TITLE: Genetic and Environmental Predictors of Self-Worth in Young Children

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ABSTRACT:
Previous research indicates that parental involvement predicts higher self-worth in children, and that self-worth is genetically influenced during childhood. However, few studies consider transactional influences of genetic and environmental (parenting) influences on self-worth. The current study used an adoption design to assess independent and interactive contributions of parental warmth involvement, child surgency, and heritable factors to two domains of early childhood social self-worth: perceived peer acceptance and maternal acceptance. We hypothesized that: (1) child surgency, which captures sociability and positive affectivity, is positively related to children’s social self-worth; (2) child surgency mediates associations between heritable...
tendencies to seek and form positive social relationships (i.e. birth mother agreeableness, behavioral activation) and social self-worth; and (3) adoptive mother involvement and child surgency interact to predict children’s social self-worth. Participants included 561 adopted children and their birth and adoptive families from the Early Growth and Development study. When children were 54-months-old, their adoptive mothers reported on their own parenting (maternal involvement); adoptive fathers reported on children’s surgency. Children rated their perceived peer and maternal acceptance at age 72 months. Birth mothers reported on their own agreeableness and behavioral activation. Birth mother characteristics predicted children’s perceived maternal acceptance, however these effects were not mediated by child surgency. Surgency was positively related to perceived maternal acceptance and peer acceptance, but only when children experienced average to high levels of maternal involvement. This study reaffirmed heritable influences on self-worth, and highlights that child temperament and parenting jointly affect emergent self-worth.

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