

Maternal Employment and the Mother-Child Relationship

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Introduction

- It has been suggested that a mother's employment status affects the quality of emotional support she gives her children as well as the quantity of time she spends with them, factors which play a large role in children's development. (Sphancer, Melick, Syre, & Spivey, 2006).
- Developmental theories and parenting research suggest a relationship exists between the level of emotional support provided in the home, and child behavior problems (McCarty, Zimmerman, Diguseppe, & Christakis, 2005).
- Galinsky (1999) suggested a possible gender difference in outcomes of maternal employment; suggesting daughters of employed mothers would report higher levels of feeling loved, supported, and understood by mothers compared to daughters of stay-at-home mothers, while boys would show no difference.
- The purpose of this study was to examine whether children of stay-at-home mothers showed differences in reported levels of maternal warmth, maternal trust and maternal conflict, than those of employed mothers.

Research Questions

- Do children of stay-at-home mothers exhibit differences in mother-child relationship quality when compared to children of employed mothers?
- Do these relationships differ by biological sex of the child?

Participants

- Participants were 252 dyads aged 8-12 ($M=9.6$, $SD = 1.4$) who took part in the Twins, Adoptees, Peers and Siblings (TAPS) study (McGuire et al., 2010)
- The families were predominantly middle class, with 63% of European ancestry.
- Pairs of children who experienced birth difficulties that may have affected behavioral development were excluded.

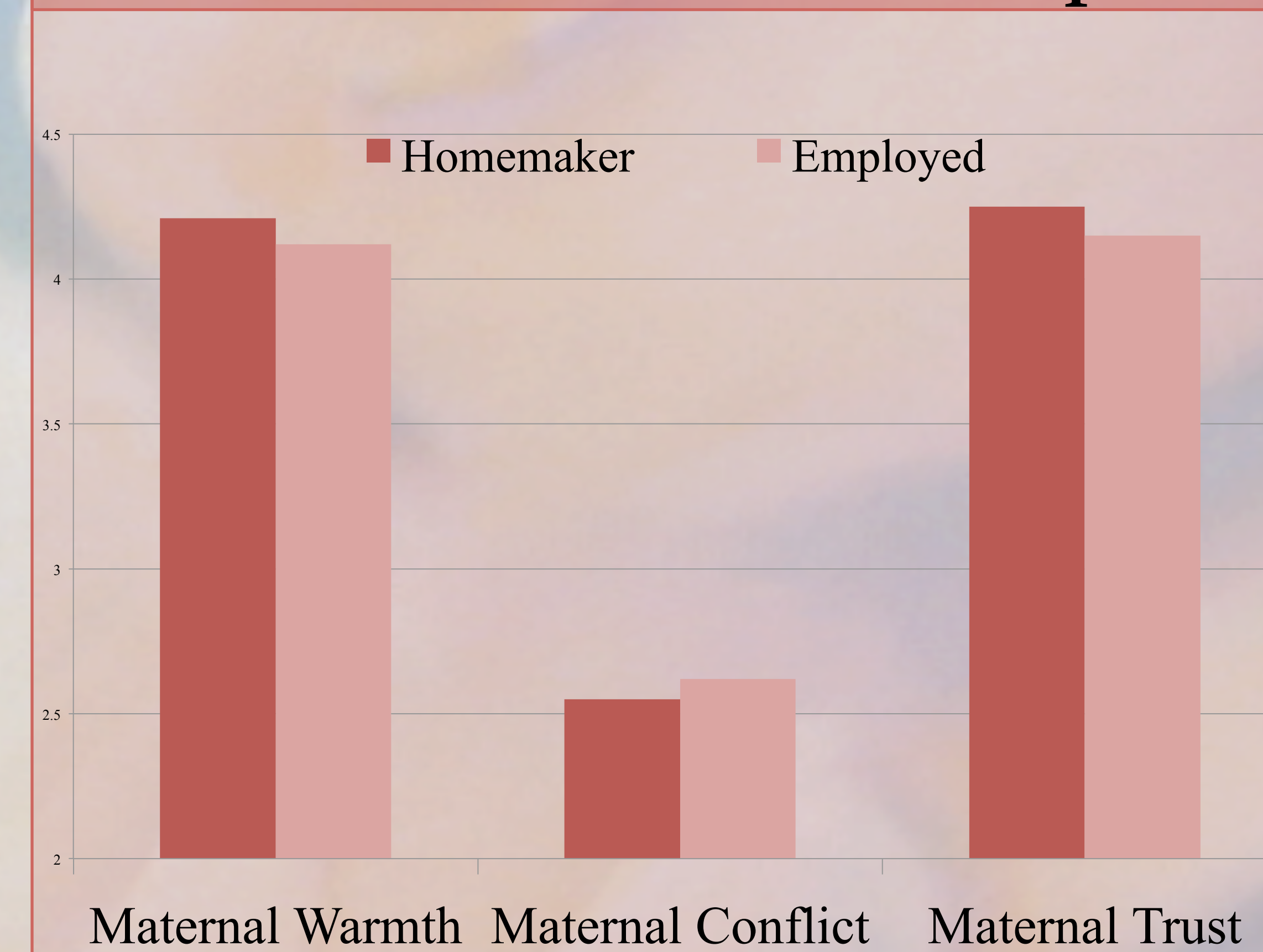
Measures

- The children completed multiple questionnaires as part of a three-hour home interview about their family relationships:
- Maternal Warmth:** children completed a measure of perceived maternal warmth (Schaefer, 1965); $\alpha = .86$
- Maternal Conflict:** children completed a measure of perceived maternal conflict (Crouter, Bumpus, Davis, & McHale, 2005); $\alpha = .87$
- Maternal Trust:** children completed a measure of perceived maternal trust (Crouter, Bumpus, Davis, & McHale, 2005); $\alpha = .86$
- Each mother reported her occupation
 - Stay-at-Home mothers, retired mothers, or unemployed mothers were listed as "Homemakers" (91).
 - Mothers with part-time or full-time careers were listed as "Employed" (174).

Results

- Independent t -tests were used to compare mean scores of employed mothers to stay-at-home mothers for maternal warmth, $t(212) = .646$, ns, maternal conflict, $t(252) = .060$, ns, and maternal trust $t(213) = .645$, ns.
- There were no significant statistical differences between the groups in relationship quality.
- ANOVAs showed that maternal employment status and gender did not have a significant interaction with maternal warmth $F(1, 250) = 1.372$, ns, maternal conflict $F(1, 250) = 2.813$, ns, or maternal trust $F(1, 250) = .742$, ns, although the slight differences were favorable for daughters of stay-at-home mothers, and unfavorable for sons of stay-at-home mothers.

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Conclusions

- Results of this study suggest that in general, a mother's employment status has little effect the relationship she has with her children.
- However, the slight gender differences in the children of employed compared to stay-at-home mothers suggest that it is possible the time a mother spends with her sons or daughters is not necessarily equally necessary or beneficial. Further analyses are needed to better understand these differences.
- Possible future directions should include further investigation into the gender differences of behaviors of stay-at-home mothers, and investigation of the same relationships in children of stay-at-home fathers.
- Limitations to this design include: a small number of children of stay-at-home mothers, and a lack of information of time spent at home with children, and high rates of twins in samples which could change maternal responsibilities, stress levels and relationships with children.

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