

## Emotional Intelligence and Self-Esteem Mediate Between Perceived Early Parental Love and Adult Happiness

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### Abstract

This research examined the extent to which perceived parental love is associated with happiness levels in adulthood and investigated whether emotional intelligence and self-esteem mediate this relationship. In a sample of 88 Australian adults, with a mean age of 41.55,  $SD = 12.78$ , perceived parental love predicted adult happiness. Emotional intelligence and self-esteem were related to both perceived parental love and happiness. The relationship between perceived parental love and happiness was mediated by emotional intelligence and self-esteem. When perceived maternal and paternal love were examined separately, maternal love was positively associated with adult happiness with mediation through higher emotional intelligence and self-esteem. While early paternal love had a direct association with adult happiness, there was no mediating effect of self-esteem or emotional intelligence. Also, only maternal love made a unique contribution to predicting adult happiness, suggesting that perceived love received from a mother during childhood may be particularly important to the development of happiness.

**Keywords:** *Emotional intelligence; self-esteem; parental love; happiness*

Few studies have taken into account the impact of the early environment of the child, in particular the influence of parental love or perceived parental love, on later happiness. Further, the variables which may mediate the relationship between perceived parental love and happiness have not been investigated. The aim of the present study was to examine the extent to which perceived parental love is associated with happiness levels in adulthood, and explore whether emotional intelligence and self-esteem mediate this relationship.

### Parental Love

Acts of parental love are many and varied, and include warmth and affection, commitment of resources and time, and self-sacrifice (Buss, 1988). According to Buss, such acts may be linked to reproductive success over generations. To date, more psychological research on love has focused on romantic love and attraction in adolescence and adulthood (e.g., Dion & Dion, 1973; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988; Rubin, 1970) than

on parental love received during childhood. In the parenting literature, much attention has been given to attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969) and parenting style (Baumrind, 1966; Coopersmith, 1967). Concepts such as parental warmth, support, nurturance, care, affection, and closeness are referred to frequently, and are used relatively interchangeably in the literature on parent-child relationships. These concepts fall under the umbrella of the warmth dimension of parenting, and are central elements of parental love (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Research indicates that parents communicate their love, or lack of love, in four major ways: warmth and affection; hostility and aggression; indifference and neglect; or undifferentiated rejection (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001).

Receiving parental love early in life may be linked to positive life outcomes. For example, research indicates that emotional support from parents positively relates to identity achievement during adolescence (Sartor & Youniss, 2002). Forsman (1989) investigated the relationship between parental "unconditional positive regard" and adult self-esteem, and found higher paternal unconditional positive regard was related to higher self-esteem in both adult men and women. However, there was only a small association between maternal unconditional positive regard and self-esteem in women, and this relationship was weaker for younger women than older women.

Reports of higher parental support are associated with fewer psychological and physical symptoms in adolescence (Wickrama, Lorenz, & Conger, 1997). Adolescents who rate their parents high on parental support feel cared for, loved, and valued: feelings that can be internalized (Ross, Mirowsky, & Goldsteen, 1990). Research by Shaw, Krause, Chatters, Connell, and Ingersoll-Dayton (2004) explored the relationship between receiving parental love (parental emotional support) early in life and an individual's physical and mental health in adulthood. Parental emotional support was defined as "*gestures or acts of caring, acceptance, and assistance that are expressed by a parent toward a child*" (Shaw et al., 2004, p. 4). Results suggested that a lack of parental emotional support during childhood is associated with increased levels of depressive

symptoms and chronic health problems in adulthood, which continue to persist with increasing age. Poor personal control, self-esteem, and social relationships during adulthood accounted for a significant proportion of the relationship between a lack of early parental support and adult depressive symptoms in later life.

## Happiness

Happiness may have three distinct components: the frequency and degree of joy, the average level of life satisfaction over a given period, and an absence of negative feelings (Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989). A widely used assessment tool, the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) (Argyle et al., 1989) is a measure of global happiness that derives from this conceptualization.

An alternative, though not contradictory, model of happiness was developed by Seligman (2002). In this model components of happiness are positive emotion and pleasure, engagement (with family, friends, romantic partners, career, and hobbies), and meaning (contributing to 'the bigger picture'); of these three components, pleasure is held to be the least significant in creating a happy life. Recent research lends support to this idea, showing an orientation to pleasure is not as strong a predictor of life satisfaction as engagement or meaning (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). Further, people tend to adapt quickly to positive events in their lives, and return to their baseline level of happiness (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996).

In searching for answers to what constitutes happiness and how it develops, many studies have focused on personality trait correlates of happiness (Argyle & Lu, 1990; Brebner, Donaldson, Kirby, & Ward, 1995; Furnham & Brewin, 1990; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), with happiness often being described as overlapping with stable extraversion (e.g., Francis, Brown, Lester, & Philipchalk, 1998). The general influence of genetics on human behaviour has lead scientists to explore the role genes play in determining one's happiness, with findings suggesting that about 50% of the variation in happiness levels is due to genetic predispositions (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Lykken & Tellegen, 1996).

Other research has explored the importance of relationships, and found that satisfying social relationships are a major factor in the development of lasting happiness (Argyle et al., 1989). Marriage has been found to be associated with greater well-being for both sexes, with women reporting slightly more favourable outcomes than men (Wood, Rhodes, & Whelan, 1989). Furthermore, surveys have consistently found religious faith to be associated with greater happiness (Inglehart, 1990).

Material wealth has been much studied and research shows personal income is important in predicting

happiness up to a point, however once basic needs are met, additional income adds little to happiness and satisfaction with life (Inglehart, 1990). Further, strong economic growth does not seem to increase societal happiness levels (Myers, 2000).

Demographic correlates of happiness are complex, and do not seem to consistently distinguish the happy from the unhappy. In a recent study, Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) reported older people were happier ( $r = 0.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and less depressed ( $r = -0.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than the young. However, no stage in life has been identified as consistently being the happiest or most satisfying (Myers & Diener, 1995). Gender differences in well-being and happiness have also been explored, with mixed results. In an extensive review of the literature Diener (1984) concluded there was no mean difference overall between men and women in reported levels of positive well-being.

Surprisingly, parenting variables have received relatively little attention in the happiness literature. Research by Furnham and Cheng (2000) explored the extent to which parental rearing styles (authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive), personality, and self-esteem predicted happiness levels. Results suggested that self-esteem was both a direct predictor and mediator variable of young people's self-reported happiness. Maternal authoritativeness was the only direct predictor of happiness when maternal and paternal rearing styles were examined together. Research by Cheng and Furnham (2004) examined the effects of specific parental rearing styles (labelled care, discouragement of behavioural freedom, and denial of psychological autonomy), self-criticism, and self-esteem on self-reported happiness in young people. They found that self-esteem was again the most important correlate of happiness. Maternal care was the only direct correlate of happiness when maternal and paternal rearing styles were examined together.

Amato (1994) found that emotional closeness to parents significantly predicted offspring happiness and life satisfaction, with both mother and father making unique contributions to offspring happiness and life satisfaction. Similar research showed that perceived parental support significantly predicts adolescent life satisfaction (Young, Miller, Norton, & Hill, 1995). Three elements of parental support – intrinsic, extrinsic, and closeness - were assessed in the study, with intrinsic support being identified as the strongest predictor of life satisfaction. Intrinsic support was conceptualized as encouragement, appreciation, being satisfied with the child, trust, and love.

## Possible Mediating Effects of Emotional Intelligence and Self-Esteem

Emotional intelligence has been defined as the ability to adaptively identify, understand, manage, and harness emotions both in the self and others (Salovey & Mayer,

1990; Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, & Dornheim, 1998) and to use emotion to facilitate cognitive processing (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). Emotional intelligence has been conceptualized in the literature both as a relatively enduring trait and as an ability (Mayer et al., 1999; Petrides & Furnham, 2003; Schutte et al., 1998).

Research suggests that higher emotional intelligence is associated with better psychological functioning. Several studies have found that high emotional intelligence is related to greater well-being (Austin, Saklofske, & Egan, 2005; Palmer, Donaldson, & Stough, 2002). Other studies have found high emotional intelligence to be associated with less depression (Schutte et al., 1998), greater optimism (Schutte et al., 1998), the ability to repair moods (Schutte et al., 1998), and characteristic positive mood and high self-esteem (Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, & Hollander, 2002). Interpersonal relations have also been explored, and higher scores for emotional intelligence have been found to be associated with higher empathic perspective taking and self-monitoring in social situations, higher social skills, more cooperative responses toward partners, and more loving and affectionate relationships (Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston, Greeson, Jedlicka, Rhodes, & Wendorf, 2001). Marital satisfaction tends to be greater when partners are higher on emotional intelligence (Schutte et al., 2001).

Receiving parental love during childhood is associated with the development of higher emotional intelligence. Research on attachment orientations and emotional intelligence abilities suggests secure attachment is positively related to the facilitation, understanding, and management of emotions, and total emotional intelligence scores for both males and females (Kafetsios, 2004). Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (1999) found that adolescents with higher emotional intelligence reported their parents showing more warmth.

Self-esteem has been described as the affective or evaluative appraisal of the self; in other words, how much a person likes or dislikes his or her self (Baumeister, 1993). High self-esteem indicates a person has self-respect, a sense of self-worth, value, and a feeling that “*you are glad you are you*” (Corkille Briggs, 1970, p. 3).

Various studies have found high self-esteem is linked to better overall functioning. For example, Rogers (1959) found self-esteem to be associated with adaptive personality functioning. Self-esteem is also positively associated with subjective well-being (Diener & Diener, 1995) and satisfying social relationships (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Low self-esteem is associated with depression (Tennen & Herzberger, 1987), loneliness (Jones, Freemon, & Goswick, 1981), and anxiety (Brockner, 1984).

Research suggests parents play a vital role in the development of self-esteem (e.g. Buri, 1989; Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, & Mueller, 1988; Klein, O’Bryant, & Hopkins, 1996). Coopersmith (1967) conducted a study with fifth and sixth grade boys, and found authoritarian parenting was related to low-self esteem. The study also found that firm control, when combined with warmth and a democratic style of decision making (authoritative style), was associated with high self-esteem. In other research, children perceived authoritative parents as being supportive and nurturing (Baumrind, 1966).

Research by Hopkins and Klein (1993) suggested that parental nurturance is positively associated with global self-worth in college students ( $r = 0.33, p < .001$ ), with a greater proportion of women’s global self-worth being explained by perceived parental nurturance. These authors defined parental nurturance as parental warmth, love, acceptance, support, and concern. The present study aims to re-examine the relationship between perceived parental love and global self-esteem, and extends previous research by using a larger age range of participants.

In light of research linking self-esteem and emotional intelligence to better social and psychological functioning, together with research suggesting parents play a vital role in the development of self-esteem, and some evidence that loving parenting is linked to later emotional intelligence, one might expect a significant proportion of the relationship between early parental love and adult happiness to be mediated by self-esteem and emotional intelligence.

The study examined the following hypotheses:

1. Greater perceived parental love is associated with higher (a) emotional intelligence, (b) self-esteem, and (c) happiness in adulthood.
2. Higher emotional intelligence and self-esteem are associated with greater happiness.
3. Emotional intelligence and self-esteem mediate the relationship between parental love and adult happiness.

## Method

### Participants

Eighty-eight adults were recruited from among the general population of Canberra, in the Australian Capital Territory and a country town in New South Wales, Australia, to participate in the study. Participants were recruited from workplace settings, such as retail stores and a health care centre, and users of services such as parents of children at a day care centre. The 88 participants represent a 35.20% response rate of those originally contacted. The average age of participants was 41.55 ( $SD = 12.78$ ).

Sixty-five participants were women, 22 were men, and one did not report gender.

## Measures

**The Early Parental Support Scale (EPS)** The EPS (Shaw et al., 2004) consists of two subscales of 6 identical items that assess the perceived availability of love and emotional support from each participant's parents during childhood. These 6 items were derived from the 12 "care" items of the Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979). The first subscale asks the participants to answer the questions with reference to their mother (or the female who was responsible for raising the participant), while the second subscale is answered with reference to the participant's father (or the male who was responsible for raising the participant). Sample items include: "How much did she/he understand your problems and worries?"; "How much could you confide in her/him about things that were bothering you?"; "How much love and affection did she/he give you?" As well as providing subscale scores, the measure provides an overall score derived from the sum of all 12 items. A 4-point Likert scale is used to rate the items (1) not at all, (2) a little, (3) some, and (4) a lot. High scores on the EPS indicate high parental love during childhood. This measure of early parental love has demonstrated an internal consistency reliability of 0.90 for the mother subscale, and 0.92 for the father subscale (Shaw et al., 2004). The Parental Bonding Instrument, from which the EPS is derived, has good evidence of concurrent, construct, and predictive validity (Parker et al., 1979).

**The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale** The Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item measure designed to measure global feelings of self-acceptance and self-worth. The 10 items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from (1) strongly agree to (4) strongly disagree. High scores indicate low self-esteem. This measure has a demonstrated test-retest reliability of 0.85 and an internal consistency reliability of 0.88 (Rosenberg, 1965). It has strong evidence of concurrent, construct, and predictive validity (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

**Emotional Intelligence Scale** The Assessing Emotions Scale (Schutte et al., 1998) is a 33-item scale that assesses how well respondents identify, understand, regulate, and harness emotions both in themselves and others. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. High scores indicate high emotional intelligence. This scale has demonstrated internal consistency of between 0.87 and 0.90 and a two-week test-retest reliability of 0.78 (Schutte et al., 1998). Validity has been demonstrated, with emotional intelligence scores being related to characteristics such as clarity of feeling, mood repair, optimism, and lack of depressed affect; predicting college students' grades in their first year; differentiating between groups one would expect to differ on emotional intelligence; and showing evidence of discriminant validity (Schutte et al., 1998).

**The Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI)** The OHI (Argyle et al., 1989) is a 29-item questionnaire used to measure general happiness levels, with sub-categories of personal achievement, enjoyment and fun in life, and vigour and health (Furnham & Brewin, 1990). Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. High scores on the OHI are indicative of high happiness. The OHI has a Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.90 and a test-retest reliability of 0.78 over 7 weeks and 0.67 over 5 months (Argyle et al., 1989). Friends' ratings of participants' happiness correlate at 0.43 with scale scores. Validity evidence includes correlations of 0.40 to 0.60 with three dimensions of happiness, positive affect, life satisfaction, and negative affect and distress (Argyle et al., 1989).

Participants in the present study responded anonymously and returned completed questionnaires in self-addressed and postage paid envelopes.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Two participants were missing data for questions about their father and were subsequently excluded from the analyses. All other missing values were replaced by the mean for all participants for that question. The happiness variable was moderately negatively skewed with one univariate outlier. This variable was reflected and a square root transformation applied. The transformed variable was normally distributed. By using Mahalanobis distance with  $p < .001$ , one multivariate outlier was identified and subsequently removed. Eighty-five cases remained for analysis.

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations for each of the four measures and age for men and women. There were no significant differences between men and women for any of the main variables. It is interesting to note that both men,  $t(21) = 3.63, p = .002$ , and women,  $t(61) = 6.21, p < .001$ , reported receiving significantly more love and affection from their mother than from their father during childhood.

### Main Analyses

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested through single order Pearson's  $r$  correlations between the main variables for the 85 participants. Table 2 shows the results of these analyses. Higher scores for perceived parental love (total and both maternal and paternal) were significantly associated with higher self-esteem and happiness. Total parental love and maternal love were significantly positively associated with emotional intelligence, while paternal love was not significantly associated with emotional intelligence. Higher self-esteem and emotional intelligence were significantly associated with greater happiness.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and independent t-values of early parental love (EPS), self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and happiness for men ( $N = 22$ ) and women ( $N = 62$ ).

Measures	Males		Females		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Age	43.18	10.73	40.98	13.44	-0.69
EPS					
Parents	33.14	6.50	34.74	8.14	0.83
Mother	18.09	3.01	19.03	4.04	1.00
Father	15.05	4.46	15.77	4.99	0.60
Self-esteem	16.50	4.94	17.56	5.31	0.82
Emotional intelligence	126.32	12.34	125.9	15.98	-0.10
Happiness	171.64	18.04	168.41	28.44	-0.50

Note. All *t*'s are non-significant.

Table 2: Correlations of major study variables.

Measures	Self-esteem	Emotional intelligence	Happiness
EPS			
Parents	-0.29**	0.23*	0.34**
Mother	-0.33**	0.24*	0.37***
Father	-0.21*	0.17	0.26**
Self-esteem		-0.54***	-0.77***
Emotional intelligence			0.69***

Note. Low scores on self-esteem scale indicate higher self-esteem.

Happiness = square root of reflected happiness scores.  $N = 85$ , \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Multiple regression using criteria outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) for mediation analysis tested the hypothesis that the relationship between early parental love and happiness is mediated by self-esteem. The results are shown in the first Column of Table 3. Parental love (maternal and paternal love together) significantly predicted scores on self-esteem, therefore Step 1 in mediation analysis was satisfied.

In the second regression equation, (square root of reflected) happiness was regressed on total parental love. The results showed that early parental love significantly predicted happiness, ( $B = .097$ ,  $SE B = .029$ ,  $\beta = .342$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 12\%$ ), therefore the second step in mediation analysis was satisfied.

In the third regression equation, happiness was regressed on both early parental love and self-esteem (see Table 4) and the semi-partial correlations were examined. The results showed that self-esteem was significantly associated with happiness after parental love was taken into account, therefore Step 3 in mediation analysis was also satisfied.

Step four of the analysis showed that the association between early total parental love and happiness was

reduced when the predicted mediator of self-esteem was taken into account. To test the significance of a mediating relationship, the indirect effect was divided by the standard error. The formula provided by Sobel (1982) was used to calculate the standard error of the indirect effect. Using this formula a *z* score greater than  $\pm 1.96$  is significant at the .05 level (Howell, 1997). Evidence of a significant indirect effect from parental love to self-esteem to happiness was indicated by a *z* score of 2.61,  $p < .05$ , significantly different from zero. As the relationship between parental love and happiness was no longer significant when self-esteem was taken into account, there was some evidence for a full mediating effect for self-esteem.

The regression equations were repeated with emotional intelligence as the mediator. In the first regression equation, early parental love (maternal and paternal love together) significantly predicted emotional intelligence, as seen in the second column of Table 3. Therefore, Step 1 of the mediation analysis was satisfied. Parental love was shown in the preceding analysis to significantly predict (square root of reflected) happiness, therefore Step 2 was also met.

Table 3: Regression of early parental love on self-esteem and emotional intelligence.

	Self-esteem	Emotional intelligence
EPS		
Parents		
<i>B</i>	-.194	.438
<i>SE B</i>	.070	.207
$\beta$	-.290**	.226*
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.084	.051
Mother		
<i>B</i>	-.450	.963
<i>SE B</i>	.142	.421
$\beta$	-.329**	.243*
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.108	.059
Father		
<i>B</i>	-.220	.527
<i>SE B</i>	.115	.335
$\beta$	-.206	.170
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.042	.029

*N* = 85, \* *p* < .05, \*\* *p* < .01.

Table 4: Regression of happiness on early parental love (EPS) and self-esteem.

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>
EPS				
Parents	.037	.020	.128	.015
Self-esteem	-.313	.031	-.736***	.497
Variance explained	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .613			
EPS				
Mother	.075	.042	.128	.015
Self-esteem	-.311	.031	-.731***	.477
Variance explained	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .613			
EPS				
Father	.046	.032	.102	.010
Self-esteem	-.320	.030	-.752***	.542
Variance explained	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .608			

*N* = 85, \*\*\* *p* < .001.

Table 5: Regression of happiness on early parental love and emotional intelligence.

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>sr</i> <sup>2</sup>
EPS				
Parents	.056	.023	.197*	.037
Emotional intelligence	.094	.012	.641***	.389
Variance explained	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .506			
EPS				
Mother	.125	.046	.215**	.043
Emotional intelligence	.093	.012	.633***	.377
Variance explained	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .513			
EPS				
Father	.066	.036	.144	.020
Emotional intelligence	.097	.012	.661***	.424
Variance explained	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .490			

*N* = 85, \* *p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01. \*\*\* *p* < .001

In the third regression equation, happiness was regressed on both early parental love and emotional intelligence (see Table 5). Emotional intelligence was significantly associated with happiness, therefore Step 3 was satisfied.

The association between parental love and happiness was reduced when emotional intelligence was included. The mediating effect of emotional intelligence,  $z = 2.05$ ,  $p < .05$ , was significantly different from zero. Therefore, there was a significant indirect effect from parental love to emotional intelligence to happiness. However, the effect involved only partial mediation because a significant direct path remained from early parental love to happiness.

### Supplementary Analyses

In order to distinguish between the effects of maternal love and paternal love in predicting adult happiness (mediated through self-esteem and emotional intelligence), each variable was assessed separately in the three regression equations. The results of regressing self-esteem and emotional intelligence on maternal and paternal love separately are shown in Table 3. Maternal love was significantly associated with both self-esteem and emotional intelligence, therefore Step 1 in mediation analysis was satisfied. The associations between paternal love and both self-esteem and emotional intelligence were non-significant.

The results of regressing happiness on maternal and paternal love (entered separately) showed that both maternal love, ( $B = .215$ ,  $SE B = .059$ ,  $\beta = .369$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = 14\%$ ) and paternal love, ( $B = .117$ ,  $SE B = .048$ ,  $\beta = .257$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = 7\%$ ) significantly predicted happiness, therefore Step 2 in mediation analysis was satisfied. Both self-esteem (see Table 4) and emotional intelligence (see Table 5) were significantly associated with happiness when maternal and paternal love were controlled, therefore Step 3 was satisfied.

The association between maternal love and happiness was reduced when self-esteem was included. This mediating effect of self-esteem, ( $z = 2.8$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was significantly different from zero. This provides evidence of a significant indirect effect from maternal love to self-esteem to happiness. The association between maternal love and happiness was reduced when emotional intelligence was included. The mediating effect of emotional intelligence, ( $z = 2.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was significantly different from zero. This provided evidence of a significant indirect effect from maternal love to emotional intelligence to happiness. Neither self-esteem nor emotional intelligence was found to mediate the relationship between paternal love and happiness, as Step 1 in mediation analysis was not satisfied for paternal love.

To assess the unique contribution of both maternal and paternal love in predicting happiness, both variables were entered simultaneously into the regression equation. Maternal love made a significant unique contribution to happiness ( $B = .195$ ,  $SE B = .074$ ,  $\beta = .335$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $sr^2 = 7\%$ ), paternal love was not significant. Thus, paternal love did not add to predicting variance in happiness over and above variance predicted by maternal love.

### Discussion

The present study found that, as hypothesized, greater perceived parental love was associated with higher emotional intelligence. This result extends earlier research by Mayer et al., (1999), which indicated that high emotional intelligence is associated with high parental warmth. Separate analyses of perceived maternal and paternal love showed that higher perceived maternal love was associated with higher emotional intelligence but that the association between paternal love and emotional intelligence was non-significant. These findings suggest that maternal love may be particularly beneficial in enhancing the emotional intelligence of offspring.

The results of the present study showed that, as hypothesized, greater perceived parental love (both maternal and paternal) was associated with higher self-esteem and happiness in adulthood. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that parental nurturance is positively associated with global self-worth in college students (Hopkins & Klein, 1993), and similar studies showing that parental care and support are positively associated with happiness in adolescents and young adults (Amato, 1994; Cheng & Furnham, 2004; Furnham & Cheng, 2000; Young et al., 1995).

As hypothesized, both higher emotional intelligence and higher self-esteem were associated with greater happiness. The strong association between emotional intelligence and happiness is congruent with previous research that has found emotional intelligence to be related to well-being (Austin, Saklofske, & Egan, 2005; Palmer, Donaldson, & Stough, 2002). The finding that self-esteem was a strong correlate of happiness is consistent with previous research (Cheng & Furnham, 2004; Furnham & Cheng, 2000).

The results of the present study indicated that a significant portion of the relationship between perceived parental love and happiness may be due to parental love's association with self-esteem and emotional intelligence. However, when perceived parental love is examined separately for maternal love and paternal love, it appears that mothers' and fathers' influences on happiness in the offspring's adult life may be different. In the present study, both perceived maternal and paternal love were significantly associated with the level of happiness in children's adult lives. But

only maternal love was significantly associated with happiness via that love's positive association with self-esteem and emotional intelligence. These results lend support to the idea that adults who receive love and support from their mothers early in life tend to have higher self-esteem and higher emotional intelligence. These latter qualities may then further enhance people's ability to create and maintain a happy and more fulfilling lifestyle. Therefore, as the results from this study suggest, perceived early maternal love has direct and indirect effects on happiness in adulthood, a finding in agreement with work by Cheng and Furnham (2004). In contrast, while perceived early paternal love had a direct association with adult happiness, there was no indirect effect via self-esteem or emotional intelligence. This result is unexpected and inconsistent with previous research that found paternal care predicts happiness mediated through positive self-evaluation (Cheng & Furnham, 2004).

In evaluating the results of the present study, several limitations should be considered. First, the impact of retrospective memory bias on the long-term recall of early experiences is an established concern in psychology. Given the relatively older age of the present sample, some participants may have found it difficult to remember the conditions of their childhood. Also, social influences and fear of the consequences of disclosure (even to one's self) may adversely affect recall (Brewin, Andrews, & Gotlib, 1993). Research on the accuracy of memories from early childhood is inconsistent. Some evidence suggests claims about the unreliable nature of retrospective reports are exaggerated, with the central characteristics of personally significant events or experiences being remembered with reasonable accuracy (Brewin et al., 1993). Also, Forsman (1989) suggested the validity of retrospective accounts of early childhood experiences may actually increase with time due to psychological maturity and personal development, whereby adults, as opposed to adolescents, have a more balanced and objective view of their parents' parenting.

One possible strategy to improve the reliability of retrospective reports is to obtain reports from other individuals, such as siblings, which may provide a more balanced account of childhood experiences. However, one must use caution when interpreting these accounts because other informants may also be susceptible to bias and error (Brewin et al., 1993). Utilizing independent observations of parental behaviour, as in the study by Wickrama et al. (1997), may strengthen confidence in the results. However, one could argue that it is the perceptions of the participants' experiences in early childhood, not what other people may observe to be the case, which have the greatest impact on the individual and therefore provide researchers with the most valuable data and the information researchers actually want. Also, as was the case in the present study, using reliable and valid measures and ensuring

the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants, will strengthen confidence in the findings from retrospective reports.

As with all correlational studies, it is not possible to know the direction of causality between the study variables. Additionally, other factors that were not tested in the present study may underlie covariation of variables. By conducting future longitudinal or experimental studies, more information regarding causality may be obtained.

Often researchers use constructs such as warmth, affection, unconditional positive regard, emotional support, and closeness relatively interchangeably in the parenting literature. However, it is unclear whether these factors (or other related constructs) have similar effects on offspring well-being and the development of attributes such as emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and happiness. Future studies need to clarify whether, for example, the *unconditional* quality of parental love exhibits a similar effect.

The results of the present study suggest possible additional research avenues. For example, what are the unique characteristics of maternal love that are associated with the development of emotional intelligence? Of particular interest is the impact of not only the quantity of maternal love, but also the quality. Does the current relationship with parents affect individuals' early recollections of their parents' parenting? Future research aimed at controlling the effects of current relationships with parents would help to answer this question. Future research could also profitably examine the degree to which various sources of support in the community, whether from a grandparent or family friend, differ in relation to the love from a biological parent, and how this may affect emotional intelligence and happiness. Further, investigations of the role and influence of parental love in single parent families, divided families, and mixed families are promising research avenues.

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