Adolescent Closeness to Parents and Young Adult Global Self-esteem: the Moderating Role of Natural Mentoring Relationship

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Abstract

Theories suggest that relationships play an important role in self-esteem. Close relationships with parents during adolescence revealed direct and long-term effects on self-esteem. The past research demonstrated that a natural mentor significantly positively affected adolescents’ psychological outcomes. Whether it directly influences psychological well-being or is a protective factor for at-risk youths, a greater likelihood of favorable outcomes was demonstrated when adolescents are close to their parents or have natural mentoring relationships. However, there has been a gap in the literature about the moderating role of the natural mentoring relationships (NMRs) between closeness to parents and children’s global self-esteem. To better understand how different relationships affect youth’s self-esteem, the current study addressed this gap by using The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent and Adult Health to investigate the moderating role of natural mentoring relationships and the characteristics (duration of relationship and closeness to mentor). The results showed favorable outcomes. Results replicated previous findings in the significant correlation between closeness to parents and the natural mentoring relationship on self-esteem. In the relationship between closeness to parents during adolescence and global self-esteem in adulthood, having a natural mentor predicted more favorable outcomes in global self-esteem with closeness to mother. Further analyses did not find significant moderating effects of closeness to mentor and duration of mentorship. Thus, the results emphasized the importance of close relationships during adolescence self-esteem development—especially having natural mentoring relationships.

Keywords: natural mentoring relationship, closeness to parents, global self-esteem, moderation analysis, secondary data analysis
ADOLESCENT CLOSENESS TO PARENTS AND YOUNG ADULT GLOBAL SELF-ESTEEM:
THE MODERATING ROLE OF NATURAL MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

by

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Introduction

Throughout the study of the development of children, the parent-child relationship has been acknowledged as one of the most influential human relationships (Fang et al., 2021). Scholars have shown parent-child relationship as a key to various developmental outcomes of children. Theories have informed the study of parent-child relationships. Attachment theory suggests that young children who develop secure and healthy attachments with parents in the early stages of life have a better chance of developing healthy relationships with others later in life (Beckwith et al., 2003; Dykas et al., 2011). Good attachment with parents also promotes emotional regulation and development (Beckwith et al., 2003). Parents’ active participation and intervention lay the foundation for children’s social and academic success (Obiakor, 2010). Furthermore, the relationship with parents is the nurturing ground for children in physical, emotional, social, and mental health (Beckwith et al., 2003; Dykas et al., 2011). As children age, adolescents maintain parental attachments they develop early in life into late adolescence and maintain a stable parental closeness in transition to adulthood (Fang et al., 2021). The transference of interpersonal social-cognitive theory postulates that the attachment patterns developed earlier in life are likely to carry over to new relationships in the future (Andersen & Chen, 2002).

Aside from attachment, good parent-child relationship quality has led to higher global self-esteem. Closeness, for example, was one of the ways researchers measured parent-child relationship qualities (Van Houdt et al., 2020). Having close relationships with parents is beneficial for children and adolescents’ psychological well-being (Amato, 1994). On the contrary, lower closeness to parents was associated with negative child outcomes, such as loneliness, depressive symptoms, and poor social skills (Birkeland et al., 2014).
Adolescence is a challenging developmental period that goes through many changes (Harris et al., 2015). Evidence showed that closeness to parents might decrease from middle to late adolescence as they spend less time with parents (Fang et al., 2021). Despite wanting to be independent, parents still remained the primary resources for support throughout late adolescence and young adulthood (Fang et al., 2021). This reflected the importance of parental closeness in adolescent development. Research has found measurement differences between children’s self-reports of closeness to parents and parents’ reports of closeness to their children (Van Houdt et al., 2020). Parents, especially fathers, tend to overestimate their closeness with children (Van Houdt et al., 2020). In the current study, adolescents’ reports were incorporated to measure closeness to parents.

As adolescents begin to seek independence from their parents and still desire adult guidance and validation, mentoring relationships are especially vital to their development (Liang et al., 2016). Mentoring relationship is a one-on-one relationship between a more experienced individual (an older person, the mentor) and a less experienced individual (the protégé) to provide support, guidance, and opportunities to the protégé (Jacobi, 1991). Mentoring relationship as a form of social support is important for child development. When a caring adult is present, it could make a difference in a young person’s life, deciding whether he/she will stay in school or drop out or choosing between healthy decisions and risky behaviors (Bruce & John, 2014). Mentoring research, in general, has found that youths who had mentors experienced better psychological well-being, less risky behaviors, better academic achievements, and better career outcomes later in life (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014; Karcher, 2005a; Liang, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002). Mentoring relationships can be divided into formal and natural mentoring.
relationships. Due to different conceptualizations, natural mentoring relationships have not been widely explored.

Out of many developmental factors, global self-esteem has received much attention in the research on child development. Global self-esteem is the positive and negative feelings someone has toward oneself as a whole that feature self-acceptance and/or self-respect (Rosenberg et al., 1995). As children age, many changes happen at different levels during adolescence (Harris et al., 2015). There has been considerable evidence that one’s global self-esteem is associated with physical and mental health (Orth & Robins, 2014; Orth et al., 2012; Steiger et al., 2014). Life-span development and self-esteem studies suggested that self-esteem was a cause of various life outcomes (Orth et al., 2012). For example, men and women of all ages suffer from depression with low self-esteem (Orth et al., 2012). Longitudinal research has shown that adolescents with lower self-esteem are more likely to experience depression, poor health, and economic hardship in adulthood (Steiger et al., 2014).

Considerable research has shown that self-esteem is derived from relationships with people (Murray et al., 2000; Miele, 2016; Orth et al., 2012; Orth & Robins, 2014; Pinto et al., 2015; Schwartz et al., 2012). In the promotion and protection research of self-esteem, close relationships like parent-child and mentoring have shown positive correlations. On the one hand, secure attachment relationships between adolescents and parents promote global self-esteem (Keizer et al., 2019). On the other hand, mentoring relationship studies have found that higher self-esteem was associated with the presence of natural mentoring relationships among adolescents and young adults (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005b; Schwartz et al., 2012). Different mentoring characteristics (i.e., closeness to mentor) also inform higher self-esteem (DuBois &
Silverthorn, 2005a). Nevertheless, the fluctuation of self-esteem and parent-child relationships makes adolescence a challenging and critical developmental period to study (Harris et al., 2015)

**Problem Statement**

A considerable amount of research has been conducted to understand better closeness to parents to self-esteem and the mentoring relationship to self-esteem. Cross-sectional studies have consistently supported the positive effect of parental closeness on the development of adolescent self-esteem (Amato, 1994; Bulanda & Majumdar, 2009; Mattanah, Lopez, & Govern, 2011). Some longitudinal studies have examined the effect of natural mentoring relationships on global self-esteem (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005b, 2005a; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014). Some research has addressed the moderating role of general mentoring relationships and adverse children’s outcomes (Drevon et al., 2018; Rhodes et al., 1994a; Scanlon et al., 2019). Previous evidence has stressed the importance of relationships in self-esteem. However, few studies have explored multiple important relationships together. Moreover, the longitudinal design of close parent-child relationship and global self-esteem needs more testing. Therefore, the current study enriches the field by exploring the moderating role of natural mentoring relationships between closeness to parents and global self-esteem in adolescents and young adults.

**Theoretical Framework**

In the exploration of literature, the lack of theory mentioned in research made it challenging to establish a theoretical framework for this study. The following theories were selected because they were either supported by relevant literature or fit the intention of the current subject of matter.

**Attachment Theory**
Attachment theory was developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (1991). The foundational aspect of attachment theory is the human instinct for attachment, the need for closeness to a loving figure (parents or primary caregivers). The theory suggests that self-esteem develops from a secure parent-child relationship that facilitates self-worth and feelings of importance (Harris et al., 2015). Moreover, the desire for attachment extends beyond infancy into other relational bonds throughout the human life cycle (Ainsworth, 1989). Attachment theory has been widely used as a framework in parent-child relationship research (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2009; Keizer et al., 2019; Mattanah et al., 2011; Orth et al., 2012). Studies under this framework often considered that children who have good attachment relationships with their parents might lead to beneficial outcomes. This effect is a long-lasting effect on children’s self-esteem (Keizer et al., 2019; Mattanah et al., 2011).

Inspired by this theory, different lines of research sprouted at almost every step of human life. For adolescents, the emotional security suggested by attachment theory provided by a few primary attachment figures throughout the lifetime adventure serves as support when things are not going well (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991). Knowing someone is always there for you take the edge off loneliness and fear of failing. Unlike infant attachment, adolescent attachment research uses self-report, interview-based methods, or parent-report measures to identify attachment relationships (Mattanah et al., 2011). Different age groups likely have differences in parent-child attachment dynamics. As one of the attachment features, closeness is often used to measure parent-adolescent attachment/relationship. The current study used closeness to mother and father as predictor variables.

The developmental context of adolescents and young adults may describe various attachment relationships. Adolescents face multiple developmental pressures. Behaviors like
relationship building and seeking social support are ways of coping with such stress (Mattanah et al., 2011). Mentoring relationships provide meaningful isolated interactions featuring long-term support and foster trusting relationships that may only be achieved during a specific period of time (Dubois & Karcher, 2005). Besides parents, closeness to a mentor is an important component of mentoring relationships (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005a). Closeness to mentor was one of the predictor variables in the current study.

Social Support Theory

Besides parental support, mentoring support serves as a form of social support for adolescents. Previous literature showed little clarity in defining the relationship type, the kind of interactions, and the recipients’ actual needs for support in social support theory (Hupcey, 1998). Though the lack of specificity, the common denominator of social support implied vaguely some form of positive interaction or helpful behavior directed towards a person in need of support (Hupcey, 1998). As a metaconstruct, social support could not be studied under a single or simple definition (Hupcey, 1998). Hupcey (1998) proposed five categories in examining the theoretical definition of social support, and two of them seemed appropriate for this study: the type of support provided and recipients’ perceptions.

The first one is the type of support provided. In Hupcey’s words of Cobb’s definition, “…information leading a person to believe that he/she is cared for and loved, esteemed and valued, and/or that he/she belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation.” (1998 p. 2). This definition aligns with the conceptualization of the natural mentoring relationship. The second one is the recipients’ perception. It was defined as “…the extent to which an individual believes that his/her needs for support, information, and feedback are fulfilled” by Procidano and
Heller (Hupcey, 1998, p. 2). It is safe to assume that establishing such relationships is based on recipients’ needs and the need to fulfill those needs for natural mentoring relationships.

**Interpersonal Social-Cognitive Theory**

The interpersonal social-cognitive theory was proposed by Andersen and Chen (2002). This theory was guided by the social-cognitive model of transference, which referred to the relationship experiences and past assumptions that significant others will reappear in new relationships (Andersen & Chen, 2002). The interpersonal social-cognitive theory states the relationship between self and specific other individuals, the significant others. Furthermore, the relationship is distinct from the relationship between self and other social entities (Andersen & Chen, 2002). Under Andersen and Chen’s (2002) definition, a significant other is an individual who is currently or has been profoundly influential in one’s life. One still is or once was emotionally invested in that individual. Their conceptualization assumed that the significant other can be kin relations (i.e., parents) or later developed (i.e., mentors).

**Hunt and Michael’s Framework**

Hunt and Michael (1983) provided a framework for the study of mentoring. The factors proposed captured the reciprocal relationship of mentorship. According to Hunt and Michael (1983), the framework consists of (1). the context and environmental factors (work setting; organizational characteristics; occupation/profession/position; interpersonal relationships or social network); (2). mentor characteristics (age differential; gender; organization position; power; and self-confidence); (3). protégé characteristics (age, gender, and need for power); (4). stages and duration of the mentor-protégé relationship (stage 1: initiation; stage 2: protégé; stage 3: the breakup; stage 4: lasting friendship); and (5). the outcome of the relationship (mentor, protégé, and organization) (Hunt & Michael, 1983).
This framework provided a comprehensive view of the study of mentoring. The current study’s data did not reflect the quality of this theory. Nevertheless, the framework is important to include as guidance for the current study about the natural mentoring relationship.

**Summary of Theoretical Framework**

The current study integrated the attachment theory, social support theory, and interpersonal social-cognitive theory to examine the relationship between closeness to parents, natural mentoring relationships, and global self-esteem among adolescents and young adults. Hunt and Michael’s framework served as a guide for the mentoring aspect of this study. This study was limited by secondary data, such that the measures about mentoring did not fully represent their framework. Nevertheless, the framework was essential to include in this study as a guide and reminder of mentoring studies’ components.

**Literature Review**

This section reviewed the relevant literature on this topic. This section first addressed and established the conceptualization of self-esteem, mentoring, and natural mentoring relationships (NMRs). Next, the review turned to the literature on closeness to parents and adolescent self-esteem, NMRs and self-esteem, and NMRs as a protective factor for adolescents and young adults. Finally, the limits and gaps in previous literature were addressed.

**Global Self-Esteem**

When looking at the term “self-esteem,” Rosenberg’s work needs to be mentioned. Rosenberg and his colleagues (1995) addressed the failure to distinguish the parts from the whole in self-esteem studies. They tested the concepts between global self-esteem and specific (academic) self-esteem. Depending on which aspect of oneself is the choice of reference, the relationship between one’s judgment of a particular aspect and global self-esteem would be
depended on the ranking hierarchy of different aspects of self-values (Rosenberg et al., 1995). Specifically, after vigorous research, Rosenberg and colleagues (1995) found that as an example of specific self-esteem, academic self-esteem and global self-esteem have distinctly different correlations. According to the results, global self-esteem tended to be associated with psychological well-being and had a highly affective nature. On the contrary, specific self-esteem appeared to be more cognitive and was strongly associated with behavior or behavioral outcomes (Rosenberg et al., 1995).

In the current study, self-esteem was conceptualized as global self-esteem due to the items that measure self-esteem in the Add Health questionnaire. Though fewer items than Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale were present, those items were similar to the developed scale (Rosenberg, 1965b). Global self-esteem is defined as “an individual’s positive or negative attitude toward the self as a totality” that features self-acceptance and/or self-respect (Rosenberg et al., 1995, p. 1).

**Mentoring**

The working definition of mentoring in this paper is a one-on-one learning relationship between an older person and a young person where the more experienced individual (older person) serves as a role model or guide of the less experienced person (protégé) in providing support, guidance, and opportunities (Jacobi, 1991). The process of mentoring is nurturing, supportive, often protective, and developmentally important (Jacobi, 1991). Adolescents and young adults are the target population of this study; the definition of mentoring is further restricted to youth mentoring. Youth mentoring is a unique caring dyadic relationship between non-parental adults and youth, who provides guidance, support, and encouragement to the protégé and promotes personal and/or professional development. Youth mentoring has been
deemed a crucial component of youth development (Dubois & Karcher, 2005; Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2021). This definition covers the range of mentoring relationships from naturally developed to formally created (Schwartz et al., 2012).

As mentoring received more attention in research, the concept of mentoring has been utilized in various settings during the past two decades: formal and informal. Community-based mentoring (Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2021; Karcher, 2005; Marino et al., 2020; Ng et al., 2014; Rogers, 2011; Spencer, 2007), and school-based mentoring (Dubois & Karcher, 2005; King et al., 2002; Marino et al., 2020; Schwartz et al., 2012) are the two most common formal youth mentoring to help youth develop supportive relationships (Schwartz et al., 2012). Community-based mentoring provides regular one-on-one mentoring experience in neighborhood settings with an adult volunteer. Mentors provide guidance and support in various developmental goals to youths (Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2021). In school-based mentoring, youth meet with mentors in school buildings during or after school. Mentors provide mainly academic assistance with additional support in emotional and companionship (Schwartz et al., 2012).

Natural Mentoring Relationships (NMRs)

Other than formal mentoring, natural mentoring relationship (NMRs) is the informal side of the mentoring research. In the current study, a natural mentor is termed as a nonparental adult who, without the help of a program designed to connect youths and adults, provides support and guidance to a young person (Dang & Miller, 2013; Dubois & Karcher, 2005; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer & Behrendt, 2005). The trusting mentoring relationship typically develops within families and social networks (Schwartz et al., 2012). Natural mentors consist of kin and non-kin relationships (Dang & Miller, 2013). For example, natural mentors can be extended family
members (i.e., grandparents, uncles, older siblings), teachers, neighbors, co-workers, and so on (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer & Behrendt, 2005).

Literature has explored natural mentoring relationships (NMRs) under different terms with similar definitions. For example, Chen et al. (2003) used the term “Very Important Persons (VIPs)” as “natural mentors.” According to their definition, VIPs are “non-parental adults who have had a significant influence on the adolescent and on whom the adolescent can rely for support—come from many different socially-defined contexts: extended family members, teachers, employers, church representatives, coaches, or older friends.” (Chen et al., 2003, p. 1-2). Chen et al. (2003) studied adolescents in China and United States and suggested that the cultural value of education may affect adolescents’ choice of relationships with different VIPs. Chinese adolescents were more likely to develop closer relationships with VIPs, especially their teachers, than with their counterparts from the United States. And American adolescents were more likely to report kin members as VIPs (Chen et al., 2003). Supportive non-parental adults (SNPAs), conceptualized by Sterrett et al. (2011) is an umbrella term including NMPs, VIPs, non-parental adults who provide kinship and/or social support. Adolescents who identified SNPAs exhibited higher levels of academic achievement, self-esteem, lower levels of behavioral problems, and fewer emotional difficulties (Sterrett et al., 2011).

**Closeness to Parents and Self-Esteem**

The association between closeness to parents and self-esteem has been widely studied. Much research has studied closeness to mother and father together as one measure. Cross-sectional research supports that close parent-child relationships are important for developing global self-esteem. For example, Parker and Benson (2004) suggested that adolescents’ perceived closeness with parents is positively associated with self-esteem from a nationally
representative sample. Using the first wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Bulanda and Majumdar (2009) found a significant positive association between parental availability and self-esteem. Positive self-esteem was found to be associated with having close relationships with parents (measured in attachment bonds) among college undergraduates (Mattanah et al., 2011). Harris et al. (2015) found a robust correlation between parent-child closeness and self-esteem in Germany and the United States adolescents. Longitudinal design provided inconsistent results between closeness to parents and adolescent self-esteem. For example, Harris et al. (2015) replicated significant correlations at the same point in time, but the longitudinal models failed to show significant relations.

Though many studies have tested father and mother closeness together as one measure, prior literature has warranted evidence that mother and father interact with children differently. Daughters and sons both experienced positive changes in self-esteem when the mother-adolescent attachment relationship and perceived mother-adolescent relationship quality were assessed (Keizer et al., 2019). This finding suggested that even though adolescents started to spend more time in non-familial relationships, mothers still strongly influence adolescents’ self-esteem. Mixed results revealed the complexity of father-child relationships. Closeness to father yielded significant associations with happiness, life satisfaction, and psychological distress in adult children independently from closeness to mother (Amato, 1994). However, when controlling for closeness to the mother, closeness to the father did not have any effect on children’s self-esteem (Amato, 1994).

The current study used closeness to mother and closeness to father variables separately in exploring the association with self-esteem in adolescents and young adults.

**Natural Mentoring Relationships and Self-Esteem**
The literature showed ample research in studying mentoring relationships and adolescent self-esteem. The literature search was challenging. The conceptualization or lack of conceptualization of natural mentoring relationships excluded many studies. Thus, this section will only include literature that examines natural mentoring relationships on adolescent and young adult self-esteem under the conceptualization of natural mentoring relationships and self-esteem established in the previous sections. The relationship demonstrated here is only the direct effect of the presence of a natural mentoring relationship on adolescent and young adult self-esteem. After the limiting process, literature inclusion may appear to be scant. Nevertheless, most literature in the following paragraph and the next section fit most of the conceptualizations of this paper.

The main articles leading the exploration of natural mentoring relationships in the current study were from DuBois and Silverthorn (2005b, 2005a). DuBois and Silverthorn (2005b) first investigated the health-related outcomes of natural mentoring relationships among older adolescents and young adults using the Add Health dataset. Among other beneficial outcomes (i.e., college attendance, reduced problem behavior, physical activity level), the results demonstrated that youths who reported natural mentoring relationships were more likely to have heightened self-esteem (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005b). In another study using Add Health dataset, DuBois and Silverthorn (2005a) looked into the characteristics of natural mentoring relationships (mentor role, frequency of contact, closeness, and duration) on various outcomes (education/work, problem behavior, psychological well-being, and physical health). Specifically, they found that the likelihood of favorable outcomes was higher with non-kin mentors except for psychological well-being compared with kin mentors. Greater closeness to mentor was especially outstanding in predicting favorable psychological well-being (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005a).
These mentoring characteristics also emerged their importance in several other studies in informing self-esteem (Chen et al., 2003; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014; Klaw et al., 2003). Among the characteristics, closeness and relationship duration appeared to withstand additional testing. For example, Hurd and Zimmerman (2014) explored the association between natural mentoring relationship profiles and various young adults’ mental outcomes. The results suggested that relational closeness and extended relationship duration may promote improvements in psychological well-being (i.e., self-acceptance, a feature of self-esteem) among adolescents (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014). In examining the duration of mentoring relationships, Klaw and colleagues (2003) examined young mothers (who recently gave birth to a baby) whose relationships with natural mentors are still ongoing after two years with those relationships stopped or without mentoring relationship. Klaw and colleagues (2003) found that weekly and daily interactions were characteristics of the long-term mentoring relationship. Moreover, those who kept the mentoring relationships were 3.5 times more likely to have remained or graduated from school.

**Natural Mentoring Relationships as Moderator**

As a moderator, natural mentoring relationships were studied on various adolescent outcomes in the at-risk population. At-risk youth are characterized by incarceration of parents or guardians, regular absentees from school, poor academic performance, behavioral problems in and out of school, delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and homelessness (Bruce & John, 2014). More studies have demonstrated the beneficial outcomes of mentoring programs. This section only included literature that fits the definition of natural mentoring relationships. Drevon et al. (2018) found that natural mentoring relationships moderated the relationship between peer victimization and interpersonal difficulties among college students. Students who reported natural mentoring relationships reported lower levels and fewer interpersonal problems among
victims of bullying. Scanlon et al. (2019) demonstrated that mentorships also significantly moderated the relation between childhood trauma and adolescent criminal justice involvement. Specifically, the natural mentoring relationship weakened the association between parental incarceration and criminal justice involvement in adolescence and adulthood for children exposed to childhood trauma (Scanlon et al., 2019). Among pregnant African American, Hispanic, and White adolescents, those who had mentors were less likely to have consumed alcohol in the last month or week. They were more likely to report having plans to continue their education after giving birth to their children (Rhodes et al., 1994a). Similarly, Rhodes et al. (1994b) found that mentorship moderated the effects of relationship and support network problems on psychological distress in Latina adolescent mothers.

**Summary of Literature Review**

To summarize, considerable research has been conducted among adolescents to better understand natural mentoring relationships and closeness to parents concerning their global self-esteem. Some studies tested the association between parental closeness and adolescent self-esteem. Other studies explored the characteristics of natural mentoring relationships and self-esteem. The previous research also indicated that among at-risk youth, natural mentoring relationships led to better social, behavioral, and academic outcomes. However, very few studies have focused on the possible effect of natural mentoring relationships within the relationship of closeness to parents and adolescent self-esteem in the general population. There also has been limited conceptualization of natural mentoring relationships in previous literature. Therefore, the current study attempted to replicate how closeness to parents and natural mentoring relationships predicted self-esteem and explored the moderating effect of natural mentoring relationships between closeness to parents and self-esteem.
The Current Study

The primary purpose of this study was to use nationally representative data in exploring the moderating effect of natural mentoring relationships between closeness to parents in adolescence and their self-esteem in adulthood without identifying the at-risk population. This study aimed to inform the potential importance of natural mentoring relationships in the general population of adolescents and young adults. The gaps and conceptualization limitation in the literature was addressed. The current study examined the relationship of closeness to parents and adolescents’ self-esteem, explicitly paying attention to the moderating role of natural mentoring relationships in the relations. Closeness to parents was considered a significant predictor of children’s self-esteem. Having natural mentoring relationships informed children’s self-esteem and served as a protective factor for at-risk children. Attachment theory (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991) provided the basic theoretical framework for exploring the relationships between closeness to parents and self-esteem and mentoring relationship with self-esteem. Social support theory (Hupcey, 1998) and interpersonal social-cognitive theory (Andersen & Chen, 2002) provided frameworks to explore an integrated model for closeness to parents, natural mentoring relationships, and self-esteem in adolescents and young adults. Hunt and Michael’s Framework (1983) of mentoring served as guidance for natural mentoring relationship study.

Previous literature has led to the expectation of seeing significant main effects of closeness to parents and self-esteem and natural mentoring relationship and self-esteem in the current study. Hence, it was hypothesized that closeness to parents and having natural mentoring relationships would be positively associated with global self-esteem. Under the theoretical framework of this study, it was vital to understand whether mentors and parents work together to build children’s self-esteem. The theories suggest that having close relationships with parents (significant others)
may appear in natural mentoring relationships (other significant other figures). Moreover, the support from one’s social network may inform higher self-esteem. If moderation were to occur, it would have confirmed the theories that the significant others from social support are working together with the significant others (parents in this case) kin support in informing children’s self-esteem outcome. Expressly, the moderation analysis implied that the relationship between closeness to parents and self-esteem changes as a function of having a natural mentoring relationship. Thus, it was hypothesized that the presence of natural mentoring relationships would moderate the relationship between closeness to parents in adolescence and self-esteem in adulthood. The direction of this change was predicted to be positive, meaning having a mentor would strengthen the relationship between closeness to parents and self-esteem at all levels. Specifically, natural mentoring relationships would serve as protective factors at lower levels of closeness to parents and boost self-esteem at a higher level of closeness. This moderating relationship is essential to explore because lower self-esteem may lead to different adolescent psychological problems. Whether natural mentoring relationships would make a positive difference in assisting the development of adolescents would inform parents, policymakers, program designers, and educators to assist adolescents’ development better. Furthermore, previous literature has demonstrated the important positive associations between the characteristics of natural mentoring relationships with self-esteem. If the moderation were confirmed, as exploratory analysis, closeness to mentor and duration of mentoring relationship were proposed as mentorship characteristics that moderated the association between closeness to parents and self-esteem.

The current study did not control for demographic information, such as age, biological sex, or race. These variables were usually controlled for as confounding factors rather than significant variables for the research. This means the inclusion of age, biological sex, and/or race in regression
models may influence the relationship between the predictor and outcome (Shapiro et al., 2021). Again, the focus of this study is to explore the moderating role of natural mentoring relationships between closeness to parents and self-esteem. This point will be further discussed in the limitation and future direction section. Additionally, this study used the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) to perform secondary data analyses exploring these associations. The following research questions were examined and explored:

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

*Research Q1:* Whether closeness to parents and children in adolescence have relationships with children’s global self-esteem in adulthood?

*Hypothesis 1:* Closer parental relationships during adolescence would be positively associated with children’s global self-esteem in adulthood.

*Research Q2:* Whether having a mentor in adolescence have a relationship with children’s global self-esteem in adulthood?

*Hypothesis 2:* Having a mentor during adolescence would positively affect children’s global self-esteem in adulthood.

Research question 3 addresses the gap in the literature:

*Research Q3:* Does having a mentor during adolescence moderate the relationship between closeness to parents and children’s global self-esteem in adulthood?

*Prediction 1:* Having an NMR would moderate the relationship between closeness to parents and self-esteem.

If prediction 1 were to occur, as an exploratory, question 4 would test the mentoring characteristics that might contribute to the moderation effect from question 3.

*Research Q4:* To what extent do natural mentoring relationships moderate the association of...
closeness to parents and global self-esteem among adolescents and young adults?

*Prediction 2:* Closeness to mentor and duration of natural mentoring relationship would be the characteristics of natural mentoring relationships that moderate the relationship between closeness to parents and global self-esteem.

**Method**

**Sample and Procedure**

The data were drawn from wave 1 and wave 3 of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health), a nationally representative study of adolescent health and behavior in the United States. Add Health uses clustered sampling strategy to select adolescents from grades 7-12 and followed them through five waves of interviews into adulthood (age 32-40 years). Wave 1 took place between 1994 and 1995. 20,780 youths completed the in-home interviews. In wave 3 (2001-2002), 15,197 respondents completed the in-home interview. The datasets of this study were publicly accessible data from the original dataset. The current sample contains 4,867 participants (see Table 1 for descriptive information). It is a smaller sample with participants who answered the mentoring section at wave 3. Age in months was calculated from the participants’ birth year, month, and interview date. Gender was measured by an item indicating whether the participant was male or female. The unit of analysis is individuals. The distribution of this sample was analyzed and reported as follows:

1. **Age:** At wave 1, the sample age ranged from 11 to 21, with a mean age of 15.94. At wave 3, the sample age ranged from 18 to 28 at wave 3, with a mean age of 22.33.
2. **Gender:** 2,246 males (46.1%) and 2,621 females (53.9%).
3. **Race:** This sample contains 58.5% White, 22.9% African American, 2.9% American Indian, 5.6% Hispanic, 3.9% Asian, and 6.1% Other.
4. Mentor: 3,716 (76.24%) participants reported having had a natural mentor. 1,145 (23.45%) reported not having had a natural mentor.

| Table 1. Mean (or n) and Standard Deviations (or %) on All Variables |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| **Variable**     | **N (%)**        | **M**        | **SD**       |
| Closeness to mother | 4,828          | 4.51          | 0.81          |
| Closeness to father   | 4,524          | 4.01          | 1.19          |
| Mentor             | 4,867          |               |               |
| Yes       | 3,722 (76.24%) |               |               |
| No        | 1,145 (23.45%) |               |               |
| Duration            | 3,716 (57.13%) | 8.76          | 6.97          |
| Closeness to mentor  | 3,510 (53.97%) | 2.60          | 1.30          |
| Self-esteem        | 4,858          | 16.93         | 2.26          |

Note. Participants are allowed to report more than one race. N = 4,867.

**Measures**

*Closeness to Mother & Closeness to Father.* Closeness to parents was assessed at wave 1.

Two questions were included to account for the maximum inclusion of residential and non-residential biological parents for each parent. Residential parents were biological or someone who functions as parents in the same household as respondents at the time of survey. Information about non-residential biological parents was administrated only if the biological parents were not members of the respondents’ households at the time of survey. The variables were created by adding the two questions about each parent together. Since the participants might have a chance to answer both questions, the residential parents questions were prioritized. For closeness to mother (residential), “How close do you feel to your [MOTHER/ADOPTIVE MOTHER/STEPMOTHER/FOSTER MOTHER/etc.?]” was asked. For closeness to father (residential), “How close do you feel to your [FATHER/ADOPTIVE FATHER/STEPFATHER/FOSTER FATHER/etc.?]” was asked. Participants rated these two questions on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 5 = very much). For closeness to mother (non-residential biological), “How close do you feel to your biological mother?” was asked. For
closeness to father (non-residential biological), “How close do you feel to your biological father?” was asked. Participants rated these two questions on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not close at all, 5 = extremely close).

*Mentor.* Natural mentoring relationships variable was measured at wave 3. Participants were first asked to rate “Other than your parents or step-parents, has an adult made an important positive difference in your life at any time since you were 14 years old?” on a dichotomous scale (0 = no, 1 = yes). Then, participants were asked to identify the most influential person’s mentor role. According to the characteristics, the possible responses ranged from family (i.e., grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt, older sister, and older brother) to informal (i.e., coach/athletic director, neighbors, employer, co-worker, and friend’s parents), and professional (i.e., teachers/guidance counselor, minister/priest/rabbi/religious leaders, and doctor/therapist/social worker) (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005b, 2005a). For the purpose of the present investigation, those who reported a “younger sibling” (younger brother or younger sister), “friend,” or “spouse/partner” were excluded because of the possibility that the person could be younger than the participants, which would not match the most definitions of a mentor regarding age (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005b, 2005a; Jacobi, 1991). Table 2 indicates the distribution of mentoring roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is this person related to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older brother</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger brother</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older sister</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger sister</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s mother</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s father</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s mother</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s mother</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aunt 224
Uncle 162
Teacher/guidance counselor 742
Coach/athletic director 155
Minister/priest/rabbi/religious leader 149
Employer 122
Co-worker 135
Neighbor 40
Friend 632
Spouse or partner 117
Friend’s parent 143
Doctor/therapist/social worker 17
Other 180

Note. If there has been more than one person, participants were asked to describe the most influential. N = 4856.

Closeness to Mentor. Closeness to mentor was measured at wave 3. The participants were asked, “How close do you feel about this person these days?” The question was answered on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = not close at all, 1 = only a little close, 2 = somewhat close, 3 = quite close, 4 = very close).

Duration. Duration of natural mentoring relationship was measured by the number of years the mentor has been important in respondents’ life at wave 3 (ranging from 1 year to 27 years).

Global Self-Esteem. Global self-esteem in adolescents and young adults was measured at wave 3 (age 18-28) with four statements: (1) You have a lot of good qualities, (2) You have a lot to be proud of, (3) You like yourself just the way you are, and (4) You feel like you are doing everything just about right. The rating scale of each statement was reverse coded (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The internal consistency estimates were satisfactory. Cronbach alpha is .78. Global self-esteem items were reverse coded such that higher scores represent higher individual rates of self-esteem.
Analysis

Analysis Plan

The data in the current study were from Add Health’s public data waves 1 and 3. SPSS and R computer software were used to prepare the variables (i.e., creating measuring, centering) and to run a series of nested regression models. Specifically, continuous predictor variables were grand mean centered on making 0 a meaningful value and on making the interpretation of the interaction terms more readily interpretable. For moderation analyses, interaction terms were created between predictor variables (closeness to parents and mentoring). Descriptive statistics means (or n) and standard deviations (or %) were presented (see Table 1 and Table 2), and Pearson correlation analyses were used to examine the relationship between all study variables (see Table 3). For main analyses, a series of regression models were fit to the data to address each of the research questions. Specifically, the first model included mother and father closeness, model 2 added the mentor variable, and model three added the interaction of mother and father closeness and mentor. As a final step, model 4 included the mentoring relationship closeness and the number of years of the mentoring relationship. Listwise deletion was used to address missing data. The primary model is presented in equation 1 and visually presented in Figure 1.

Equation 1:

\[ Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (Mother\ Closeness_i) + \beta_2 (Father\ Closeness_i) + \beta_3 (Mentor_i) + \beta_4 (Mother\ Closeness_i \times Mentor_i) + \beta_5 (Father\ Closeness_i \times Mentor_i) + \varepsilon_i \]
Figure 1. Figure of Closeness to Parents, Mentoring, and Interactions Predicting Self-esteem.

Main Analysis

Hypothesis 1: Closer parental relationships during adolescence would positively associate with children’s global self-esteem in adulthood.

Linear regression analyses were performed to determine the association between closeness to parents at wave 1 with global self-esteem at wave 3. Closeness to mother and closeness to father were included in the same regression model that controlled for each other to predict global self-esteem.

Hypothesis 2: Having a mentor during adolescence would positively affect children’s global self-esteem in adulthood.

The mentor variable was added to a model with mother and father closeness. Linear regression analysis was performed to determine the association between mentor variable, closeness to parents variables on global self-esteem.

Prediction 1: Having a natural mentoring relationship would moderate the relationship between closeness to parents and global self-esteem.
The following regression models examined how natural mentor relationships moderate the relationship between closeness to parents on global self-esteem. Closeness to mentor and duration were added to the regression model. Interaction terms were created with closeness to mother/father and closeness to mentor variables and closeness to mother/father and duration variables.

Prediction 2: Closeness to mentor and duration of natural mentoring relationship would be the characteristics of natural mentoring relationships that moderate the relationship between closeness to parents and global self-esteem.

As a final step, linear regression analyses were used to explore the relationship between mentoring characteristics and global self-esteem. This model examined how mentor closeness and duration of natural mentoring relationships have associated with the relationship between closeness to parents and global self-esteem.

Results

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between closeness to parents and adolescents’ global self-esteem, specifically paying attention to the moderating role of natural mentoring relationships in the relations (see Table 4). This chapter presents the research findings from the analyses.

Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive statistics that include means (or n) and standard deviations (or %) for all study variables are included in Table 1. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between closeness to mother and closeness to father variables from wave 1 and mentor, global self-esteem, closeness to mentor, and duration variables from wave 3 (see Table 3). The correlation between closeness to mother and closeness to father was .29 (p < .001). This moderately positive
significant correlation indicated that mother and father closeness was related; however, each variable measured distinctly different things as most of the variance in each variable was not shared with the other. This was an important initial step to ensure no multicollinearity problems when running the variables together in subsequent regression models.

Table 3. Correlations of Closeness to Mother, Closeness to Father, Mentor, Closeness to Mentor, Duration and Global Self-Esteem

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<td>3</td>
<td>0.11***</td>
<td>0.29***</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.06***</td>
<td>0.03***</td>
<td>0.05***</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
<td>0.07***</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.12***</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.04***</td>
<td>0.04**</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.18***</td>
<td>0.36***</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

***p < .001, ** p < .01

**Regression Analyses**

*Hypothesis 1:* closer parental relationships during adolescence would positively associate with children’s global self-esteem in adulthood.

Closeness to mother and closeness to father were run together with global self-esteem (see Table 4, Model 1). Results from linear regression models indicated that wave 1 closeness to mother significantly predicted children’s global self-esteem at wave 3 (b = .25, S.E. = .04, p < .001). That is, a one unit increase in closeness to mother at wave 1 was associated with a .25 unit increase in self-esteem at wave 3, controlling for closeness to father a wave 1. Similarly, closeness to father significantly predicted children’s global self-esteem at wave 3 (b = .15, S.E. = .03, p < .001). Specifically, a one unit increase in closeness to father at wave 1 was associated with a .15 unit increase in self-esteem at wave 3, controlling for closeness to mother a wave 1. This model accounted for 2% of the variance ($R^2 = .02$) in global self-esteem. As a sensitivity check, closeness to parents variables were run separately with global self-esteem; closeness to
mother and father at wave 1 significantly predicted an increase in children’s global self-esteem at wave 3, respectively.

**Hypothesis 2:** Having a mentor during adolescence would positively affect children’s global self-esteem in adulthood.

The result from the linear regression model indicated that having a mentor during adolescence significantly predicted children’s global self-esteem in adulthood (\( b = .23, S.E. = .07, p < .001 \); see Table 4, Model 2). Specifically, a one unit increase in having a mentor (going from no mentor to having a mentor) during adolescence was associated with a .23 unit increase in global self-esteem as an adult.

**Prediction 1:** Having a natural mentoring relationship would moderate the relationship between closeness to parents and self-esteem.

Regression analyses were performed to investigate whether having a mentor during adolescence moderated the relationship between closeness to parents (wave 1) on children’s global self-esteem in adulthood (wave 3) (see Table 4, Model 3). The predictor variables were closeness to mother and closeness to father, and the moderator variable was mentor. The interaction between closeness to mother and mentor was statistically significant (\( b = .26, S.E. = .09, 95\% \text{ C.I.}[0.08, 0.43], p < .01 \)), thus indicating a moderating effect of the presence of a natural mentor of closeness to mother and global self-esteem. The interaction between closeness to father and mentor was not statistically significant (\( b = -.05, S.E. = .06, 95\% \text{ C.I.}[-0.17, 0.06], p = .36 \)). The results identified mentor as a positive moderator of the relationship between closeness to mother at wave 1 and children’s global self-esteem at wave 3. The interaction was plotted and probed to understand better how mentoring moderated the association between closeness to mother and global self-esteem (see Figure 2). As presented in Figure 2, for
individuals that reported not having a mentor, there was no difference in self-esteem at different levels of closeness to mother, as indicated by the nonsignificant simple slope \( b = .10, S.E. = .07, p = .140 \). However, for individuals that reported having a mentor, there was a significant increase in self-esteem at higher levels of mother closeness, as indicated by the significant simple slope \( b = .35, S.E. = .06, p < .001 \). These findings indicated that having a mentor strengthened the association between closeness to mother and global self-esteem.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>[12.69, 12.89]</td>
<td>12.79*** (.05)</td>
<td>[12.68, 12.89]</td>
<td>12.17*** (.12)</td>
<td>[11.94, 12.40]</td>
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<td>Closeness to Mother</td>
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<td>.24*** (.04)</td>
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<td>-.03 (.15)</td>
<td>[-0.32, 0.26]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closeness to Father</td>
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<td>[0.09, 0.21]</td>
<td>.15*** (.03)</td>
<td>[.09, .20]</td>
<td>.17*** (.04)</td>
<td>[0.09, 0.27]</td>
<td>.37*** (.10)</td>
<td>[0.18, 0.58]</td>
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<td>Mentor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closeness to Mother * Mentor</td>
<td>0.23*** (0.07)</td>
<td>[0.10, 0.37]</td>
<td>0.24*** (0.07)</td>
<td>[0.10, 0.37]</td>
<td>0.39*** (.10)</td>
<td>[0.21, 0.58]</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>R-Square</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001
Prediction 2: Closeness to mentor and duration would be the characteristics of natural mentoring relationships that predict self-esteem.

To further investigate whether mentoring characteristics moderated the relationship between closeness to parents (wave 1) on children’s global self-esteem in adulthood (wave 3), additional linear regression analyses were performed with the interaction terms (see Table 4, Model 4). The predictor variables were closeness to mother and closeness to father, and the moderator variables were closeness to mentor and duration. The results indicated no significant moderating effects on the duration of mentoring relationships or closeness to mentor.

As an exploratory analysis, additional linear regression analyses were performed to examine the direct associations of closeness to mentor and duration of mentoring relationship on self-esteem for those individuals who indicated having a mentor. Duration of mentoring relationship was not a significant predictor of self-esteem; however, closeness to mentor was.
Specifically, a one unit increase in closeness to mentor was associated with a .20 unit increase in self-esteem ($b = .20$, $S.E. = .03$, $p < .001$; see Table 5).

Table 5. Beta Estimates, Standard Errors, and 95% Confidence Intervals of Closeness to Mentor and Duration of Natural Mentoring Relationship on Global Self-Esteem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>$b$ (S.E.)</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>12.16 (0.12)</td>
<td>[11.94, 12.40]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness to Mentor</td>
<td>.20*** (.03)</td>
<td>[-0.02, 0.01]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>-.00 (.01)</td>
<td>[0.14, 0.26]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *** $p < .001$

**Discussion**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship among closeness to parents, natural mentoring relationships, and global self-esteem in adolescents and young adults. More specifically, having a natural mentoring relationship was predicted to serve as a possible moderator between closeness to parents and children’s global self-esteem. Closeness and duration of mentoring relationships were also explored to see if they were the mentoring characteristics that moderated the relationship between closeness to parents and global self-esteem. This study contained a couple of findings that replicated previous research and several findings that enhanced the literature. The focus of this section is to discuss the findings and draw appropriate implications, recognize limitations, and inform future directions.

**The Relationship Between Closeness to Parents and Global Self-Esteem**

This study demonstrated that closeness to mother and closeness to father during adolescence is strongly associated with adult children’s global self-esteem. The findings demonstrated the long-term effect of parental closeness in adolescence on children’s self-esteem in adulthood with longitudinal data. The results were consistent with hypothesis 1. The linear regression analyses showed that having a closer relationship with mother and/or father during
adolescence is associated with higher self-esteem in adulthood. Keizer and colleagues’ (2019) longitudinal study suggested similar findings that perceived parental relationship quality was positively related to self-esteem. Even though adolescents may increase time spent outside of families and eventually divert from their families as adults, parental closeness is highly important for how they think of themselves. Youth’s closeness to parents remained relatively stable in the transition to adulthood, even with lesser contact between youth and parents (Fang et al., 2021).

Moreover, the results clarified that mothers and fathers independently related to children’s self-esteem. The findings of hypothesis 1 were reflected in the attachment theory, where the feeling of closeness promotes self-worth and self-esteem (Harris et al., 2015). Previous literature has explored parental influence as a single measure and two different measures. Scholars have suggested the importance of distinguishing between father-child and mother-child relationships. In prior studies, parental closeness as a single measure was assessed repeatedly with different samples, and the findings on self-esteem were consistently significantly positive among adolescents and young adults. However, when assessed separately, mixed results appeared. Even though the current study separated mother and father closeness, it did not explore the different gender dyads of these close relationships (i.e., father-son, mother-son). More research is needed for separate assessments of mother and father. The findings shed light on family research in the future to better understand how children’s self-esteem derives from each parent. Self-esteem links to many behavioral and social outcomes. More research on different parental influences could inform family practices and family education to promote and protect children’s self-esteem.

**The Relationship Between Natural Mentoring Relationships and Global Self-Esteem**
Linear regression analysis demonstrated that having a natural mentoring relationship during adolescence was associated with higher global self-esteem in adulthood. The finding is consistent with hypothesis 2. DuBois and Silverthorn’s studies have demonstrated similar results using Add Health data (2005b). Deriving from the social support theory, interpersonal social-cognitive theory, and attachment concepts, the connection between adolescents and mentors reflects the need for important adult figures in their development. And the natural mentors promote adolescent self-esteem. Other than self-esteem, recent studies have found that natural mentoring relationships influence social skills, school behavior, family relationships, and a sense of connectedness to school and family (DuBois et al., 2011; Karcher, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2012). As another source of connectedness, mentors have revealed their importance in the overall development of adolescents.

The Relationship Among Closeness to Parents, Natural Mentoring Relationships, and Global Self-Esteem

The results indicated significant moderating effects on self-esteem: having a natural mentoring relationship moderated the association between closeness to mother during adolescence and children’s global self-esteem in adulthood, but not for closeness to father. The results partially confirmed prediction 1. Figure 2 shows that higher closeness to mother for adolescents with natural mentors is strongly associated with higher global self-esteem. However, the effect though significant, was not so evident for lower closeness to mother from the look of the figure. In other words, having a natural mentor boosted self-esteem among those who were closer to their mothers. However, it did not protect the self-esteem of those who were not as close to their mothers. This finding partially confirmed the prediction: having a natural mentoring relationship would boost an individual’s self-esteem while having a closer
relationship with a mother. Attachment theory proposes that parental bonds have a significant bearing on future relationships. The findings provide evidence that parental closeness is related to mentoring relationships. This finding is interesting because closeness to both parents significantly predicted adult children’s global self-esteem, but having a mentor omitted the relationship between closeness to father and global self-esteem. Society place a great deal on the influence of mothers on children’s outcomes. So having a mentor would significantly improve global self-esteem. Nevertheless, the other parent is also important during the development of children, fathers. From the results, fathers in this study seemed to take on the mentor role. If a child is close to their father, no matter whether the child has a mentor, his or her global self-esteem does not change, and the closer he or she is to the father, the higher their self-esteem. The relationship between mentor and closeness to father interactions needs further research and testing.

Lastly, to further analyze this moderating relationship, this study specifically measured the duration of natural mentoring relationships and perceived closeness to mentor. The results demonstrated no significant moderating of closeness to mentor nor duration of mentoring relationship. The findings denied prediction 2. As a direct effect, a closer relationship with a natural mentor could foster long-lasting effects on young people’s global self-esteem. In previous studies, a close relationship with mentors was associated with positive psychological well-being, such as higher self-esteem (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005a). Furthermore, the duration of mentoring relationship was found to be more consistent with behavioral outcomes, such as greater physical activity, graduation rate, and decreased risk of smoking (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005a; Klaw et al., 2003). Hurd and Zimmerman (2014) stated that relational closeness is a key characteristic in natural mentoring relationships. The exploratory results demonstrated that
closeness to the mentor was associated with higher global self-esteem in adulthood. In the current study, duration of mentoring relationships may be reflected in closeness with natural mentors. The current sample’s average duration of natural mentoring relationship is 8.76 years, which is a longer time than previous research (i.e., two years). In contrast to mentoring relationships that last for a couple of years, longer-term relationships may not have apparent effects.

**Implications**

Overall, this study demonstrated that having a natural mentor makes a difference in adult children’s global self-esteem, especially when interacting with maternal closeness. Closeness to parents during adolescence contributes significantly to global self-esteem for adulthood. Besides parents, a natural mentor also strongly influences global self-esteem into adulthood. From the findings, we can see that the quality of social relationships strongly influences global self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). As adolescents age, the relationship between parents and children may be less intimate (Birkeland et al., 2014). Mentors are important adult figures other than parents in situations where they may not be comfortable communicating with parents and when their friends may not be able to provide constructive advice. Results from the current study may inform parental practices in building mentoring relationships. Parents could create opportunities for kids to establish natural mentoring relationships by encouraging them to join sports teams, bands, church youth groups, or other extracurricular activities. Social support theory suggests that when there is a need for support to fulfill, one would seek out relationships that satisfy the need (Hupcey, 1998). Parents may also express the benefits of communication and establishing close relationships with extended family members (i.e., grandparents) and other trusted social members (i.e., teachers, coaches).
According to the very first national survey of young people’s perspectives on mentoring, Bruce and John (2014) stated that at-risk youths are characterized by incarceration of parents or guardians, regular absentees from school, poor academic performance, behavioral problems in and out of school, delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and homelessness. Approximately 16 million youth in the United States, including 9 million at-risk youth, never had any form of mentorship (Bruce & John, 2014). Since the establishment of MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership 30 years ago, it has been estimated that 3 to 4.5 million structured mentoring relationships for at-risk youth in the United States were established through matching children with adult volunteers (Bruce & John, 2014). Some youths are fortunate to have natural mentors (Bruce & John, 2014). But due to factors like school populations and safety, many youths were restricted from the opportunity to connect to an adult outside of family (Schwartz et al., 2012).

Formal mentoring relationships are different from natural mentoring relationships. Communities and schools usually host formal mentoring opportunities. Community-based mentoring programs generally provide volunteer mentor matches for at-risk youth. The typical length of this committed relationship lasts at least a minimum of one year. Community-based mentoring programs can be tailored to the different youth populations, such as youth in foster care and juvenile offenders (Schwartz et al., 2012). School-based mentoring programs provide mentoring during or after school. They are usually shorter in duration and provide more academic guidance, emotional support, and companionship (Schwartz et al., 2012). However, researchers and educators need to be aware that these opportunities may be shorter in duration indicated by the program’s termination or the end of the school year. As a society, more formative mentoring programs would promote mentorship ties. The benefit of such programs
may reflect on later relationship building (i.e., during emerging adulthood) and social interaction where young people may actively seek out natural mentoring relationship connections.

The current study used nationally representative data, but it did not investigate the at-risk population where there could be more benefit from having natural mentors or any mentors. It is necessary to identify the beneficial and positive characteristics of mentoring relationships. But adolescence is when self-esteem fluctuates. For the mentoring programs that target at-risk youth, it is crucial to watch out for the potential negative impacts on the more vulnerable youths. It might be likely that when the outcomes of mentoring relationships mismatch their expectations, the adverse effects can potentially decrease their self-esteem and increase risky behaviors.

From the theories, previous literature, and this study, relationships play an important role in influencing self-esteem. Mentoring relationship alone is not enough to meet the needs of the relatively vulnerable youth. Researchers and policymakers need to test the practices that positively contribute to youth outcomes, be cautious about the drawbacks if the “plans” go south, and find new ways to assist at-risk children.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Several limitations of this study should be noted. The major limitation is that the current study may experience common method variance. The analyses in this study were based on interview reports on all variables. Potential intentional and unintentional biases needed to be noted in respondents’ self-reports. Specifically, it was difficult to know whether the respondents had natural mentoring relationships or formal mentors (i.e., mentors through programs). The question asked participants to recall whether they had natural mentors since they were 14. The retrospective recall might be biased in describing such mentoring relationship (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014). Closeness to parents was a subjective measure of participants’ rating during
the interview/survey. There is no other way of validating its accuracy. In the future, a parent rating scale could be utilized to reduce common method variance. The mentor and global self-esteem measures were relatively general as they may not fully reflect the concepts being measured. Future studies should use multiple measures and more developed scales to measure mentor relationships in general and self-esteem. Ideally, mentoring relationships should be identified at the time of the establishment and followed throughout the duration of such relationships.

Next, this study did not control for background characteristics, such as age, gender, and race. Historically, studies have been controlling for demographics to rule them out. It has also been the researcher’s choice to control for demographics. As stated early on in the current study, controlling for such demographics may ignore the meaningful resources of variation in the population. Previous mentoring studies have demonstrated differences between age, gender, and race. For example, mentoring relationship quality (measured in closeness to mentor) differed by young people’s age at meeting their mentor and establishing mentoring relationships (Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2021). Specifically, mid-to-late primary school-aged children and younger adolescents reported closer relationships with their mentors than older adolescents (Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2021). Mentoring research has explored gender differences in the mentoring relationship among adolescents. For example, Liang and colleagues (2002) found that mentoring relational qualities were associated with higher self-esteem and lower loneliness in college females. Emotional closeness was found to assist in the relationship between male mentors and adolescent boys (Spencer, 2007). For race and ethnicity, Darling et al. (2006) suggested in a mentoring study of individual differences that perceived salience of their racial identities and differences in cultural values might result in different experiences with mentors from both the
same and different racial-ethnic backgrounds. DuBois et al. (2011) stated that even though it has been a goal in mentoring programs to match ethnic minority youth with the same-race mentor, there has been little research with consistent patterns to confirm whether this is a favorable match. Future mentoring research may explore age, biological sex, and race as important variables in studying mentoring relationships.

Lastly, although the results indicated significant correlations, it does not imply causation. Other than having a natural mentor, there are other possibilities that an “omitted variable” made closeness to mother and self-esteem move together. The association may be affected by Type I error since the data came from a nationally representative dataset with large sample size. While the effect sizes were relatively small in this study, that should not indicate that natural mentoring relationships have limited real-life applications. To further address the implications of these findings, replication and intervention research are needed in the future.

**Future Research Plan**

This study is just the beginning of my research on the mentoring relationship. Building on the current study, I will add children’s background characteristics (gender, race, and age) in the next project and explore gender differences in different parent-child dyads (i.e., father-daughter, mother-son). Adding biological sex as an important variable allows the analysis to discover related effects on global self-esteem with parental closeness as predictor variables. The Add Health data has consistent items in measuring global self-esteem at wave 1, wave 2, and wave 3. There is an opportunity for longitudinal analyses by including global self-esteem from wave 2 and measuring the change in global self-esteem with initial closeness to parents measures at wave 1.
Furthermore, the Add Health data also identified different mentor roles (i.e., grandmother, co-worker, etc.) It would be worth looking into how the difference in mentoring roles affects global self-esteem, with closeness to parents during adolescence being the predictors. Other mentoring characteristics like frequency of contact with mentors and the importance of mentors will be added to the model for further analysis.

The next step is to collect data using other established scales, starting with cross-sectional data first. Some developed measures could be used to explore this relationship further. One established scale is Relational Health Indices – Mentor (RHI-M). As part of the Relational Health Indices-Youth Version, RHI-M contains 25 items assessing mentor relationships (Liang et al., 2016; Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, et al., 2002). Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale will provide a holistic picture of measuring global self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965a).
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