception of worth as a person (e.g., I feel that I am worthwhile as a person).

Harter (2012) argues that distinctions should be made among global and domain-specific evaluations of the self, those that are in relation to one's sense of competence in the following domains which are associated to the adolescent period. One, scholastic competence refers to cognitive competence in relation to one's ability to adequately complete school work. Two, social competence refers to one's ability to make as well as maintain friends, which implies knowing how to become socially popular. Three, athletic competence refers to one's physical ability to perform in sports. Four, physical appearance refers to feelings towards one's looks, in terms of overall body and specific parts of the body (e.g., hair and face). Five, behavioral conduct refers to the evaluation of one's behaviour in social situations, whether it is deemed suitable or unsuitable.

In typical populations, Harter (1999) highlights the benefits of high self-ratings, as they serve as organizational, motivational, and protective functions that foster well-being across development. Similarly, in the context of poverty, resilient youth tend to highly rate global and domain-specific self-esteem, which is associated with feeling accepted by others and competent in one's ability to cope effectively with challenges that are associated with each domain (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003). High self-esteem (HSE) is thus considered to be a protective

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factor that promotes well-being and optimal development in the general population and among vulnerable youth, including those who live in poverty (Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardslee, 2003).

High Self-Esteem Among Children from Low-SES Backgrounds

The protective traits of individuals with HSE include high aspirations, good interpersonal skills, self-confidence, self-reliance, and better overall mental and physical health (Kim-Cohen, Moffitt, Caspi, & Taylor, 2004; Mann, Hosman, Schaalma, & De Vries, 2004). Particularly in the face of negative influences, these traits continue to foster the development of an adaptive internal mechanism that promotes healthy individual growth (Mann, et al., 2004). Accordingly, HSE is one of the strongest predictors of happiness (Furnham & Cheng, 2000) and overall well-being among adolescents and young adults (Diener & Diener, 1995). Findings from the literature on resilient youth who face a variety of adverse conditions, including poverty, highlight the many benefits of HSE, particularly in the domains of emotional and social development (e.g., Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Rao & Tamta, 2015).

Luthar (2006) suggests that the mechanism through which the construct of HSE is protective in the face of adversity operates by means of one's ability to modify the effects of risk in a positive direction by employing adaptive coping strategies. This mechanism is thought to be influenced in several ways throughout childhood and adolescence, such as through social relations (i.e., attachment) with individuals with whom one is close (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Thompson & Goodvin, 2005). Thus, depending on the attachment style, primary caregivers and close friends represent essential social forces that shape youth's self-esteem and overall development (Mruk, 2006).

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Attachment Style and Development

Attachment relations are generally described as intense and affectionate bonds that have implications in developmental outcomes (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1982). These relations can either be secure or insecure, depending on the extent to which one feels that the attachment figure is supportive and trustworthy (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Throughout adolescence, secure attachment as compared to insecure attachment with parents and peers appears to lead to many benefits (e.g., Groh, Roisman, van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Fearon, 2012; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005).

Secure attachment and development. Secure attachment relations are associated with adaptive social and emotional outcomes (e.g., Aviezer, Sagi, Resnick, & Gini, 2002; Kerns, Abraham, Schlegelmilch, & Morgan, 2007). Some researchers have even suggested that attachment relations that provide a sense of security represent one of the most important determinants of psychosocial outcomes, including HSE, among youth (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). The benefits of this attachment style are particularly highlighted in high-risk contexts as it is protective against internalizing and externalizing symptoms (e.g., anxiety and aggressivity) (Buist, Deković, Meeus, & van Aken, 2004). However, in certain high-risk contexts, securely attached parent or peer relations may be linked to problematic outcomes among youth. For example, secure alliances with peers with externalizing problems can be related to delinquent behaviors (Wampler & Downs, 2010) and academic achievement can be negatively affected by peers who devalue scholastic success (Luthar & Burack, 2000). Based on the study of academic achievement of youth from low-SES backgrounds, Davis-Kean (2005) suggests that youth who form secure relations with parents with limited post-secondary education, are more likely to score lower on measures of reading and math skills as compared to youth from higher income

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backgrounds and with more educated parents. He proposes that the link between parent education and children's academic achievement may be explained by the influence of the parental practices in promoting scholastic competence. Bornstein, Davidson, Keyes and Moore (2003) suggest that, in order for HSE and resilience to be fostered in the face of adversity, secure attachment relation must be experienced in a context that promotes optimal growth.

Insecure attachment and development. In contrast, insecure attachment relations are associated with multiple maladaptive outcomes for youth (Groh et al., 2012). For example, when experienced with caregivers, the affected youth tend to develop socioemotional difficulties, such as social alienation (Cohn, 1990), high rates of self-insecurities (Jacobsen, & Hofmann, 1997), and internalizing (e.g., depression) and externalizing (e.g., delinquency) problem behaviours (Buist et al., 2004). Similarly, socioemotional difficulties, such as bullying behaviors (Burton, Florell, & Wygant, 2013), and anxiety and aggression (Kupersmidt & Dodge, 2004; Millings, Buck, Montgomery, Spears, & Stallard, 2012) are associated with insecure peer relations. One explanation for the maladaptive outcomes that are associated with youth's perception of insecure relations is that essential attachment figures who could not be relied upon caused individuals to question their value and worth in times of distress (Mikluncer & Shaver, 2007). Individuals who view the self as being unworthy are more likely to engage in problematic or unhealthy behaviours that may have detrimental developmental consequences (Crocker & Wolf, 2001).

Links Among SES, Attachment, and Self-Esteem

Youths from lower SES contexts tend to report lower levels of self-esteem than in higher socioeconomic contexts (McLeod & Owens, 2004). One explanation for the poor levels of self-esteem among these youth is that they are more likely to perceive their social relations, particularly the parental ones, as being insecure (Belsky & Fearon, 2002). For youth from low-

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SES backgrounds, negative perceptions of parental relations may be associated with barriers that are specific to parenting in the context of poverty. For example, in low-SES settings, caregivers are typically single parents who struggle in meeting daily obligations while ensuring optimal upbringing conditions for their children (Misra, Moller, & Budig, 2007). In Canada, about 80% of the 1,527,840 single parent families are female led (Statistic Canada, 2011) and the absence of an additional caregiver in the household, such as a father figure, is associated with impeded maternal well-being which has implications in parenting practices (Wildeman, et al., 2012). Beyond the effects of financial hardship, the risk of impeded well-being among single parents from low-SES backgrounds is associated with other stress inducing circumstances, such as unemployment (Huston et al, 2005) and a lack of social support (Crosier, Butterworth, & Rodgers, 2007). For single parents, these stress-inducing conditions lead to manifestations of anger and hostility toward their children, which may lead to insecure relations that foster low self-esteem (Conger et al, 2010). Although insecure social relations are harmful for individuals from all economic strata (Groh et al, 2012), youth in lower levels are particularly vulnerable as they face additional risk-factors that are associated to the environment of poverty, including low-quality schooling experiences and housing in adverse neighborhoods (Evans, 2004). Nonetheless, even if parental relations are compromised, secure relations with other adults or with close friends are also protective against low self-esteem and other negative circumstances associated with the context of poverty (Werner, 1992; Wilkinson, 2004).

Attachment Figures and the Domains of Self-Esteem

In the general population, each domain of self-esteem is influenced differently by youth's perception of their mother, father, and peer relations (for a review, see: Gorrese & Ruggieri, 2013; Mattanah, Lopez, & Govern, 2011). For example, the quality of peer relations tends to be

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related to perceptions of social competence, scholastic competence, and physical appearance (Boulton, Smith & Cowie, 2010), while parental relations tend to be associated to global self-esteem (Paterson, Pryor, & Field, 1995; Quatman & Watson, 2001). Inconsistencies in the findings between the effects of attachment figures on domains of self-esteem (Laible, Carlo, & Roesch, 2004) may be due to moderating factors, such as the effect of cultural differences in the manifestation of secure attachment relations. For example, Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, and Morelli (2000) argue that measures of the quality of attachment relations are rooted in Western societal values that significantly differ from other cultures. Measures of the quality of attachment relations must take into account such factors in order to accurately assess the effect of attachment on developmental outcomes among a specific population. Nonetheless, a child's perception of their attachment relation with their parents and peers remains one of the central components of the development of self-esteem throughout adolescence (Rao & Tamta, 2015).

Present Study

The focus of this study is to explore the influence of mother, father, and peer attachment, respectively on the six domains of self-esteem (perceptions of scholastic competence, social competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth) articulated by Harter (2012) among youth from low-SES backgrounds between the ages of 8 and 14 years old. In an attempt to provide empirical evidence for specific populations of vulnerable youth from low-SES backgrounds, the following research question will be explored: "To what extent are mother, father, and peer attachment, as measured by the degree to which participants perceive that their parents (mother and father) and peers are trustworthy and responsive, have on the six domains of self-esteem of youth from low-SES urban backgrounds?" Specific hypotheses will not be made as past studies among youth from the general population

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have provided inconsistent links between attachment figures and specific domains of self-esteem.

Method

Participants

The participants were 59 youth (female = 25) between the 8 and 14 years old ($M_{\text{age}} = 11.21$, $SD = 1.43$) recruited from an overnight summer camp for low-SES youth from Montreal. The household family income fell below \$57,000 Canadian for all the participants (see Table 2).

Measures

The measures that were used in the study are commonly used with individuals of this age group in a variety of contexts and communities.

The Demographics Self-Report Questionnaire. The Demographics Self-Report Questionnaire was used to obtain personal information about the participants with regards to family size, and household residents (see Table 1).

The Self Perception Profile for Children (SPPC; Harter, 2012). The SPPC is a Likert-type scale used to measure the self-perceived competence of the participants. Six-item subscales are used to obtain scores for each of the six distinct domains of self-esteem, including scholastic competence, social competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth (which can also be referred to as global self-esteem). The questions are designed in a structured alternative format in which respondents need to choose whether the first or second part of the question best describes them. Once they choose the part that best describes them, they rate the statement as being “really true” or “sort of true”. The questions are then scored on a 4-point Likert scale, with a score of 1 indicating low perceived competence and a score of 4 reflecting high perceived competence. Subscale scores are computed by averaging the value representing the responses to each item. The validity of this measure was conducted by

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Harter (2012) using a sample of students in grade 3 through grade 6 from economically diverse social classes in the state of Colorado. Results from Cronbach's Alpha analyses revealed high reliability scores (between 75 and 91 percent) for each self-esteem scale.

The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

The IPPA measure was used to assess the quality of parent-adolescent relatedness and peer-adolescent relatedness. It includes questions about relationships with important people in the respondent's life, such as their mother, father, and close friends. Both parent (mother and father) and peer scales consist of 25 items that are answered individually by the participant regarding each of the relevant individuals (mother, father, peers). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with a rating of 1 indicating that the statement is not true and a rating of 5 indicating it is true. The subscale scores were computed by averaging the values representing the responses to each item. In this sample, Cronbach's Alpha reliability analyses were run among each item predicting the parent and peer attachment subscales. All the items were deemed to be strongly correlated for each subscale: parent communication = .90, parent trust = .93, peer communication = .87, and peer trust = .88.

Procedure

This study was approved by McGill's Research Ethics Board Office. Consent was sought from the parents both at the time of camp registration and at the time of departure to the camp site. A research team of 3 graduate students traveled to the site during the second week of each of three two-week periods in order to administer the questionnaires to the campers whose parents had provided consent for them to participate. The participants were told that their performance in the study would not be reported to anyone, including their parents or camp counsellors, and were asked to provide their assent if they were willing to participate. The questionnaires were

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completed in a group format of 3 to 4 participants who filled out their answers on a personal response sheet after a member of the research team had read out each question. Over the course of a day, the participants were allowed up to 2 one-hour sessions to complete their questionnaires, and prior to each session they were told that they could ask for help or withdraw from the study at any given time. Once the questionnaires were completed, the participants were encouraged to provide feedback about the sessions and discuss issues that should be examined in the future. Finally, they were given a small present for their involvement in the study.

Results

Attachment Figures and Domains of Self-Esteem

Using IBM SPSS (Version 21), the effect of mother, father, and peer attachment on each domain of self-esteem was assessed through six separate multiple linear regressions (one for each domain of self-esteem). The results of these analyses are displayed in Table 3 and Tables 6 to 10. As can be seen, only the regression model examining perceptions of social competence was found to be significant, $F(3, 37) = 3.50, p < .05$ (see Table 3). As such, mother, father, and peer attachment accounted for 22% of the variation in perceptions of social competence among this population of youth from low-SES backgrounds ($R^2 = .22$, Adjusted $R^2 = .16$).

Among the attachment figures, only father attachment was a significant predictor of perceptions of social competence, with higher scores on father attachment associated with higher scores on perceptions of social competence when mother and peer attachment scores were held constant ($\beta = .57, t = 2.61, p = .01$). None of the other self-esteem domains of scholastic competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioural conduct, and global self-worth were significantly associated with mother, father, and peer attachment.

Exploratory Analysis

The significant relationship between father attachment and perceptions of social competence was further examined. In this investigation, father attachment and perceptions of social competence was compared among the participants who reported that they lived with their father (i.e., resident-father group) and those who reported that they did not (i.e., nonresident-father group). Only the regression model among the non-resident fathers revealed a significant relationship between father attachment and perceptions of social competence, $R^2 = .26$, $F(1, 22) = 7.90$, $p < .05$) (see Table 4). As such, non-resident father attachment accounted for 26% of the variation in perceptions of social competence, indicating that among the participants who did not live with their father, higher scores for father attachment was associated with higher scores in perceptions of social competence ($\beta = .52$, $t = 2.81$, $p < .05$). Examination of the frequencies in father attachment scores among the resident and non-resident father groups indicates that there is slightly more variability in attachment among non-resident fathers (see Table 5) which may account for this finding.

Discussion

The relationship between attachment figures (mother, father, and peers) and the six domains of self-esteem (scholastic competence, social competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth) was explored among youth from low-SES urban backgrounds between the ages of 8 and 14 years. Only father attachment was found to be associated with increased self-esteem, and specifically in terms of perceptions of social competence. This finding suggests that beyond the negative influences of poverty, such as social and emotional maladaptation (Evan & Cassells, 2014), father relations that are perceived as being responsive and trustworthy may act as a protective factor against negative self-evaluations

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of social competence (e.g., making friends and getting others to like oneself), thereby fostering wellbeing in the face of adversity. This evidence is congruent with Zimmerman, Salem, and Maton's (1995) finding that close relationships with fathers, even those not living in the same household with their child, promote high self-esteem.

Father Attachment and Social Competence

Paquette (2004) explains the association between father relations and children's social competence in terms of men's tendency to contribute to the development of children's openness to the world and bravery in unfamiliar situations. In his theory, the father-child relation has been described as an activation attachment relation in comparison to the mother-child attachment relation that is aimed at providing a sense of relief in times of distress. This activation relation contributes to the development of social skills among children and is fostered through physical play, such as the typical father-child rough-and-tumble play. The development of self-control in circumstances of stimulation is promoted in this form of play, thus contributing to children's development of socially acceptable forms of emotion regulation. For youth from this population who face daily challenges associated to low-SES (Evans, 2004), the benefits of secure paternal relations may be associated with adaptive emotion regulation skills that may foster HSE and resilience across development in the context of poverty (Buckner, et al., 2003). In Dumont and Paquette's (2013) reassessment of the father-activation theory among toddlers, they argued that greater activation quality is associated with greater social competence. The findings from the present study suggest that the benefits of father relations in the development of social competence may extend beyond toddlerhood into early adolescence and in the context of poverty.

Non-resident Fathers and Youth's Self-Esteem

As a little over half of this population reported that their father did not live in the household (see Table 1), the contributions of father relations in youth's perception of social competence was examined separately among children from resident and non-resident father households. In this more fine-grained analysis, father attachment was only associated with an increase in perceptions of social competence among youth from non-resident father households (see Table 4). This is relevant to evidence that youth who do not live with their father full-time are at risk for maladaptation across development (e.g., King, 1994). For example, children of divorced parents who live in single mother households are at-risk of being maladjusted in terms of their overall self-esteem and social competence (Amato, 2000). These impeded perceptions of the self are associated to a variety of negative outcomes, including internalizing and externalizing problems (Lee, Hankin, & Mermelstein, 2010). Yet, the finding from this study suggest that it is possible for youth to form trustworthy and supportive attachment relations with non-resident fathers and this type of relation is associated to HSE, specifically in terms of perceptions of social competence, despite economic poverty.

This significant relation among non-resident father attachment and increased perceptions of social-competence in the current study may be explained by the presence of more variability in father attachment among youth from non-resident father households as compared to youth who live with their father (See table 5). Furthermore, this variability in youth's attachment with their non-resident father may be associated with differences in the development of their openness to the world and bravery in unfamiliar situations, as described in Paquette's (2004) father activation theory, as these two factors are associated to perceptions of social competence (Bierman & McCauley, 1987; Grisset & Norvell, 1992).

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Another explanation for the unexpected significant finding in non-resident father attachment and perceptions of social competence is related to the impact of scheduled and monitored opportunities for fathers to engage with children, as youth who live apart from their father form attachment relations under different circumstances than children who live in the same household. For instance, non-resident fathers typically engage with their children through contact in several ways, such as in person during scheduled visits, through telephone, by email, or in letter (Smyth, 2002). Knowing that their time spent together is limited, some fathers may provide substantial support and make a significant effort to be involved in their child's life, thus buffering the effect of not being able to engage with their children daily.

Furthermore, because our measure of father attachment did not specify that children had to answer each question in relation to their biological father, perhaps they considered another paternal figure who lives in the household. As suggested by Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, and Bremberg (2008), non-biological paternal figures may buffer the expected negative effect of non-resident biological fathers on the self-esteem of youth in the context of poverty.

Mother Attachment and Youth's Self-Esteem

The lack of detectable significant relations among mother attachment and the domains of self-esteem of the youth from this study may be explained by the relative constancy of the youth-mother, as compared to the youth-father relationship, particularly in the context of low-SES (Wildeman et al., 2012). This consistent relationship among mothers may create little variability in mother attachment scores, thus making it difficult to statistically evaluate their impact on youth's self-esteem (Goodwin & Leech, 2006). Yet, the failure to find an impact of mothers on specific domains of youth's self-esteem is inconsistent with evidence of mothers' unique contribution to global self-esteem among typical populations (Arbona & Power, 2003; Laible et

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al., 2004; Wilkinson, 2004) and in the context of poverty (Evans, 2004; Owens & Shaw, 2003).

In typical populations, some researchers have argued that mother contributions to self-esteem are influenced by mediating factors, such as empathy and prosocial behaviours (Laible et al., 2004).

In this particular vulnerable setting, perhaps the investigation of the effect of attachment relations on self-esteem should be investigated by controlling for mediating factors that are associated with the environment of poverty, such as the type of neighborhood in which children live (Kohen, Leventhal, Dahinten, & McIntosh, 2008) or characteristics of the family environment (e.g., quality of father and mother interactions) (Conger & Donnellan, 2007).

Peer Attachment and Youth's Self-Esteem

One explanation for the lack of detectable contributions of peer relations to domains of self-esteem in this study is that the youth from this study may have differential definitions of the term “peer” (e.g., best friend, friend, cousin, classmate, etc.), thus creating inconsistent responses to the question. Another explanation is that they may have answered the peer questionnaire in relation to their friendships in the camp setting. Findings from Parker and Seal's (1996) study on friendships in a 4-week sleep-away camp setting among a population of youth aged between 8 and 15 years old revealed that friendship networks in this context change frequently. This frequent change in friendships made it difficult for children to develop an emotional bond with their peers, however, children who could maintain the same friendships throughout their stay at the camp were able to develop this bond. In the present study, a similar pattern of frequent changes in friendships may have been the case as youth arrive and leave at different moments throughout the duration of the camp. Thus, the children may have made a succession of friendships that did not last, thus making it hard to experience emotional bonds. This plausibility may have contributed to the lack of findings in terms of the impact of peers on domains of self-

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esteem among our population of youth from low-SES backgrounds.

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of this study is the relatively small number of participants ($n=59$), as a larger sample size would add more power to detect differences. A second limitation is the failure to consider other factors such as ethnicity, non-resident parent income, or consideration of other parental figures (e.g., grandparents, aunts, or uncles) that may influence the relation between attachment figures and domains of self-esteem (Attar-Schwartz, Tan, Buchanan, Flouri, & Griggs, 2009; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Knowledge about these demographic factors would allow us to better understand the similarities and differences of the group of participants in this study and youth from low-SES backgrounds in other locales and studies.

Conclusion

Among other constructs, understanding the relationship between parent and peer attachment and self-esteem among youth from low-SES backgrounds is paramount in identifying the protective factors that may promote healthy childhood development in disadvantaged contexts. However, no distinct characteristic can explain a developmental outcome, as many characteristics contribute to the process. Characteristics merely represent predispositional and interactive factors, rather than causal or deterministic ones (Mruk, 2006). Nonetheless, the present study includes evidence indicating that paternal attachment promotes HSE, in terms of higher perceptions of social competence. The father-child relationship should be particularly emphasized in this population, as it represents a protective factor in the development of at-risk youth. Moreover, this study has particular implications for non-resident fathers as it provides evidence that youth may form impactful attachment relations with fathers who live outside the household, and that these relations may be associated with increased self-esteem and resilience

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among vulnerable youth.

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Table 1

Demographic Information

Variable	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	33	55.9
Female	26	44.1
Household residents		
Resident Mother	52	88.1
Non-Resident Mother	7	11.9
Resident father	27	45.8
Non-resident father	32	54.2
Grandmother	13	22
Aunt	3	5.1
Stepmother	4	6.8
Foster mother	0	0
Grand-father	0	0
Uncle	6	10.2

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Step-father	2	3.4
Foster father	1	1.7
Other Adult	3	5.1
Siblings		
at least one older brother	15	25.4
at least one older sister	15	25.4
at least one younger brother	13	22
at least one younger sister	18	30.5

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Table 2

Population Household Income

Variable	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Less than \$23,999	40	68
\$24,000 - \$29,000	4	7
\$30,000 - \$35,999	3	5
\$36,000 - \$44,999	6	10
\$45,000 - \$57,000	3	5
Unspecified	3	5

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Table 3

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Assessing the Relationship Between Mother, Father, and Peer Attachment on Social Competence

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>95% CI</i>
Mother Attachment	-.15	.26	-.12	[-.67, .38]
Father Attachment	.54	.21	.57*	[.12 , .96]
Peer Attachment	-.09	.18	-.08	[-.46 , .28]

Notes. $R^2 = .22$ ($p < .05$).

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Table 4

Simple Linear Regression Analysis Assessing the Relationship Between Father Attachment and Perceptions of Social Competence

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>95% CI</i>
Resident Father Attachment	.15	.35	.19	.39	[-.04, .74]
Non-Resident Father Attachment	.26	.52	.18	.51*	[.14, .90]

Notes. $p < .05^*$

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Table 5

Frequencies for Resident and Non-Resident Father Attachment Scores

Variable	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Resident Father Attachment	1.40	4.52	3.57	.71
Non-resident Father Attachment	2.00	4.64	3.36	.77

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Table 6

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Assessing the Relationship Between Mother, Father, and Peer Attachment on Scholastic Competence

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>95% CI</i>
Mother Attachment	.35	.22	.33	[-.11, .81]
Father Attachment	.04	.18	.05	[-.33, .40]
Peer Attachment	-.22	.16	-.23	[-.54, .10]

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Table 7

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Assessing the Relationship Between Mother, Father, and Peer Attachment on Athletic Competence

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>95% CI</i>
Mother Attachment	.29	.19	.34	[-.10, .69]
Father Attachment	-.21	.15	-.32	[-.52, .10]
Peer Attachment	-.02	.13	-.02	[-.29, .27]

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Table 8

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Assessing the Relationship Between Mother, Father, and Peer Attachment on Physical Appearance

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>95% CI</i>
Mother Attachment	-.34	.30	-.25	[-.94, .27]
Father Attachment	.42	.24	.42	[-.06, .90]
Peer Attachment	-.11	.21	-.09	[-.53, .31]

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Table 9

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Assessing the Relationship Between Mother, Father, and Peer Attachment on Behavioural Conduct

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>95% CI</i>
Mother Attachment	-.27	.23	-.26	[-.73, .18]
Father Attachment	.40	.18	.52	[.03, .76]
Peer Attachment	-.16	.16	-.17	[-.48, .16]

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Table 10

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Assessing the Relationship Between Mother, Father, and Peer Attachment on Global Self-Worth

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>95% CI</i>
Mother Attachment	-.13	.25	-.11	[-.63, .38]
Father Attachment	.37	.20	.44	[-.03, .77]
Peer Attachment	-.14	.17	-.13	[-.49, .22]