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The relations between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence in children: Gender as a moderator

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Abstract

Previous research suggested a relation between the parent-child relationship and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence in children. Also some evidence was found for a moderating effect of gender in this relation. The purpose of the current study was to investigate the moderating effect of gender in the relations between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence. In this study, 77 children (43 boys, 34 girls) aged 9-12 years (M = 10.42) filled in questionnaires. Hierarchical regression analyses were performed. Results showed that if the parent-child relationship quality was low, children showed more fear of failure and less self-esteem than if the parent-child relationship quality was high. Girls showed more fear of failure and boys showed more perceived scholastic competence and social acceptance. No moderating effect of gender was found in the relations between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence. The results support the suggestion that parenting may be included in fear of failure intervention techniques. This study adds to the existing literature on the importance of the parent-child relationship in children's development.

The relations between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence in children: Gender as a moderator

Fear of failure is defined as an achievement-motivation, characterized by avoidance of achievement-related tasks to prevent failure (Birney, Burdick, & Teevan, 1964, 1969; Elliot, 1999; Elliot & McGregor, 1999; McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989). Individuals with high fear of failure are seen as extremely defensive and concerned with the opinion of others. Also, they are more aware of their failures than of their successes and tend to overgeneralize their failures to their global self-concept (Heckhausen, 1967, 1968; McGregor & Elliot, 2005). In addition, these individuals have excessively low self-esteem (Birney et al., 1964, 1969; Teevan & Hartsough, 1964; Teevan & Loomis, 1964) and are dependent on external sources for reinforcement (Stamps & Teevan, 1966; Moot, Teevan, & Greenfeld, 1988). They strive for success and try hard to avoid failure, using self-protective behaviors like self-handicapping, learned helplessness, and defensive pessimism. These self-protective behaviors may lead to numerous psychological problems such as high anxiety, unstable self-esteem, and lack of resiliency (Covington, 1992; Martin & Marsh, 2003; Martin, Marsh, & Debus, 2001; De Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013) and is negatively correlated with academic success (Herman, 1990; Wach, Spengler, Gottschling, & Spinath, 2015).

Fear of failure is also seen in children (Ollendick, Matson, & Helsel, 1985; Wach et al., 2015;). Many fear of failure interventions are focused on elevating the child's self-esteem, since low self-esteem is a core component of fear of failure. However, more factors could be included in the underlying mechanisms of fear of failure. Research suggested that self-esteem is related to the parent-child relationship (Gecas, 1971, 1972; Openshaw, Thomas, & Rollins, 1984; Rosenberg, 1965; Sears, 1970; Hoelter & Harper, 1987; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986; Harter, 1993), so fear of failure could be related to the parent-child relationship too. If the parent-child relationship appears to affect self-esteem as well as fear of failure, a more

effective approach for fear of failure would be parenting training to improve the parent-child relationship. More knowledge about the underlying mechanisms is desired for the development of effective interventions for children with high fear of failure. In this research paper, the relations between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence, and the moderating effect of gender in these relations are investigated. In this study, the parent-child relationship quality is defined as the child's perception of the quality of the interaction between the child and the parents, the child's feelings towards the parents, especially if the child feels loved and supported and treated fairly, and if the atmosphere at home is comfortable (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2013).

Fear of failure in children is associated with the parent-child relationship in more than one way. First, research suggested that some parents measure their self-esteem in terms of the achievements of their children. The child's success makes the parents' self-esteem grow (Ng, Pomerantz, & Deng, 2014; Grolnick, 2015). Those children will feel pressured to succeed because their parents need them to, and they will fear failure. Second, other research showed that mothers who punished their children's failures and reacted neutrally to success, had children that feared failure (Teevan, 1983). Also, fear of failure in children can stem from parents setting high achievement standards but not believing in the child's abilities (Smith, 1969). In addition, Bowlby (1973) suggested, according to his attachment theory, that children experience anxiety when they are not sure of the availability and/or accessibility of their caregivers. In this way, insecure attachment can lead to anxiety in children and adolescents (Colennesi et al., 2011; Elliot & Reis, 2003). In general, girls experience more anxiety than boys (Ollendick, King, & Frary, 1989; Bender, Reinholdt-Dunne, Esbjorn, & Pons, 2012). This gender difference could be due to environmental, biological, and experiental factors (Zahn-Waxler, Shirtcliff, & Marceau, 2008) but also differences in emotion regulation (Bender et al., 2012). Furthermore, some evidence has been found for a

moderating effect of gender in the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and anxiety. Graham and Weems (2015) found a positive association between girls' anxiety and their parents' anxiety, but a negative association was found for boys. Genetics cannot be the underlying factor in this study because the association is different for boys and girls. A more plausible explanation is that parenting is the key component in this relation because supportive, positive parents are more likely to teach their children emotion regulation and coping techniques, so children will feel less anxious. This could be the same explanation in the relation between the parent-child relationship and fear of failure. Moreover, the meta-analysis of Van der Bruggen, Stams, and Bögels (2008) found that the effects between observed parental control and anxiety were stronger for girls than for boys. Contrary to this study, in another study of Van der Bruggen, Bögels, and Zeilst (2010) the relation between observed parental control and anxiety was stronger for boys than for girls. As opposed to the studies previously mentioned, other studies did not find differences between boys and girls in the relation between parenting and childhood anxiety (McLeod, Wood, & Weizs, 2007; Verhoeven, Bögels, & Van der Bruggen, 2012). In sum, previous studies on the moderating effect of gender in the relation between the parent-child relationship and anxiety found different results. However, none of the previous studies focused on the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure.

Altogether, some evidence has been found for a direct relation between the parent-child relationship and fear of failure. However, self-esteem and perceived competence might be part of this relation too, either as underlying mechanisms or as the two sides of the same coin. Self-esteem is defined as the self-judgment of personal worth and global feelings of competence and self-acceptance (Rosenberg, 1965). Perceived competence differs from self-esteem, because it is the perception of the child of his or her competence in a specific domain, since children do not feel equally competent in every domain. Self-esteem is a more global

view of themselves and perceived competence is a more specific view. However, global self-esteem is more than the sum of the different domains of perceived competence, although there is some overlap (Harter, 1982). The current study will focus on the domains of scholastic competence and social acceptance, because of the overlap with fear of failure in this study. Fear of failure often occurs within the scholastic and social context, and to get a clear overview of the relation with perceived competence this study only focuses on the domains of scholastic competence and social acceptance.

Previous research found a relation between the parent-child relationship and self-esteem. According to Bowlby (1969, 1973) and Ainsworth (1989), the foundation of internal beliefs about relationships and interactions, as well of self-worth and competence, lies in the parent-child attachment. Further in this development, parents keep having an important role. For example, cross-sectional research showed that there is a positive relation between parental support and children's self-esteem. If the parents supported the child, the child's self-esteem was higher (Gecas, 1971, 1972; Openshaw et al., 1984; Rosenberg, 1965; Sears, 1970; Hoelter & Harper, 1987; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986). On the other hand, when the parents evaluate their children negatively, children will question their own value and worth (Harter, 1993). Felson and Zielinski (1989) found in their longitudinal study that children with high self-esteem perceived more appraise and affection from their parents than children with low self-esteem. Self-esteem could act as a schema that affects perception and memory (Markus, 1977). This schema could either lead to a positive or a negative perception by the child of the parent-child relationship. In general, girls seem to have lower self-esteem than boys (Furnham & Cheng, 2000; Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999; Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002). The explanation for the difference between girls and boys, could be that girls feel more insecure about their body image, which is a core component of self-image (Warren, 1983; Harter, 1993). Some evidence was found for a moderating effect of gender in

the relation between the parent-child relationship and self-esteem. Some studies found that girls' self-esteem was more affected by parental support or parenting style than boys' self-esteem (Felson & Zielinski, 1989**;** Gecas, 1971**;** Openshaw et al., 1984; Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2008**)** but other studies found that boys' self-esteem was more affected **(**Hoelter, 1984; Medinnus, 1965). Moreover, other studies found contradicting gender effects in the same study (Demo, Small, & Savin-Williams, 1987**;** Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986**)**, or no effects at all **(**Hoelter and Harper, 1987**;** Sears, 1970). Most studies on the moderating effect of gender in the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and self-esteem are cross-sectional, so no conclusions can be drawn about the causality.

With regard to perceived competence, research showed that if parents held low expectations of their children's academic achievements but set high standards, children showed low perceived academic competence (Phillips, 1987). In cross-sectional as well as longitudinal studies, a positive relation was found between the child's perception and their parents' perception of the child's academic abilities (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1982; Parsons, Adler & Kaczala, 1982; Phillips, 1987). In addition, in a longitudinal study of Stevenson and Newman (1986), mothers' ratings of the child's academic abilities at a young age predicted the child's self-perceived academic abilities at an older age, controlling for actual abilities. Besides perceived scholastic competence, perceived social competence is also linked to the parent-child relationship. Research showed that in early adolescents, secure attachment to both parents was linked to higher perceived social competence (Boling, Barry, Kotchik, & Lowry, 2011). Furthermore, parents who felt less of a struggle teaching their children social skills, had children with higher perceived social competence (Ladd & Price, 1986). In addition, children's perceived social competence was influenced by the attitudes their parents have on their social competence, but children's perceptions of themselves also influenced the image the parents had of their children (Sameroff & Seifer, 1983). With regard to perceived

competence in children, gender differences have been found. Boys showed more perceived scholastic competence than girls, but no difference was found in social acceptance (Veerman, 1989; Groot & Prins, 1989; Straathof, Treffers, Siebelink, & Goedhart, 1991). Moreover, other studies found differences within the domain of scholastic competence. Boys showed more perceived scholastic competence, regarding mathematics, whereas girls showed more perceived scholastic competence, regarding verbal skills (Wilgenbusch & Merrell, 1999; Wach et al., 2015; Eccles, Wigfield, Harold & Blumenfeld, 1993), regardless of the actual grades (Marsh & Yeung, 1997). In another study on perceived competence in adolescents, boys showed more social competence (Rose & Montemayor, 1994). Altogether, some evidence was found for the relation between the parent-child relationship and perceived competence, and for gender differences in perceived competence. However, no previous research has focused on the moderating effect of gender in the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and perceived competence.

In sum, many studies documented that the parent-child relationship quality, fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence are related, and that gender can have a moderating role in these relations. Fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence are treated differently in most studies, but their definitions show some overlap. For this reason, a clear overview of these three constructs and the parent-child relationship quality is desired. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relations between the parent-child relation quality, and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence in children, and the moderating effect of gender in these relations.

The following hypotheses are formulated for this study. Hypothesis 1: There is a negative relation between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, and this relation is stronger for girls than for boys. Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relation between the parent-child relationship quality and self-esteem, and this relation is stronger for girls than

for boys. Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relation between the parent-child relationship quality and perceived scholastic competence and social acceptance, and this relation is stronger for girls than for boys.

Method

Participants

In this study, children in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade of two primary schools in a small town in the Netherlands participated. All 105 children received an informative letter and a permission form for their parents. Twenty-eight of them did not get permission from their parents, did not want to participate, or did not return the permission form. In total, 77 children (43 boys, 34 girls) participated aged 9 to 12 years (M = 10,42, SD = 0,978).

Materials

Pearent-child relationship quality. The parent-child relationship quality was measured by the Parent Relation & Home Life subscale of the KIDSCREEN questionnaires, the Dutch version (The KIDSCREEN Group Europe, 2006). This subscale contained six items (e.g. ‘’have you been able to talk to your parent(s) when you wanted to?’’). The children had to answer these questions, keeping in mind how it has been for the past week. Items were judged on 5-point scales (1 = *not at all* and 5 = *extremely*). The total score on this subscale has a range from 6 to 30 points. The Parent Relation & Home Life subscale has a strong internal consistency (Cronbach’s α = .89) and a strong test-retest reliability (r = .72), when measured two weeks later (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2013). With regard to the construct validity, the KIDSCREEN showed small to medium correlations of the expected relations with other measures of quality of life (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2008).

Perceived competence and self-esteem. Perceived competence and self-esteem were measured by the Self Perception Profile for Children (SPPC; Harter, 1985), a revision of the

Perceived Competence scale (Harter, 1979; 1982), in the Dutch translation (Veerman, Straathof, Treffers, Van den Bergh, & Ten Brink, 2004). The items consisted of two opposing statements, and the children judged which one was *sort of true* or *really true* for them. Regarding perceived competence, only two subscales were used for this study: the Scholastic Competence subscale (e.g. ‘’some children think they are good at their schoolwork – other children worry about doing their schoolwork right’’) and the Social Acceptance subscale (e.g. ‘’some children find it hard to make friends – other children find it easy to make friends’’) that both contained six items. The total score on these subscales has a range from 6 to 24 points. The Dutch versions of the Scholastic Competence and Social Acceptance subscales have a sufficient internal consistency (respectively: α = .78 and α = .74) and a moderate to strong test-retest reliability (respectively: r = .86 and r = .68), when measured again after four weeks (Veerman et al., 2004). Regarding the construct validity, Harter (1982) reported moderate correlations between perceived cognitive competence and three motivational subscales on a measure of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation in the classroom.

Self-esteem was measured by the Global Self-Worth subscale of the SPPC (e.g. ‘’some children are often unhappy with themselves – other children are often happy with themselves’’). The Dutch version of this subscale has a sufficient internal consistency (α = .74) and a strong test-retest reliability (r = .74; Veerman et al., 2004).

Fear of failure. Fear of failure was measured by the Failure and Criticism subscale of the Fear Survey Schedule for Children-Revised (FSSCR; Ollendick, 1983) in the Dutch translation (Oosterlaan, Prins, Hartman, & Sergeant, 1995). This subscale contained 23 items (e.g. ‘’being punished by their mother’’). Items were judged on 3-point scales (1 = *not afraid* and 3 = *very afraid*). The total score on this subscale has a range from 23 to 69 points. The Failure and Criticism subscale has a strong internal consistency (α = .88) and a strong test-retest reliability (r = .75), when measured again after three months. The FSSCR shows

sufficient convergent validity. Correlations with other anxiety measures were moderate to strong (Ollendick, 1983).

Procedure

After the headmasters and teachers agreed to participate in this study, I visited the schools to introduce myself and explain the study to the children. Afterwards, I handed out the informative letters and permission forms for their parents. One week later, I visited the schools again. The children were in their own classrooms and placed their desks separately from each other for their privacy. Children who did not get permission or did not want to participate continued their own school work in silence. The teacher stayed in the classroom. After a short explanation, the children filled in the written questionnaires in silence. Afterwards, they were thanked for their help and received a small token of appreciation.

Data analytic strategy

Descriptive statistics were obtained for an overview of the sample. Of the total of 77 cases, seven were excluded because of missing data. In one case only, one item on the Parent Relation & Home Life scale was missing. There, I filled in the mean score of the other items so this case could be included. A total of 70 cases were used for further statistical analyses. Preliminary data analyses were performed to investigate connectedness between variables. First order correlations were calculated between perceived parent-child relationship quality, fear of failure, self-esteem, perceived scholastic competence, and perceived social acceptance. To test the moderating effect of gender, four hierarchical regression analyses were performed. The variables were centered to make it possible to look for main effects and interaction effects. Predictors were added in the following order: Step 1: parent-child relationship quality, Step 2: gender, Step 3: interaction of parent-child relationship quality and gender. The dependent variables in the separate hierarchical regression analyses were

respectively fear of failure, self-esteem, perceived scholastic competence, and perceived social acceptance.

Results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of boys and girls of all variables, except school and grade. First order correlations between all study variables are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. *Means and standard deviations of all variables.*

Measures	Boys		Girls		Total	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Age	10.410	0.896	10.410	1.073	10.410	0.975
Parent-child relationship quality	26.270	4.080	25.125	3.941	25.740	4.028
Fear of failure	33.487	5.258	38.844	8.325	35.971	7.312
Self-esteem	19.811	3.479	17.781	4.976	18.870	4.328
Scholastic competence	17.487	3.070	15.188	3.831	16.420	3.607
Social acceptance	19.027	3.884	16.438	4.464	17.826	4.332

Note. Boys: $N = 38$, Girls: $N = 32$

Table 2. *First order correlations between all study variables.*

Measures	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Age	-						
2. Gender	.008	-					
3. Parent-child relationship quality	-.146	.139	-				
4. Fear of failure	-.095	-.372**	-.290*	-			
5. Self-esteem	-.061	.243*	.554**	-.559**	-		
6. Scholastic competence	.145	.308**	.092	-.426**	.312**	-	
7. Social acceptance	.054	.302*	.227	-.549**	.519**	.354**	-

Note. $N = 70$
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$

It is notable to recognize that all correlations between fear of failure, self-esteem, scholastic competence, and social acceptance are moderate and significant ($p < .01$).

Table 3. *Hierarchical regression analyses with fear of failure and self-esteem as dependent variable.*

Variables	Fear of failure				Self-esteem			
	B	SD of B	*β*	*ΔR²*	B	SD of B	*β*	*ΔR²*
Step 1				.084*				.307**
Parent-child relationship quality	-.138	.055	-.290*		.597	.109	.554**	
Step 2				.112**				.028
Parent-child relationship quality	-.115	.052	-.243*		.572	.109	.530**	
Gender	-.213	.070	-.338**		.242	.144	.169	
Step 3				.004				.002
Parent-child relationship quality	-.114	.053	-.241*		.573	.109	.532**	
Gender	-.214	.070	-.340**		.240	.145	.168	
Parent-child relationship quality x Gender	-.059	.106	-.061		-.099	.220	-.045	

Note. $N = 70$. Gender: 0 = female, 1 = male
**p <.05; **p <.01*

To verify the first hypothesis, a hierarchical regression analysis with fear of failure as the dependent variable was performed. The results are shown on the left side of Table 3. The first hypothesis was partially confirmed. A negative relation between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure was found ($\beta = -.290$, $p < .05$), and by adding the parent-child relationship quality as a predictor 8.4% of total variance was explained. Also, an effect of gender was found. Girls showed higher fear of failure than boys ($\beta = -.338$, $p < .01$), and by adding gender as a predictor 11.2% more of total variance was explained. However, no interaction effect between the parent-child relationship quality and gender on fear of failure was found. So, the main effect of the parent-child relationship quality on fear of failure was confirmed, but the moderating effect of gender was not.

For the verification of the second hypothesis, a hierarchical regression analysis with self-esteem as the dependent variable was performed. Results are shown on the right side of Table 3. The second hypothesis was also partially confirmed. A positive relation between the parent-child relationship quality and self-esteem was found (β = .554, p <.01), and by adding the parent-child relationship quality as a predictor 30.7% of total variance was explained. Neither a gender effect nor an interaction effect was found. The main effect of the parent-child relationship quality on self-esteem was confirmed, but the moderating effect of gender was not.

Table 4. *Hierarchical regression analyses with scholastic competence and social acceptance as dependent variable.*

Variables	Scholastic competence				Social acceptance			
	B	SD of B	β	ΔR^2	B	SD of B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1				.008				.051
Parent-child relationship quality	.083	.108	.092		.244	.127	.227	
Step 2				.089*				.075*
Parent-child relationship quality	.045	.105	.050		.202	.124	.188	
Gender	.360	.140	.301*		.394	.165	.276*	
Step 3				.001				.000
Parent-child relationship quality	.046	.106	.051		.202	.125	.188	
Gender	.359	.141	.301*		.395	.166	.276*	
Parent-child relationship quality x Gender	-.051	.213	-.028		.031	.252	.014	

Note. N = 70. Gender: 0 = female, 1 = male
**p <.05; **p <.01*

The third hypothesis was split up into two components: scholastic competence and social acceptance. To verify this hypothesis, two hierarchical regression analyses were

performed with respectively scholastic competence and social acceptance as the dependent variables. The results are shown in table 4. No relations between the parent-child relationship quality and both scholastic competence and social acceptance were found. In addition, a gender effect was found for both components. Boys felt more competent in school (β = .301, p <.05) and more socially accepted (β =.276, p <.05). By adding gender as a predictor 8.9% more of total variance was explained in scholastic competence and 7.5% in social acceptance. No interaction effects of the parent-child relationship quality and gender on perceived competence were found. The third hypothesis was not confirmed.

Discussion

In this study, the relations between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence were investigated. Also, the moderating effect of gender in these relations was investigated. In accordance with the first part of the first hypothesis, a negative relation was found between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure. The better the child perceived the relationship with his or her parents, the less fear of failure the child experienced. The first part of the second hypothesis presumed a positive relation between the parent-child relationship quality and self-esteem. The results confirmed this relation. The better the parent-child relationship quality was, the higher the child's self-esteem. The first part of the third hypothesis was not confirmed. No relation between the parent-child relationship quality and perceived competence was found. The second part of all three hypotheses presumed a moderating effect of gender. Main gender effects were found: girls showed higher fear of failure than boys and boys perceived themselves as more competent than girls in both the scholastic and social domains. However, contrary to the expectations no moderating effects of gender were found in all three

hypotheses. The relations between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence appear to be the same for boys and girls.

The main effect of the parent-child relationship quality on fear of failure and self-esteem that was found in this study is in accordance with previous research. For example, in Colonnesi et al. (2011) and Elliot and Reis (2003), a relation was found between parent-child attachment and anxiety in children and adolescents. Also, a positive relation was found between parental support and the child's self-esteem (Gecas, 1971, 1972; Openshaw et al., 1984). In addition, Harter (1993) stated that parents influence the way children value themselves. The current study measured the parent-child relationship quality as perceived by the child and in some previous studies parenting was measured more objectively and in other studies parents filled in the questionnaires. So, even though there were differences in the design of the studies and the measured constructs, similar results were found. An effect of the parent-child relationship quality on perceived competence was expected because of the overlap between the definitions of self-esteem and perceived competence. Contrary to this expectation, the effect of the parent-child relationship quality on perceived competence was not found in the current study. Regarding scholastic competence, previous studies showed that the parents' perceptions of the scholastic competence of their child was similar to the perception of the child of his or her scholastic competence (e.g. Parsons et al., 1982; Phillips, 1987; Stevenson & Newman, 1986). Moreover, Ladd and Price (1986) showed that parents who experienced less struggle in teaching their children social skills had children that felt more socially competent. However, no previous research has investigated the relation between the quality of the parent-child relationship and perceived competence. Differences in results between previously mentioned studies and the current study could be explained by differences in measured constructs.

The findings in the current study support the idea that the parent-child relationship quality is an important factor in children's development. Bowlby (1973, 1982) mentioned the importance of the relationship between parent and child in his attachment theory. This theory suggests that the connection between parent and child is established in the early years of the child's life, and that it is the foundation of internal beliefs about self-worth and competence. If the caregiver is available and accessible to the child, the child will feel secure and free to explore the world and to have faith in other people. If the child is not sure about the availability of the caregiver, the child will experience anxiety and insecurity. Also, the child will expand this anxiety and insecurity to other people and will feel more anxious about the world. According to Ainsworth (1989), attachment remains an important influence not only in childhood but for the rest of one's life. So, it could be that the parent-child attachment determines the way people value themselves and whether they are easily anxious or not. Although the current study did not focus on parent-child attachment, the parent-child relationship quality as measured in this study also focused on the perception of the child of the availability of the parent. For this reason, the results that were found in the current study support the suggestion of the importance of the parent-child relationship as mentioned in the attachment theory.

In the current study, gender effects were found for fear of failure and perceived competence. Contrary to the expectations, no moderating effect of gender was found in the relations between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence. With regard to fear of failure, the finding that girls show higher fear of failure than boys is in accordance with previous research on anxiety in children (e.g. Ollendick et al., 1989). The difference between boys and girls could be caused by environmental, biological, or experiential factors (Zahn-Waxler et al., 2008) or by differences in emotion regulation (Bender et al., 2012). Girls experience more difficulties regulating their

negative emotions because girls are more aware of their own emotional states. This greater awareness may lead to focusing on difficulties regulating negative emotions instead of focusing on positive emotions. However, in this study, the expected difference between boys and girls in the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure was not found. The expectation of the moderating effect of gender was among others based on the study of Graham and Weems (2015) on moderators in the relation between parent and child anxiety sensitivity. However, age seems to be a moderator in this relation too. Tsao et al. (2005) also found a relation between parenting and child anxiety sensitivity, but only in girls older than 12 years. This could mean that the effects for girls grow stronger when they become older. In this study, the only participants were children between 9 and 12 years old, so it is possible that gender effects in the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure will only be visible in a few years. However, since previous research found contradicting results regarding the moderating effect of gender, it is also possible that there is no moderating effect of gender at all.

Girls and boys did not differ in self-esteem, which is contrary to previous research where it was found that girls have lower self-esteem than boys (e.g. Furnham & Cheng, 2000; Robins et al., 2002). The explanation for not finding the same gender effect in this study could be that the samples of previous research consisted of older participants, mostly adolescents. Heaven and Ciarrochi (2008) found that the difference in self-esteem between boys and girls increased between 12 and 15 years, with girls having lower self-esteem than boys. The explanation for the decline of self-esteem in girls in their adolescence is the process of physical maturation. Girls gain more body fat, whereas boys gain more muscle mass. These physical changes cause changes in the perception of one's own attractiveness, since body image is a core component of the self-image (Warren, 1983; Harter, 1993). In the current study, the sample was aged 9 to 12, which could mean that at this age there is no gender

difference in self-esteem but this may develop within the next few years. With regard to perceived competence, boys perceived themselves as more competent in both the scholastic and social domain. These results are in accordance with previous research, where it was found that boys felt more competent in the scholastic domain (Veerman, 1989; Groot & Prins, 1989; Straathof et al., 1991) and that boys felt more socially accepted (Rose & Montemayor, 1994). A possible explanation for these findings is that social desirability differs for boys and girls. Boys are desired to be assertive and confident about their competencies, whereas girls are desired to be more submissive and humble about their competencies. This social desirability may influence the way boys and girls answer questions about perceived competence, leading them to report more of less competency (Groot & Prins, 1989).

Based on previous research, a moderating effect of gender in the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and self-esteem and perceived competence was expected. However, this was not found in this study. The relation between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence appears to be the same for boys and girls. Differences in study results between previous studies and the current study might be due to different measurement instruments and different samples. For example, Heaven and Ciarrochi (2008) found an effect of parental style on self-esteem in adolescents, not in children. It is possible that gender differences are developing, but not visible yet. Another possibility is that there are no differences between boys and girls in the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence. Future research may focus on gender differences in this relation more structurally.

Even though this study adds value to the existing literature, some limitations must be acknowledged. The first to be acknowledged is the cross-sectional design of the study. No conclusions can be drawn about the causal relation of the parent-child relationship quality on

fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence. Second, the Parent Relation & Home Life subscale of the KIDSCREEN questionnaire focuses on the situation at home as it has been for the past week. This might not be accurate for the general atmosphere at home, because the atmosphere that week might have been more negative of more positive than usual. Moreover, in this study, the quality of the relationship between the child and both parents was measured. However, it is desriable to investigate differences in the relationships between the child and the mother and between the child and the father, because the child may perceive those relationships differently. Third, the sample consisted of children between 9 and 12 years old from primary schools in a small town in the Netherlands. This means that all children live in the same type of environment. To be able to generalize the results of the current study, the sample should be more diverse and consist of children from different environments. Finally, the children filled in all questionnaires themselves, so correlations between subscales may be larger than if more than one person fills in the questionnaires. The effects that were found in this study might be smaller in reality than they appear to be when one person answers all questions.

The current study has important clinical implications. Currently, intervention techniques for children with high fear of failure are mainly focused at elevating the child's self-esteem since low self-esteem is a core component of fear of failure. Fear of failure programs usually take place in classrooms or in small groups where children perform exercises to feel more confident about themselves. In this study, a correlation was found between the child's self-esteem and fear of failure, and for both self-esteem and fear of failure also a relation with the parent-child relationship quality was found. Based on the study's results, effectiveness of interventions may increase when including the impact of the parent-child relationship. Maybe there even could be changes in the program to include a parenting training where parents would learn how to elevate the self-esteem of their child and diminish

fear of failure in their child through parenting techniques. Moreover, the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure appears to be the same for boys and girls. This means that if fear of failure interventions would include parenting techniques, this does not have to be different for boys and girls. No research on the effectiveness of including parenting techniques in fear of failure programs has been done yet, so future research may focus on this topic.

In this study, the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence was investigated. A lower perceived parent-child relationship quality appears to predict more fear of failure and lower self-esteem in children. Although the results showed that girls experienced higher fear of failure and that boys felt more competent, the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence appears to be the same for boys and girls. Many studies documented the importance of the parent-child relationship and this study adds to the existing literature on this topic. Once more, the results of the current study emphasize the importance of the parent-child relationship quality in a child's development. However, future research may focus on the direction of the effect of the parent-child relationship quality. Longitudinal studies are desired to learn more about the direction of the effects found in the current study and possible underlying factors in the relation between the parent-child relationship quality and fear of failure, self-esteem, and perceived competence. Also, future research may focus on both the perception of the parents as well of the child on the parent-child relationship quality. Then the view on the impact of the parent-child relationship quality on the child's development will be more complete.

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