

Parental and Peer Attachment and its Relationship with Positive Youth Development

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Abstract

The role of parental and peer attachment in youth development is widely deliberated by scholars in human development. The importance of these two components cannot be denied because they are the closest components in the development of the individual youths. In this article we examined the relationship between parental and peer attachment with youth development using the 5Cs in the Positive Youth Development (PYD) Model. The 5Cs are competence, confidence, connection, character, caring & compassion. A structural equation model was tested on a sample of 677 youths at community colleges in Malaysia ranging in age from 18 to 23 years ($M = 19.47$, $SD = 3.59$). This study utilised the self-administered survey questionnaires. The result showed there was a significant relationship between both factors with PYD. Implications of the study showed parental and peer attachment were contributing factors towards positive youth development.

Keywords: Positive Youth Development (PYD), parental attachment, peer attachment, community colleges, youth

Introduction

Parents are the closest figures or components in the development of an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; 1986; 1979; 1977). The role of parents in youth development is widely discussed in developmental science (Theokas et al., 2005; Bowlby, 1982; 1988; Ainsworth, 1989; Schofield, 2002). The biological, psychological and emotional bonds constructed by parents with children (Bowlby, 1982) are limitless relationships and these relationships develop into a continuing model of attachment (Bowlby, 1982; Rice 1990; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Attachments are described traditionally as an effective bond between the mother and the baby (Rice, 1990). The attachment between parents and children will form certain behaviors (Bowlby, 1982). According to Bowlby (1982), attachment signals the tendency to acquire proximity. Attachment behaviour occurs when an individual is in a stress condition and the pressure forces him/her to gain safety or protection. In Bowlby's (1982) theory of attachment, he pointed out the elements in attachment as the presence of stress which made the individual sought for proximity and subsequently safety and shelter. These four elements supported other theories of attachment between the individual with the parents who are the closest human

assets for youth development (Bronfenbrenner, 1969; Theokas & Lerner, 2006). Individuals starting from infants will feel safe when they are attached to the parents (Mercer, 2006).

As children grow older, the attachment behaviour will shift to the figures other than parents (Weiss, 1982). The theory of attachment is applicable to individuals at every level. After parents, peers are the next individuals who will foster relationships with youths in their development. Collaborations with positive peers are important for the psychological development and healthy social life. The role of peers is actually a place of reference such as seeking identity, influencing tendencies and ambitions, evaluating and strengthening their own values as well as to seek advice, strengthen behaviors, solve problems, try new roles, share experiences and to understand the gender differences (Jas Laile Suzana, 2008). In addition, peer attachment also influences individual development through cognitive and social aspects (Azizi & Halimah, 2010; Piaget, 1972) where interactions between youths can speed up their cognitive development as compared to quiet and shy ones. Studies showed the tendency of youths to lean towards peers in early adolescents (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Fuligni et al., 2001). According to Hamzah et al. (2014), peers could influence individuals either towards positive or negative behaviours, however positive relationships with peers would improve their psychological well-being and hence encouraged positive behaviours.

Since both components (parents and peers) are important entities in the closest setting in the individual development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; 1986; 1979; 1977), these variables become very significant in PYD. Developmental studies stated that if the development of youths is in line with their contextual needs where they socialize in, then the 5C attributes in the development of the youth will emerge, and the youths are excluded from high risk behaviours (Roth & Brooks-Gun, 2003a; 2003b; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, Fisher & Weinberg, 2000). The contextual needs are ecological assets that include parents and peers (Theokas & Lerner, 2006). Therefore, parental and peer attachment are theoretically relevant components of PYD (Bowlby, 1982; 1988; Scheneider, Atkinson & Tardif, 2001; Noller, Reerey, & Peterson, 2001) and this study tries to find out the relationships, directions and strengths that exist between parental and peer attachment and PYD.

PYD is not just a perspective (Lerner et al., 2011), and it is applicable to three categories of youth development (tripartite) as proposed by Hamilton (1999): 1) as the natural process of youth development; 2) as a philosophy or approach to youth program, and 3) as the actual implementation of youth programmes. This study applied the first application of the PYD model as a guide to measuring the natural development of youth in community colleges in Malaysia by using the model introduced by Lerner and his colleagues, namely the 5Cs positive youth development (PYD) model. It is the robust youth development framework, having been tested and validated in cross sectional and longitudinal studies on youths especially in the United States (Heck & Subramaniam, 2009; Bowers et al., 2010; Holsen et al., 2016). This study focuses on youths at the community colleges in Malaysia because since their establishment 15 years ago, studies on youth development at community colleges are still lacking and need to be explored. Students at community colleges are youths who are developing naturally and will continue to grow and thrive to be agents, resources and assets (Benson, Scales & Syversten, 2011; Benson et al., 2006; Hamzah, 2005; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Damon, 2004; Lerner,

Dowling & Anderson, 2003; Ginwright & Fames, 2002) in their socialized context. Focusing on 5C as a model and research from parental and peer attachment towards natural development among youth, will contribute to the Developmental Sciences Theory (Lerner et al., 2005) contextually and Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1982) in strengthening the relationship of these two factors towards PYD. In addition, this study as well able to provide information for stakeholders in designing policies and planning programs for the development of youth in Malaysia generally and community colleges particularly.

Youth Development in Malaysia

Youth development in Malaysia is outlined holistically in the Malaysian Youth Policy (2015) which highlights the potentials of the youth-based intelligence (IQ), spiritual intelligence (SQ), emotional intelligence (EQ) and physical intelligence (PQ). The youth development goals in Malaysia are in line with the views of researchers and experts in youth development of the world who prioritize the potentials and talents that exist in the youths and the deficiencies to be resolved (Amodeo, & Collins, 2007; Damon, 2004 ; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2001). The three core elements in the Malaysian youth development model are positive development, development from youths to youths; and youths as a source of the nation's assets. The positive youth development prioritizes the potentials, strengths and talents of youths. These prioritizations are a recent approach which focus more on strengths rather than the deficits the youths possess (Ahmad Huzairi, 2016). The Malaysian Youth Policy is also in line with the 11th Malaysia Plan (RMK-11) that focuses on strengthening and highlighting the potentials among youths as the country's strategic development in human capital which is capable of generating knowledgeable, skilled and positive youths with empowerment in four areas: 1) improving labour market efficiency to increase economic growth; 2) transforming the Technical and Vocational education and Training (TVET) to meet the demand of industries; 3) strengthening lifelong learning to upgrade skills, and; 4) improving the quality of the education system for students' positive outcomes and institutional excellence (Malaysian Eleventh Plan, 2015).

The definition of "youths" in Malaysia which was redefined by the Malaysian Youth Policy (2015) as youths who are between the ages of 15 and 30 years which will be fully implemented in the year 2018. In Malaysia, more than 50% of its 31 million population is dominated by youths (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016). This figure shows the role of more than 50% of Malaysians should be empowered holistically in order to ensure that the development of the country is in line with the youths development programme supported by the ecological assets to ensure the balance and togetherness of the physical, social and economic development. The Malaysian youth policy classifies the youths into three groups, namely the early youths, aged between 15 to 18 years who are still in school. The second group consists of middle-aged youths who are in institutions of higher learning, aged between 19 to 24 years and in the early stages of developing their careers. The third group of youths are those aged between 25 to 30 years and most of them are having careers. The youth development experts also classified youths into three groups ranging from early adolescents (10 to 13 years), middle adolescents (14 to 17 years) and late adolescents (18 to 21 years) who started from immature adolescents

to the stage of maturity (Steinberg , 2010). Hamzah et al., (2007) defined youths as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 and categorizing them into three groups, namely early youths (15 to 20 years), middle youths (21 to 24 years) and late youths (25 to 35 years). In Malaysia, the youths are categorized into 8 target groups to enhance the achievement of the implementation of youth development program to selective target groups. The group comprises of youths at school, youths at higher institutions, youths in careers, youths in groups, youths at large, Malaysian youths abroad, minorities and marginalised youth groups and youths at-risks.

Measurements

Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development was measured by utilizing an adapted survey questionnaire from the instrument developed by Lopez et al., (2014) titled The Bridge-Positive Youth Development. A total of 24 items were selected from the original instrument and were modified. PDY was measured based on items consisting the 5C attributes namely Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Caring & Compassion. The Cronbach Alpha value for the five attributes exceeded 0.7. A 5-point scale was used to quantify the development of positive youth ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Parental and Peer attachment

A survey questionnaire was also utilized to measure parenting and peer familiarity developed by Armsden & Greenberg (1987) known as The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA). The original questionnaire measured three dimensions; trust, communication and isolation. However, this study made use of only two dimensions, namely trust and communication. This is because this study focused on the development of positive youth. The Cronbach Alpha value for the two dimensions was greater than 0.7. Both variables were measured using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was adapted to suit the respondents who were community college students.

Findings

The descriptive analysis of this study started with item verification using the second order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) method based on the structural equation modeling (SEM) for parental attachment and peer attachment. Based on the validity of items, both variables, trust and communication had 6 items each.

The result showed the second order CFA for every variable was consistent with the data as shown in table 1. Goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), root mean square of error approximation (RMSEA) and chi-square minimum (CMIN) for both variables indicated a good fit to the model (Table 1).

Table 1: Second order CFA for every variable with goodness of fit

Goodness of fit / Variables	CMIN	χ^2/df (<5.0)	GFI	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA (<=.08)
Parental attachment	32.144	4.018	0.984	0.979	0.980	0.961	0.067
Peer attachment	10.151	1.269	0.995	0.998	0.998	0.997	0.020

After the validation process, the mean scores for both variables were calculated using the 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Each mean score value was compared to the three levels; low (1.00 - 2.33), moderate (2.34 - 3.67) and high (3.68 - 5.00). Table 2 shows only 2.5% of the respondents had low level parental attachment, while 30.6% had moderate level and 66.9% had high level parental attachment. The findings also showed the average mean score of parental attachment was 3.974 which was high and a standard deviation of 0.649. Overall, the majority of respondents had high levels of parental attachment. Descriptive analysis was conducted also for peer attachment. It showed 1.6% of the respondents had low level of peer attachment, while 41.8% had moderate level and 56.6% had high level of attachment as shown in Table 2. The findings also showed the average mean score for peer attachment was 3.857 which was high and the standard deviation was 0.636. Therefore, as a whole, the majority of respondents had a high level of peer attachment where more than 90% of the respondents indicated moderate and high level peer attachment.

Table 2: Levels of Parental and Peer Attachment

Levels of Every Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Parental Attachment				
Low (1.0 – 2.33)	17	2.5	3.974	0.649
Medium (2.34 – 3.67)	207	30.6		
High (3.68 – 5.00)	453	66.9		
Peer Attachment				
Low (1.0 – 2.33)	11	1.6	3.857	0.636
Medium (2.34 – 3.67)	283	41.8		
High (3.68 – 5.00)	383	56.6		

The next analysis was the determination of the relationship between the two variables with PYD. The second order CFA model was then combined to form the measurement model. From the measurement model, the variables were connected to each other and the result showed the model was consistent with the data where the value of GFI, CFI, TLI, RMSEA and CMIN fulfilled the requirements of the SEM analysis. Figure 1 shows the model of fit and Table 3 summarized the goodness of fit value for measurement model. Every variable was correlated to each other as depicted in Table 3.

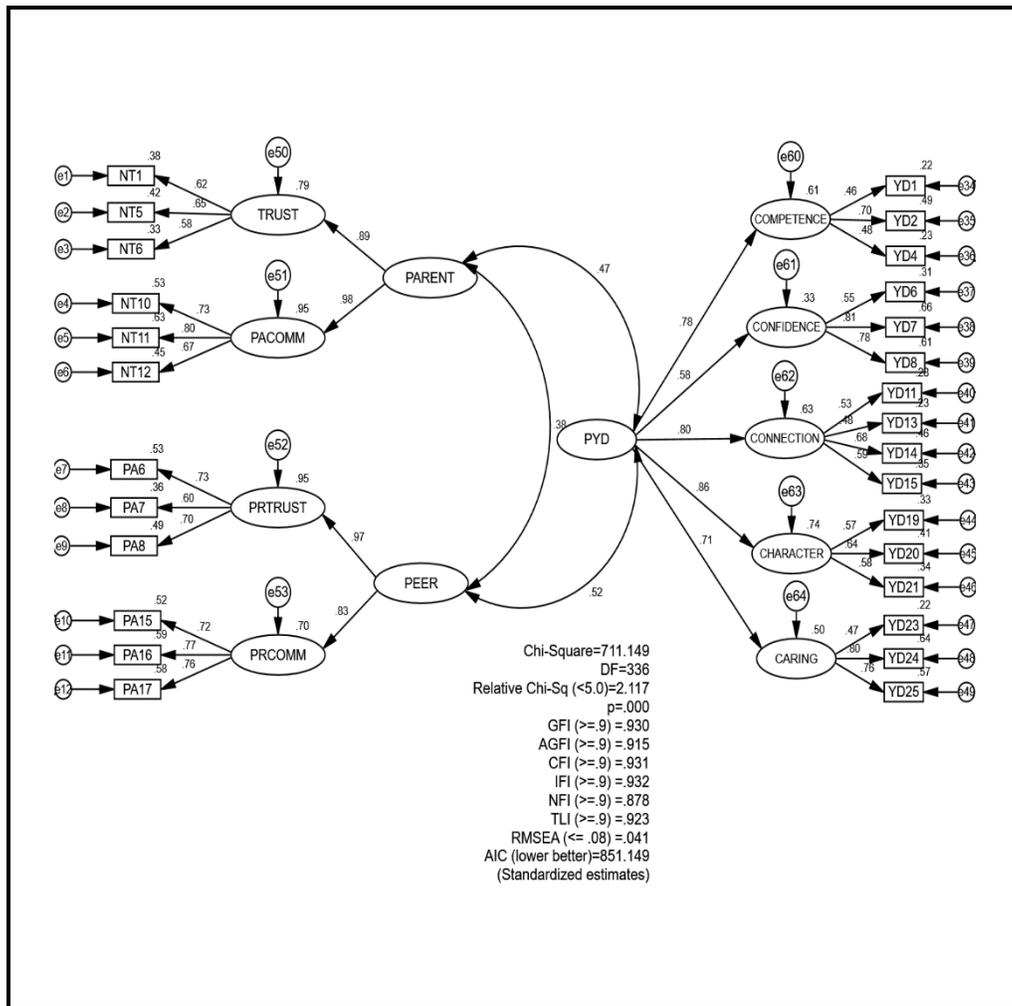


Figure 1: Measurement model of the relationship between parental and peer attachment and PYD

Table 3: Goodness of fit for measurement model

Goodness of fit	CMIN	χ^2/df (<5.0)	GFI	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA (<=.08)
Value	711.149	2.117	0.930	0.915	0.932	0.923	0.041

The result from the measurement model showed the variables were correlated to each other and the *r* value for every variable is indicated in Table 4.

Table 4: The value of *r* between variables

Relationship of Variables	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i> value
Parental attachment \leftrightarrow PYD	0.469	0.000
Peer attachment \leftrightarrow PYD	0.524	0.000

Based on the result in Table 4, the relationship between parental attachment and PYD was moderate but significant while the relationship between peer attachment and PYD was significantly strong.

Discussion

Based on the findings, the level of parental and peer attachment among community college students was very high. This finding was slightly consistent with Hamzah, (2014) findings. It however highlighted the level of parental attachment among university students in Malaysia was high while the level of peer attachment was moderate. Studies on community college students in Malaysia however showed that both levels of parental and peer attachment were high. The high level of both components among community college students proved the human development ecology theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; 1986; 1979; 1977) and the science developmental theory (Lerner et al., 2005) the importance of the two closest components in youth development. In addition, a high level of parental attachment among youths at community colleges showed the role of parents was functioning in the development of youth and the aspects of trust and communication emerged as important elements in developing youths positively (Che Hasniza & Fatimah, 2011).

In addition, the relationship between parental and peer attachment with PYD showed a significant and positive relationship. This finding demonstrated youths who were attached to parents and peers were significantly associated with the 5C attributes in PYD. This means youths who were attached to parents and peers were able to promote positive attributes (competence, confidence, connection, character and caring and computation). This finding was consistent with Kaniušonytė et al., (2014) who found parental monitoring, trust, emotional warmth, absence of alienation and communication with parents were strongly related to the 5C's of PYD. This finding showed trust and communication with parents and peers positively prevented risky behaviors and promoted PYD. In addition, the findings were also in line with the findings by O'Connor et al., (2011) who conducted longitudinal studies on 1158 youths aged between 19 to 20 years in Australia. According to O'Connor and his colleagues, a high level of positive youth development was related to the strength of the relationships between families and peers, and good emotional control. Therefore, youths would develop positively if there was the trust and communication elements between the youths and their parents. Positive trust and communication with peers and monitoring from parents enabled youths to thrive and develop positively.

Conclusion

Some limitations of this study should be highlighted. The items measuring trust and communication were too few and perhaps many details in regard to communication and trust could not be captured. The sample was only limited to community college youths. This study relied on survey questionnaires and hence the views of parents and peers were not taken into account. Perhaps future reseachers may look into these aspects. However in this study both

parental attachment and peer attachment were the contributing factors to PYD and hence concurred with most findings.

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