

# PARENTAL BONDING AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AMONG TERTIARY STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

Parental bonding is an important predictor that gives a lot of insight into parent-child relationship. Studies have demonstrated the importance of parent child relationship for adjustment, ranging from attachment during infancy, indiscipline style during childhood and adolescence to parenting style during adulthood. This paper aims to investigate the relationship between parental bonding and parent-child relationship among tertiary level students in which gender and cultural effects were also taken into consideration. A survey with two valid inventories—Parental Bonding Inventory (PBI) and Parent-Child Relationship Survey (PCRS) was carried out on 160 tertiary level students from Selangor. Results indicate that stronger parental bonding promotes better parent-child relationship. Besides, females were found to have better parental bonding as well as parent-child relationship compared to males. From a cultural aspect, there is no difference among races in terms of parental bonding and parent-child relationship.

Key words: parental bonding, parent-child relationship.

## INTRODUCTION

Of the many different relationships formed over the course of the life span, the relationship between parent and child is among the most important (Steinberg, 2001). Not surprisingly, studies of child development have devoted considerable attention to the parent-child relationship, in order to understand how it develops and functions over the lifespan. Research has found that a loving, responsive, and helpful parent who is always available for their child serves the function of binding the child to them and contributes to the reciprocal dynamics of that binding (Bowlby, 1988). However, research and information is still lacking on how this parental bonding can affect relationship between parent and child. Thus, this paper aims to examine the correlation between parental bonding and parent-child relationship, in which gender and cultural differences are also taken into consideration.

## DEFINITION

### Parental Bonding

Parental bonding can be described as an attachment between the child and the parent. This attachment theory is based on the idea that there are individual differences in terms of how infants become emotionally bonded to their primary caregivers and how these first attachment experiences influence the future developments of infants in social, cognitive and emotional aspects (Bowlby, 1969; 1977). According to Bowlby (1977), attachment is determined by the parent's attitude and behavior towards the infant's needs. Secure attachment occurs when the caregiver is always sensitive and consistent in responding to child's need. In contrast, parents who often neglect or reject the child's need for attention will lead to insecure attachment.

Studies on adult's attachment reveal that securely attached adults tend to be more competent, sociable, and more comfortable in dealing with different kinds of relationship in life (Haft & Slade, 1989). They are more likely to maintain a higher level of self-reliance and self-esteem compared to insecurely attached counterparts (Steinberg, 2001). In contrast, insecurely attached adults showed higher tendency to engage in antisocial behaviors, to suffer from depression and anxiety, to be clingy, dependent and less self-confident (Brennan & Shaver, 1991; Feeney & Noller, 1990).

To measure the bonding between parent and child, Parker, Tupling and Brown (1979) developed the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) to assess the parental characteristics – care and overprotection, which might contribute to the quality of attachment. Twelve of the items on the PBI are identified as care items (e.g., affection, emotional warmth, empathy, and closeness versus emotional coldness, indifference and neglect) and another 13 items are identified as protection or control items (e.g. overprotection, intrusion, control, prevention of independence versus independency and autonomy).

Besides, another term used to describe enduring bond between parent and child is called the “parent-child connectedness” (PCC) (Brook, Brook, Gordon, Whiteman, & Cohen, 1990). This PCC is measured using two factors – control and warmth. Warmth factor includes characteristics such as trust, flexibility, shared optimism, autonomy or affection (Miller, Benson, & Galbraith, 2001) while parents who scored highly in control factor are more likely to deprive their children from decision-making or would restrict their freedom in making friends (Bean, Lezin, Roller, & Taylor, 2004). Examinations of PCC have explored the ongoing relationship between parents and children, which are often described in terms of different parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglecting parenting. Authoritative parenting combines both high warmth scores with moderate levels of control (Bean *et al.*, 2004). In contrast, authoritarian parenting is defined by high level of control through rigid rules whereas permissive parenting is characterized by low or high warmth with low level of control (Bean *et al.*, 2004). The most favorable parenting style is authoritative parenting (high warmth-moderate control), in which parents are usually emotionally warm, affectionate, and able to combine with a set of firm, yet fair disciplinary style (Bean *et al.*, 2004). By doing so, they are able to create an emotional context in which parent-children connectedness (PCC) is high.

## Parent-Child Relationship

Parent-child relationship can be described as the socialization between parent and child (Sears, 1951). According to Sears (1951), to understand the parent-child socialization, developmentalists should shift from the dominant emphasis on characteristics of the parent and the child as individuals to an emphasis on the parent– child dyad. In addition, Maccoby (1992) further illustrates socialization as a mutual, reciprocal, relationship-based enterprise between the parent and the child.

In order to capture the dyadic features of the relationship, some researchers have based on certain concurrent combinations of the parent's and the child's behavior to capture dyadic qualities such as interactional synchrony (Isabella, Belsky, & von Eye, 1989). Yet, another approach by Kochanska (1997) proposed a construct of mutually responsive orientation (MRO) which consists of two main components: mutual responsiveness and shared good times between parent and child. These components are coded during naturalistic interactions of parents and children at infant, toddler, and preschool ages. A further research on MRO has then moved beyond and expanded the two components. Aksan, Kochanska and Ortmann (2006) developed the Mutually Responsive Orientation Scales (MROS) which portrayed four basic components: coordination routines, harmonious communication, mutual cooperation, and emotional ambience. Dyads high on MRO develop coordinated, smooth, easily flowing routines, so that parents and children can be proficient in reading each other's signals and have good flow of communication. They also tend to show mutual cooperation and are responsive to each other. Besides, they are more likely to experience frequent bouts of joy, show of mutual affection and humor while effectively reducing negative affect once it arises.

## RESEARCH EVIDENCE

### Parental Bonding and Parent-Child Relationship

Bean *et al.* (2004) suggested that when parent-child connectedness (PCC) is high, the emotional context in a family is high in affection, warmth, and trust. At this state, parents and children might have a better relationship as they enjoy having activities together and are more likely to communicate openly. They tend to provide emotional support and pay respect to one another as well. Besides, they are less likely to experience hostile and resentment (Bean *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, higher parent-child connectedness (bonding) may lead to a better parent-child relationship in a family.

On the contrary, the emotional climate in a family is strained when parent-child connectedness (PCC) is low (Bean *et al.*, 2004). Under this situation, parents and children tend to experience hostility and anger in their relationship. They are more likely to maintain poor communication and lack of mutual respect for one another (Bean *et al.*, 2004). Hence, they may fail to value opinions and understand each other's needs, which then lead to low satisfaction in parent-child relationship.

Furthermore, research that relied on the Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) has shown that individuals with a secure state of mind describe their relationships with their parents coherently and find these relationships to be valuable and influential in their lives. On the contrary, dismissing individuals tend to limit the influence of

their relationships with parents by idealizing, derogating, or failing to remember their experiences. Preoccupied individuals are confused, angry, or preoccupied with the relationships.

### **Gender Study: Parental Bonding**

Research evidence shows that there are gender differences to be found in terms of perceiving parental bonding by using the PBI. Females are more likely to perceive mothers as more caring compared to males (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979; Gladstone & Parker, 1996). On the “perceived social control” subscale of the overprotection scale, mothers were rated as more controlling by male participants than by female participants (Gladstone & Parker, 1996). In contrast, on the “personal intrusiveness” subscale, fathers were rated as more intrusive by females compared to males (Gladstone & Parker, 1996). This was further supported in Rey, Bird, Kopec-Schrader and Richards (1993), in which female tended to score their fathers as more overprotective in relative to males.

Azaiza (2004) conducted a study and found that a lot of differences existed in the parent-child relations of subjects who were of Arab origin. This can be attributed to the issue of gender inequalities as well as to religious beliefs which still exist in some Eastern countries. Males were found to perceive more positive parent-child relationships compared to females. There were also major gender differences in family upbringing and parental bonding with parents being more strict and distant with their female offspring compared to males. However, another study carried out by Parker *et al.* (1979) found that there were no significant gender differences when “protection” scale scores were summed.

### **Gender Study: Parent-Child Relationship**

With regard to parent-child relationship, a study done by Prior, Sanson, Smart and Oberklaid (2000) suggests that the gender differences of parent-child relationship differ from time to time during their first 15 years of life. According to their study, females had more difficulties in parent-child relationship during the age of 5 to 7 years; however, it gradually decreases to the age of 15 years. On the contrary, males’ difficulty in parent-child relationship gradually increases throughout their first 15 years of life. On the other hand, another study that explored the gender differences in the degree to which parent-child dyads and family system variables are associated with relationship quality in later life has found that the parent-child dyads of young adults were similar for males and females (Robinson, 2000). In our paper, we predict that there will be gender differences in terms of parent-child relationship, based on previous research evidence which showed that parental bonding is correlated to parent-child relationship. Thus, when parental bonding does make a difference on gender, so does parent-child relationship.

### **Cultural Study: Parental Bonding**

Cultural study by Shams and Williams (1995) using the PBI has found that British Asian adolescents rated more parental overprotection than non-Asian adolescents whereas British Asian females rated less parental care than non-Asian females. Besides, Parker and Lipscombe (1979) discovered that Greek girls (residents in Sydney) scored both fathers and mothers as distinctly more overprotective than Australian girls. Furthermore, some researchers suggest that parenting style across different cultures can impact the parental bonding (Uji, Tanaka, Shono, & Kitamura, 2006). Compared to mothers in Western countries, Japanese mothers typically spend more time with their infants, holding their babies more frequently to comfort them and to alleviate their anger or frustration. Hence, Japanese children would have better parent-child relationship as compared to children from Western countries (Uji *et al.*, 2006).

### **Cultural Study: Parent-Child Relationship**

In terms of parent-child relationship, studies show that black adolescents, compared to their white peers, tend to perceive higher care and trust in their parents (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1987). Besides, studies also reveal that white college students were less strongly valued in their relationships with their mothers while they were more likely to describe their father as more warm and supportive compared to black counterparts (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1992; Cunningham, Rice, & Young, 1997). Nevertheless, cultural differences among students in local setting are poorly understood. Hence, this paper aims to find out whether cultural differences impact the parental bonding and parent-child relationship between the three main races in Malaysia as well as foreign students.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Based on the evidence above, the objective of our research is to examine the relationship between parental bonding and parent-child relationship among tertiary school students. It is also of interest to investigate whether there is gender or cultural differences in terms of parental bonding and parent-child relationship.

The following five hypotheses were tested in this study: (1) the stronger the parental bonding, the better the parent-child relationship, (2) gender differences in terms of parental bonding, (3) gender differences in terms of parent-child relationship, (4) cultural differences in terms of parental bonding, and (5) cultural differences in terms of parent-child relationship.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

A survey was carried out to seek answers to the research questions. Voluntary participants were approached randomly. The participants of this study consisted of 80 male and 80 female full-time students from universities and university colleges in the areas of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. They were aged between 18 to 25 years (mean= 20.58, standard deviation= 1.748). Among the participants, there were 40 Malays, 40 Chinese, 40 Indians and 40 foreigners. Foreign students in this study consisted of several different ethnicity such as Persians, Koreans, Arabians, Pakistanis, Tanzanian, African as well as Chinese from Taiwan, China and Indonesia.

**Table 1. Distribution of Sample by Races and Gender**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Malay	20 (25%)	20 (25%)	40 (25%)
Chinese	20 (25%)	20 (25%)	40 (25%)
Indian	20 (25%)	20 (25%)	40 (25%)
Others	20 (25%)	20 (25%)	40 (25%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>80 (100%)</b>	<b>80 (100%)</b>	<b>160 (100%)</b>

### Procedure

Participants were briefed on the study and written consent was obtained. Participants were given approximately 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consists of three sections. Section 1 has nine demographic questions designed to elicit information about the subject's age, gender, race, religion, marital status, family status, number of sibling(s), birth order and current education level. The other two sections consist of Parental Bonding Inventory (PBI) and Parent-Child Relationship Survey (PCRS).

### Instruments

#### Parental Bonding Inventory (PBI)

The Parental Bonding Inventory (PBI) is a 25-item instrument designed to measure parent-child bonds from the perspective of the child. It has two subscales, care (items 1, 2, 4–6, 11, 12, 14, 16–18, 24) and overprotection (items 3, 7–9, 10, 13, 15, 19–23, 25). The PBI has good to excellent internal consistency, with split half reliability coefficients of .88 for care and .74 for overprotection, as well as good stability, with 3-week test-retest correlations of .76 for care and .63 for overprotection. In addition, the PBI has good concurrent validity,

correlating significantly with independent rater judgments of parental caring and overprotection. It is scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very unlike) to 4 (very like). Items 2–4, 7, 14–16, 18, 21–25 are reversed-scored. The 12 items of the care subscale allow a maximum score of 48 and the 13 items of the overprotection subscale allow a maximum score of 52 (Parker *et al.*, 1979).

### Parent-Child Relationship Survey

The Parent-Child Relationship Survey (PCRS) is a 24-item instrument used to measure adult's perceptions of their parent-child relationship. It comes in two forms: one for assessing the child's relationship with the mother and one for assessing the child's relationship with the father. Factors for the father's version include positive affect (items 3, 14, 18–24), father involvement (items 1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 16), communication (items 7, 8, 15–17), and anger (item 13). Factors for the mother's version include positive affect (items 1–3, 6, 7, 15–23), resentment/role confusion (items 9, 14), identification (items 13, 23, 24), and communication (items 4, 5, 7, 8, 15–17). The PCRS has excellent internal consistency, with alphas for the father's subscales range from .89 to .94 with an overall alpha of .96, whereas alphas for the mother's subscales range from .61 (identification) to .94 with an overall alpha of .94. In addition, the PCRS has good known-groups and predictive validity, significantly discriminating between children from divorced and intact families (Fine & Schwebel, 1983). It is scored by reverse-scoring negatively worded items (9, 13, 14) then summing individual item scores and dividing the number of items on that factor for the subscale (mean) score; the total score is the sum of the means of the subscales (Fine, Moreland, & Schwebel, 1983).

## RESULTS

### Correlation between Parental Bonding and Parent-Child Relationship

To examine the relationship between parental bonding and parent-child relationship, a Pearson correlation was conducted. Analysis of results shows that there is a significant positive relationship between parental bonding and parent-child relationship ( $r = .493, p < .01$ ). This result indicates that the stronger the parental bonding, the better parent-child relationship the participants and their parents have. This correlation is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Correlation between Parental Bonding and Parent-Child Relationship**

Variables	Correlation
Parental Bonding	.493**
Parent-Child Relationship	

Note: \*\*  $p < .01$

In an effort to further investigate the relationships between the subscales for parental bonding and also the subscales for parent-child relationship, another Pearson correlation was conducted. Analyses were separated into father factor and mother factor as there were some differences in terms of subscales for both parents.

Results show a significant relationship between caring and positive affect ( $r = .545, p < .01$ ), involvement ( $r = .619, p < .01$ ), communication ( $r = .493, p < .01$ ) and anger ( $r = .215, p < .01$ ) for fathers. Children perceive their fathers as more caring when their fathers showed more positive affect, more involvement, better communication and less anger. Results also show a significant relationship between overprotection and anger ( $r = -.161, p < .05$ ). This indicates that the less overprotective fathers were, the more angry children were with them. However, there is no significant relationship in terms of overprotection and positive affect. Table 3 illustrates this.

**Table 3. Correlation between Subscales of Father Parental Bonding and Subscales of Father-Child Relationship**

Overprotection	-.227**				
Positive Affect	.545**	-.009			
Involvement	.619**	-.069	.696**		
Communication	.493**	-.068	.634**	.676**	
Angry	.215**	-.161*	.208**	.091	.071
	Caring	Over	Positive	Involvement	Communication
		protection	Affect		

Notes: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

As for mothers, results show a significant relationship between caring and positive affect ( $r = .486, p < .01$ ), resentment/role confusion ( $r = .272, p < .01$ ), identification ( $r = .394, p < .01$ ), and communication ( $r = .413, p < .01$ ). Children perceive their mothers as caring when their mothers showed more positive affect, less resentment/role confusion, more identification, and better communication. Results also show a significant relationship between overprotection and resentment/role confusion ( $r = -.197, p < .05$ ), as well as communication ( $r = -.236, p < .01$ ). This indicates that the less overprotective, the more children perceived their mother as having less resentment or role confusion and better communication with them. However, there is no significant relationship between overprotection and positive affect as well as identification toward mother. This correlation is shown in Table 4.



**Table 4. Correlation between Subscales of Mother Parental Bonding and Subscales of Mother-Child Relationship**

OP	-.235**				
PA	.486**	-.177			
R_RC	.272**	-.197*	-.085		
ID	.394**	-.058	.634**	-.058	
COM	.413**	-.236**	.855**	-.035	.457**
	Caring	OP	PA	R_RC	ID

Key:

OP : Overprotection

PA : Positive Affect

R\_RC : Resentment/Role Confusion

ID : Identification

COM : Communication

Notes: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ **Gender Differences for Parental Bonding**

In order to examine whether there are gender differences in terms of parental bonding and parent-child relationship, an independent t-test was conducted to obtain the answer. For parental bonding, there is a significant difference between males and females [ $t(158) = -3.326$ ,  $p < .01$ ] where females showed a better parental bonding compared to males. Males had a mean score of 121.34; whereas, females scored a mean of 128.90. This is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5. Gender Differences for Parental Bonding**

Variable	Mean Scores		t (158)
	Males	Females	
Parental Bonding	121.34	128.90	-3.326**

Note: \*\* $p < .01$ 

We also further investigated the gender differences in terms of the subscales of parental bonding. For the caring factor, results show that there is a significant gender difference for both father [ $t(158) = -2.528$ ,  $p < .05$ ] and mother [ $t(157) = -3.050$ ,  $p < .01$ ] (Refer Table 6). In terms of father caring factor, males had a mean score of 33.85 whereas females scored a mean of 36.46. For mother caring factor, mean scores for males and females are 35.43 and 38.50 respectively. These results indicate that females perceived that they received more care from fathers and mothers as compared to males.

In terms of overprotection factor for both parents, results show that there is no significant difference among males and females.

**Table 6. Gender Differences for Subscales of Parental Bonding**

Variables	Mean Scores		
	Males	Females	t (158)
Father Caring Factor	33.85	36.46	-2.528*
Mother Caring Factor	35.43	38.50	-3.050**
Father Overprotection Factor	26.28	27.14	-1.024
Mother Overprotection Factor	26.56	26.80	-.279

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

### Gender Differences for Parent-Child Relationship

An independent t-test was conducted to investigate the differences between males and females in term of parent-child relationship. Results show that there is a significant gender difference for parent-child relationship [ $t (-2.391)$ ,  $p < .05$ ] where females perceive that they have a better parent-child relationship compared to males. Males obtained a mean score of 38.97 whereas females had a mean score of 41.35 (Refer Table 7).

**Table 7. Gender Differences for Parent-Child Relationship**

Variable	Mean Scores		
	Males	Females	t (158)
Parent-Child Relationship	38.97	41.35	-2.391*

Note: \*  $p < .05$

To further understand the gender differences for the subscales of parent-child relationship, an independent t-test was conducted. In terms of father-child relationship, results show that there are gender differences for positive affect [ $t (158) = -2.784$ ,  $p < .01$ ] and involvement [ $t (158) = -2.888$ ,  $p < .01$ ]. Females perceive that their father has more positive affect and more involvement compared to males. Mean scores are shown in Table 8. However, there is no significant gender difference in term of communication with fathers as well as father anger.

For mother-child relationship, results show a significant difference among males and females in term of positive affect [ $t (158) = -3.329$ ,  $p < .01$ ]. Females perceive their mothers have more positive affect toward them than males. Nonetheless, there is no significant difference for factors like resentment/role confusion, identification and communication.

**Table 8. Gender Differences for Subscales of Parent-Child Relationship**

Variable	Mean Scores		
	Males	Females	t (158)
Father Positive Affect	5.295	5.741	-2.784**
Father Involvement	4.880	5.317	-2.888**
Father Communication	4.493	4.832	-1.728
Father Anger	4.705	4.200	1.951
Mother Positive Affect	5.547	6.019	-3.329**
Mother Resentment/ Role Confusion	4.215	4.406	-.762
Mother Identification	4.882	5.196	-1.572
Mother Communication	5.321	5.635	-1.913

Note: \*\*p<.01

### Cultural Differences for Parental Bonding

To find out whether there are cultural differences in terms of parental bonding, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Tukey post-hoc comparison showed that there is no significant difference among the Malays, Chinese, Indians and foreign students regarding parental bonding as well as the subscales of parental bonding for both parents. This is shown in Table 9.

**Table 9. Cultural Differences for Parental Bonding**

Variables	Mean Scores				
	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Foreigners	F (3, 156)
Parental Bonding	129.28	121.53	122.93	125.12	2.341
Father Caring	36.28	33.33	35.38	35.75	1.516
Father Overprotection	27.25	25.15	26.60	27.83	1.903
Mother Caring	37.98	37.50	36.03	36.38	.788
Mother Overprotection	27.78	25.56	26.59	26.80	1.115

### Cultural Differences for Parent-Child Relationship

To examine whether there are cultural differences in terms of parent-child relationship, an analysis of variance is conducted. Tukey post-hoc comparison show there is no significant cultural difference regarding parent-child relationship.

Nonetheless, when further evaluating the cultural differences in terms of subscales of parent-child relationship, results found that there are significant differences among the Chinese, Indians, Malays and Chinese for father positive affect [ $F(3, 156) = 5.746, p < .01$ ]. The Indians ( $M = 5.832$ ) and Malays ( $M = 5.814$ ) perceive that they received more positive affect from their fathers compared to the Chinese ( $M = 5.052$ ). There are also significant differences between the Indians and Chinese in terms of father involvement [ $F(3, 156) =$

4.527,  $p < .01$ ]. The Indians ( $M = 5.469$ ) perceive that their fathers are more involved compared to the Chinese ( $M = 4.713$ ). Furthermore, there are significant differences among the four races in terms of father communication [ $F(3, 156) = 6.461, p < .01$ ]. The Indians ( $M = 5.079$ ), foreigners ( $M = 4.853$ ) and Malays ( $M = 4.740$ ) perceive that they have better communication with their fathers compared to the Chinese ( $M = 3.979$ ). However, there is no significant difference among races in terms of father anger (Refer Table 10).

For maternal relationship, results found that there are significant differences among the Indians and Chinese for mother positive affect [ $F(3, 156) = 3.379, p < .01$ ]. The Indians ( $M = 6.127$ ) perceive that they received more mother positive affect as compared to the Chinese ( $M = 5.482$ ). There are also significant differences among the Chinese, Malays and foreigners in terms of mother resentment/role confusion [ $F(3, 156) = 4.646, p < .01$ ]. The Chinese ( $M = 5.000$ ) perceive that they have more resentment/role confusion toward their mothers compared to the Malays ( $M = 3.800$ ) and foreigners ( $M = 4.050$ ). Besides, the results also showed that there are significant differences among the Malays and Chinese for mother identification [ $F(3, 156) = 4.034, p < .01$ ]. The Malays ( $M = 5.408$ ) perceive that they have higher level of mother identification than the Chinese ( $M = 4.667$ ). In addition, there are significant differences among the Indians and Chinese in terms of communication with mothers. The Malays ( $M = 5.794$ ) perceive that they have better communication with mothers as compared to the Chinese ( $M = 5.170$ ). This is illustrated in Table 10.

**Table 10. Cultural Differences for Parent-Child Relationship**

Variables	Mean Scores				
	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Foreigners	F (3, 156)
Parent-Child Relationship	40.85	38.56	41.56	39.67	1.740
Father Positive Affect	5.814	5.052	5.832	5.375	5.746**
Father Involvement	5.202	4.713	5.469	5.010	4.527**
Father Communication	4.740	3.979	5.079	4.853	6.461**
Father Anger	4.775	4.500	4.154	4.359	.998
Mother Positive Affect	5.778	5.482	6.127	5.761	3.379*
Mother Resentment/ Role Confusion	3.800	5.000	4.397	4.050	4.646**
Mother Identification	5.408	4.667	5.350	4.742	4.034**
Mother Communication	5.329	5.170	5.798	5.626	3.038*

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to examine whether parental bonding is associated with parent-child relationship. Besides, it is of our interest to investigate whether there are differences in gender and races in terms of parental bonding and parent-child relationship.

Analysis supports our first hypothesis, and shows that there is a significant positive correlation between parental bonding and parent-child relationship, with a low margin of unknown error. This indicates that the stronger the parental bonding, the better parent-child relationship there is. In terms of paternal relationship, a higher level of care received from the

father leads to more positive affect, more father involvement, better communication and less anger between fathers and children. These results are in accordance with the research by Bean *et al.* (2004) which finds that when parent-child connectedness (bonding) is high, parents and children are more likely to provide emotional support and pay respect to each other, enjoy having activity together, communicate openly, and are less likely to experience hostility and resentment. Besides, when the father is perceived to be more overprotective, children reported more anger toward their fathers.

In terms of maternal relationship, a higher level of care received from the mother leads to more positive affect, more mother identification, better communication and less resentment or role confusion. These results are also consistent with the findings studied by Bean *et al.* (2004). In terms of the overprotection factor, when the mother is perceived to be more overprotective, children reported poorer communication and more resentment or role confusion they had toward their mothers. This is probably because when parents overprotect their children, they might be perceived as restricting their children's freedom. Hence, when children are not given enough autonomy to be independent, they may be resentful toward their parents which results in poor communication with parents.

In addition, the present study aims to examine whether there is any discrepancy between genders and races in relation to parental bonding and parent-child relationship. Results show that there are gender differences in terms of parental bonding which support our second hypothesis. When compared to males, females have reported a better parent-child bond with both fathers and mothers. Further analysis on the subscales for parental bonding shows that there are differences among genders in terms of the caring factor but not the overprotection factor. This result is concurrent with previous research which found that females perceived mothers to be more caring as compared to males (Parker *et al.*, 1979; Gladstone & Parker, 1996). Besides results also support finding by Parker *et al.* (1979) that there were no significant gender differences when "protection" scale scores were summed.

For parent-child relationship, the result supports our third hypothesis which finds that there are gender differences regarding parent-child relationship. Females are found to have better parent-child relationship compared to males. The result, however, is opposed to Robinson's (2000) study that parent-child dyads was similar for males and females in young adults. This may due to the different ethnic composition. Previous studies consisted of white, African American, Native American and other ethnicities which are culturally different from the ethnic composition in our study. Rather, it is in accordance to our hypothesis that parental bonding is related to parent-child relationship. Thus, when gender does make a difference in terms of parental bonding, the same difference should be seen in parent-child relationship and the results prove this. Besides, further analyses on subscales reveal that females tend to perceive more positive affect from both parents and more father involvement compared to males. This may be due to females' tendency to develop positive interaction and better communication skills in family as they usually are more nurturing and warm compared to males (Tam & Tay, 2007).

When cultural differences are taken into consideration, results show that there is no significant cultural difference in terms of parental bonding. Since the result is not significant and the null hypothesis is rejected, we cannot conclude that there are differences among races regarding the parent-child bond. However, it seems to be a good sign that the bonding between parent and child is universal across cultures. Hence, there is no ethnic group that perceive they have stronger or weaker bonds with their parents. This can be explained as

similar parenting styles may exist among different races. For instance, authoritative parenting style is said to be general across cultures.

Besides, results also found that there is no significant cultural difference in terms of parent-child relationship. This result does not support our last hypothesis. However, further analyses into each of the subscales reveal significant results were shown among the races. The Indians perceive more positive father affect and father involvement as compared to the Chinese. In addition, the Indians, Malays and foreigners also perceive to have better communication with fathers than the Chinese. This scenario where Chinese fathers are perceived as being less involved, having poorer communication and having less positive affect toward their children can be traced back to the traditional Chinese culture where the parent's roles in disciplining child is best described by "A kind mother and a strict father". Chinese fathers are often seen by their children as strict disciplinary figures as they have the authority to execute punishment. Thus, the children usually treat their father with respect but try to keep a distance from him. Hence, this might contribute to Chinese fathers being viewed in a less positive way compared to fathers among the other races.

In terms of mother-child relationship, when compared to the Chinese, Indians reported more positive mother affect and better communication while the Malays reported more mother identification. Besides, the Chinese also reported more resentment/role confusion toward mothers than the Malays and foreigners. The Chinese seems to have poorer parent-child relationship compared to other races even though there are no cultural differences for parental bonding and overall parent-child relationship. Future research should consider studying the factors that contribute to these findings.

There are several limitations in this study that must be taken into consideration. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small for a comparison among races as there were only forty respondents for each race. Secondly, participants in this study were all students selected from three universities and colleges in Kuala Lumpur; hence, results cannot be generalized to students from other areas. Besides, lack of language proficiency might have affected how the survey forms were filled as these forms were only written in English. Lastly, foreign students in our study consist of several races, thus they cannot represent one particular culture.

Given the findings and limitations, future research should consider a sample from a larger population to ensure the study is a representative one. Besides, translation of language in the measurement should be made if a multiracial sample is considered. Furthermore, different methods of measurements can be used to examine parental bonding and parent-child relationship to determine if the results still hold the same. Future research can also take into account the social economic status and size of a family in affecting parent-child bonding and relationship.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, a stronger parental bonding does promote a better parent-child relationship. Females have shown a better parent-child bond as well as a better parent-child relationship when compared to males. From a cultural perspective, there is no significant difference for parental bonding and parent-child relationship. However, further analyses found that Chinese parents are viewed as less positive in their relationship with children. These findings have

thus added to our understanding of parental bonding and parent-child relationship among university and college students from a cross-cultural perspective.

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