Fathers' Involvement and School-Aged Children's Sociability: A Comparison between Japan and the United States
Masako Ishii-Kuntz

Abstract
Numerous studies on child development in Japan focus on how mothers influence emotional, cognitive and social development of their preschool children. In contrast, we know relatively little about how paternal involvement influences social development of not only preschool but also school-aged children. Similarly, although many U.S. researchers examined the determinants of paternal involvement, its consequences on sociability of their school-aged children have not been extensively studied. Using questionnaire and interview data collected in Japan and the United States, this study examines the effect of paternal involvement on sociability among their school-aged children. A theoretical model incorporating parental involvement, parental age and education, number of siblings, and other demographic variables was analyzed. In both countries, children whose fathers are actively involved in their lives reported higher scores of sociability than children with uninvolved fathers. Additionally, maternal involvement and the number of siblings are positively associated with children's sociability in both countries. The implications of my findings and the direction of future research are further discussed.

Key words: paternal involvement, school-aged children, sociability


父親の子育て参加と就学児の社会性に関する日米比較調査
石井 クンツ 昌子

要約
不登校、ひきこもり、青少年犯罪など子どもに関する様々な問題はあとを絶たない。これらの要因のひとつとして子どもの社会性の欠如があげられると同時に親子関係の問題も指摘されてきた。日本の親子関係に関する研究は主に乳幼児の発達と母親を対象にしたものが多く、父親が子どもの社会性にどのように影響しているかについての研究は少ない。さらに就学児の社会性と父親の子育て参加の関連についての研究はほとんどされていない。米国の研究についても同様なことが指摘される。本稿では父親の子育て参加が就学児の社会性に及ぼす影響に焦点をおき、母親の子育て参加、父母の年齢と教育程度、きょうだいの数、子どもの年齢と性別、そして家族構造などの影響を解明する。日米のデータを重回帰分析した結果、父親の子育て参加が活発であるほど就学児の社会性が高いことが明らかになった。さらに子どもの社会性に関しては子どもから見た父親の子育て参加が父親自身から見た子育て参加よりもより強い影響を示していることも解明された。

キーワード：父親の子育て参加、就学児、社会性

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INTRODUCTION

In Japan, children's school absenteeism and self-seclusion have been on the rise since the mid-1970s (Hisatake et al., 1997). In addition, the number of crimes committed by children has been increasing in recent years. With the rise of these problems, parents have often been encouraged for providing an environment for their children to develop the necessary social skills to adjust to social and group settings (Ishikawa, 2000). Many studies that examine various dimensions of child development in Japan and the United States have focused on mother-child relationships (e.g., Azuma, et al., 1981; Nishino, 1990). Consequently, relatively little attempts have been made to examine how fathers' involvement influences Japanese children's sociability. Makino (1996:4) argues that this is because of the "maternal instinct" myth which places much more emphasis on the importance of mothering as opposed to fathering. In addition, many studies that examined children's social development focused on preschool children rather than school-aged children (Kanbara, et al., 2000). Similarly, many studies in the United States focused on mother-child relationships as a contributing factor for children's attachment, cognitive, emotional and social development (Ishii-Kuntz, 2003; Luster, et al., 2000; NICHD, 1997).

Although the findings from these studies are insightful, it is important to examine how sociability of school-aged children is related to paternal involvement because older children have clearer conception of their fathers' role compared to their younger counterparts. The objectives of this study are twofold: to examine how fathers' involvement is associated with school-aged children's sociability, and to compare a theoretical model that includes this relationship between Japan and the United States. A cross-national comparison of the theoretical model is a worthy effort for several reasons. First, although American fathers are much more likely to be involved in their children's lives than their Japanese counterparts (Ishii-Kuntz, 1994), the effect of paternal involvement on children may be quite similar. For example, Ishii-Kuntz (1999) found that children in both countries who spend more time with their fathers express more affection toward fathers compared to those children with noninvolved fathers. In addition, a higher-level of paternal involvement is associated with preschool children's more frequent interaction with friends in both countries (Ishii-Kuntz, 1998a). Second, although the culture of active and nurturing fatherhood has existed in the United States longer than it has in Japan (Ishii-Kuntz, 1998b), there are increasing signs in Japan toward more active paternal involvement. Therefore, the analysis of cross-national data might yield some interesting similarities between the two countries. Finally, although Japanese men work longer hours than their U.S. counterparts (see Japan Association for Women's Education, 1995), the structure of their employment in terms of work hours and holidays is similar between the two countries. Despite different cultural backgrounds and history, the similarities in attitudes toward fatherhood and structure in workplace might allow us to compare how fathers' involvement is affecting school-aged children's sociability between Japan and the United States.
time with their fathers. Ishii-Kuntz (1998) also found that young children who have frequent interaction with their fathers have a more extensive network of friends. Nakano (1992) also reported that fathers' frequent play with their preschool children was positively related to their emotional stability and sociability, among other developmental dimensions. Tajima (1990) also found that eight-month-old infants who frequently played with their fathers tended to show higher levels of linguistic, cognitive as well as social development compared to those who had limited interaction with their fathers. Finally, Kato et al. (1996) reported that fathers who were actively involved in childcare were more flexible than those fathers with limited involvement, and their children displayed higher level of social development.

In the U.S., a large number of studies focused on the relationship between fathering and their children's developmental outcomes (e.g., Radin, 1982; Thompson, et al., 1994; Zimmerman, et al., 1995). Overall, we know that children who are friendly, independent and assertive with friends are more likely to have authoritative parents (Baumrind, 1968). Authoritative parenting that combines both parental control and support coincides with gendered roles of parenting that places fathers as disciplinarians and mothers as nurturers. In Radin's (1982) study, however, children with involved and nurturing fathers were also likely to be more cognitively competent than their counterparts with noninvolved fathers. Thompson, et al. (1994) also found a positive relationship between fathers' involvement and their children's emotional well-being. This positive relationship was also reported across different ethnic groups (Zimmerman, et al., 1995; Amato, et al., 1999). The long-term positive effect of fathering was also found in several longitudinal studies (e.g., Amato, et al., 1997). For example, Amato, et al. (1997) found that adults whose parents reported greater parental involvement in their childhood tended to report higher levels of social integration compared to those whose parents were not actively involved.

In summary, previous studies in Japan and the United States suggest that active paternal involvement has positive benefits for children's developmental outcomes. This direct link will be examined in this study by focusing on school-aged children's sociability and by comparing this association between Japan and the United States.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As shown in Figure 1, the theoretical model in this study incorporates the relationship between children's sociability and paternal involvement along with other demographic and familial variables. The basic premise of this model is that children who are exposed to a diverse environment are more likely to have opportunities to socialize with different adults and peers. The model also assumes that such a diverse environment can be derived from fathers' and mothers' active involvement in their children's lives. It is, therefore, hypothesized that active paternal involvement is positively associated with school-aged children's sociability. It is also predicted that active maternal involvement increases children's sociability. Assuming that older parents and parents with higher level of education can provide a more diverse environment for their children, paternal age and education are expected to be positively associated with school-aged children's sociability. Because children with one or more siblings are exposed to diverse relationships, I predict that children with more siblings are likely to report a higher level of sociability than those children with no or fewer siblings. Finally, I included several control variables: children's age and gender, and household structure. The model that incorporates these relationships is analyzed separately for Japan and the United States.
III. METHODS

1. Sample

Data come from the Parents and Children Project (see Ishii-Kuntz, 1998a) conducted in Japan and the United States. To locate sample fathers, mothers, and children, schools in suburban communities in central Japan and western United States were contacted. After the permission of several schools was obtained, a 10-page questionnaire was distributed to both fathers and mothers who have at least one biological child age three or older. Initially, 500 paired-questionnaires (500 for mothers and 500 for fathers) were distributed in each country. After identifying families with at least one child between 10 and 15 years of age with the initial questionnaires, the second phase with face-to-face interviews was conducted with the children. Excluding respondents who only had children younger than 10, or who refused to be interviewed, the final samples used for this study consist of 193 Japanese and 203 American father-mother-child triads (N = 579 for Japan and N = 609 for the United States). A focal child was randomly selected if there is more than one child in the same household who is between 10 and 15 years of age. The interviews that were conducted for children lasted approximately one hour.

The major demographic characteristics of the current sample are presented in Table 1. Japanese and American samples are similar with respect to children's mean ages (12.2 for Japanese children and 12.1 for American children), father's and mother's mean ages (42.5 and 41.3 for Japanese and American fathers, and 39.8 and 38.2 for Japanese and American mothers), and the number of sibling (1.2 and 1.9 in Japan and the U.S.). In terms of differences, the Japanese sample has a roughly
equal number of boys and girls, but there are more boys (56.2%) in the United States sample. Whereas father’s educational attainment is similar between Japan and the United States, more mothers in the U.S. (41.4%) are college-educated than Japanese mothers (31.1%). A greater proportion of American fathers (28.6%) have professional or managerial jobs than Japanese fathers (16.1%). At the same time, however, more American fathers (42.4%) are laborers compared to Japanese fathers (27.5%). Whereas Japanese fathers are more represented in clerical and service jobs (20.7%), only 7% of American fathers have those jobs. Overall, Japanese fathers’ occupations are more spread out over the different job categories than American fathers. As for mothers’ employment, a greater proportion of mothers in the United States (68.5%) are employed compared to their Japanese counterparts (61.7%). It should be noted that a closer examination of Japanese mothers’ employment pattern shows that many of these mothers are either self-employed or employed part-time. Finally, more children in the United States (82.3%) live in nuclear household than Japanese children (69.4%).

2. Measures

Father Involvement: The extent of paternal involvement was measured using both children’s and fathers’ responses. Children were asked, “How much time do you typically spend talking or playing with your father or having him help you with your homework on days when your father is (or is not) working?” Children responded to a nine-category list that ranged from no time to over 8 hours. Times spent on fathers’ working and non-working days were averaged to indicate overall father involvement perceived by children. Fathers were asked to indicate the frequency of talking or playing or helping with children’s hom-

### TABLE 1. SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>U.S.A.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child gender (Male)</td>
<td>93 (48.2%)</td>
<td>114 (56.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child mean age</td>
<td>10–15</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father mean age</td>
<td>31–55</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother mean age</td>
<td>29–50</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>40 (20.7%)</td>
<td>38 (18.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>80 (41.5%)</td>
<td>85 (41.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College or more</td>
<td>73 (37.8%)</td>
<td>80 (39.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>45 (23.3%)</td>
<td>36 (17.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>88 (45.6%)</td>
<td>83 (40.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College or more</td>
<td>60 (31.1%)</td>
<td>84 (41.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father occupation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/Managerial</td>
<td>31 (16.1%)</td>
<td>58 (28.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/Service</td>
<td>41 (20.7%)</td>
<td>14 (7.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>11 (5.7%)</td>
<td>12 (5.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborers</td>
<td>53 (27.5%)</td>
<td>86 (42.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>55 (28.5%)</td>
<td>21 (10.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>2 (0.9%)</td>
<td>12 (5.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed mothers</td>
<td>119 (61.7%)</td>
<td>139 (68.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of sibling (Mean)</td>
<td>0–5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear household</td>
<td>134 (69.4%)</td>
<td>167 (82.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N 193 203
work with response categories ranging from (1) not at all involved to (4) very actively involved. To make fathers' and children's perception of paternal involvement comparable, children's perception toward paternal involvement was reclassified to include four similar categories.

Mother Involvement: Mothers' involvement with children was similarly measured by mothers' own and children's perception of such involvement. Using identical questions as those used for father involvement, both mothers and children were asked to indicate the frequency of mothers' talking or playing or helping with children's homework with the same response categories. Children's perception of maternal involvement was again reclassified into four categories.

Children's Sociability: Children's sociability in this study is measured by five items, frequency of interaction with adults other than their own parents, level of participation in playing and talking with friends, friendliness toward adults and similar age peers, and the extent of how well they get along with others. Interaction with adults was measured by the frequency of such interaction and the level of participation with friends was measured by the frequency of talking and playing with similar-age peers. The response categories for these items ranged from (1) never to (4) very often. Friendliness toward adults and friends was measured by children's own perception of how friendly they are toward nonparental adults and similar-age peers with the response categories ranging from (1) not friendly at all to (4) very friendly. Finally, children were asked how well they get along with others including nonparental adults and friends with the response categories ranging from (1) not very well at all to (5) extremely well. These five items were summed to create a scale of children's sociability with a range of scores from 5 to 21. The alpha for this scale was .85. Higher scores of this scale indicate higher level of children's sociability.

Demographic Variables: As previously discussed, parents' ages, parental education, the number of sibling, child's gender and age, and household structure are expected to influence school-aged children's sociability. These variables thus are included as controls.

3. Analyses

The analytic strategy in this study involves examination of descriptive statistics and multiple regression. First, descriptive statistics are used to compare the key variables between the two countries. Second, the main part of the analysis involved multiple regression in which the explanatory variables were entered into equations along with the demographic variables.

IV. RESULTS

In Table 2, descriptive statistics for parental involvement and child's sociability are presented along with the results of a t-test examining mean differences between the two countries. Among five categories of child sociability, significant cross-national differences were found with respect to children's interaction with adults and how they get along with others. That is, American children not only interact with nonparental adults much more frequently but also report getting along better with others than their Japanese counterparts. Significant differences are also noted in terms of father involvement. Here again, American fathers and children reported much more active paternal involvement than Japanese children. Interestingly, no cross-national difference was found in maternal involvement. Overall, mothers in both countries report more active involvement with school-aged children than fathers. This is also reflected by their children's perception where they reported that their mothers are more actively involved with them than their fathers.

In regression analysis, parents' age and education, child's age and gender, number of sibling, and household structure were used as control variables. All independent and control variables were entered simultaneously in this analysis. Two-tailed tests of significance were
chosen to maintain a conservative estimate, although the directional nature of the hypotheses could justify the use of a one-tailed test. Because significant correlations were expected between parents' own perception of involvement with that of their children's, multicollinearity among the parental involvement variables was evaluated. Bivariate correla-
tions between fathers' and children's perception of paternal involvement were .072 and .115 for Japanese and American data, respectively. Correlations for mothers' and children's perception of maternal involvement were higher at .267 and .223 for Japanese and American data, respectively. Although all of these correlations were significant at .05 level, they do not suggest problems related to multicollinearity (Tabachnick, et al., 2001).

As seen in Table 3, regression models for both countries were significant. For Japanese data, father's own assessment of their involvement with children, child's perception of paternal and maternal involvement had statistically significant positive effect on child's sociability. That is, children with actively involved fathers are much more sociable than those children with noninvolved fathers. Additionally, children who perceive that their mothers are actively involved in their lives are also more sociable than children who do not think that their mothers are actively involved in their lives. Similarly, I found that American children with involved fathers are more likely to be sociable compared to those children whose fathers do not actively associate with their children. In terms of parental involvement, the only cross-national difference was that American children whose mothers perceive that they are actively involved in children's lives are also more sociable than children whose mothers do not perceive that way. This relationship was not found for the Japanese data. In both countries, girls and children who have more siblings are also found to report higher levels of sociability compared to boys and children with fewer siblings. Cross-national differences were found with respect to household structure. That is, children who live in extended households in Japan are more sociable than those who live in nuclear households. This difference was not found with the American data. Finally, all of these independent variables included in our model explained 27.8% and 30.4% of variation in children's sociability in Japan and the U.S., respectively.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined how fathers' involvement influenced the sociability of their school-aged children. Using questionnaire and interview data collected in Japan and the United States, I found that fathers' involvement is significantly associated with their school-aged children's sociability in both countries. That is, Japanese and American children whose fathers frequently play and talk with children and help with their homework are much more likely to show higher levels of sociability compared to those whose interaction with fathers is limited. When children as opposed to fathers themselves assessed father's involvement, this relationship was found to be even stronger. Children's perception of maternal involvement was also positively related to their sociability in both countries.

Several reasons are speculated for the significant positive relationship I found between paternal involvement and school-aged children's sociability. First, as discussed earlier, children's frequent interaction with their fathers may provide them with more opportunities to interact with a diverse group of adults including fathers' relatives, friends, and co-workers. That is, it is speculated that fathers' presence and participation in child rearing enable children to expand their social network in which they are given more opportunities to interact with a diverse group of adults including fathers' relatives, friends, and co-workers. Second, fathers' more active involvement in child rearing allows their spouses to work or pursue non-familial activities. As a result, mothers are also able to expand their social network that, in turn, may expand their children's social network as well. Third, children whose fathers are involved in child rearing are more likely to be able to observe, first hand, the kind of negotiation that goes on between their mothers and fathers during the decision making process in everyday life. Children, therefore, may learn to be a more effective and efficient communicators through their observation of parental negotiation.
In comparing Japanese and American data, the only notable difference was found with respect to the relationship between mothers' own perception of maternal involvement and children's sociability. This relationship was significant only for the U.S. sample. This finding suggests that there might be a gap between Japanese mothers' and their children's perception of maternal involvement. A closer examination of bivariate correlations indicates that the correlation between mothers' own perception and that of children is not as strong as those for paternal involvement. Further, this may be an indication that some Japanese children may take their mothers' involvement for granted because not only mothers are more available to children than fathers but also the culture of motherhood in Japan may be much more established than that in the United States.

Other notable cross-national similarities were found with respect to child's gender and the number of siblings. In both countries, girls are significantly more sociable than boys. This finding is consistent with previous studies in Japan and the United States that reported a more harmonious nature of girls' interaction with other adults and peers (see Macoby, 1988; Nakano, 1999). I also found that the number of siblings is positively associated with children's sociability in both Japan and the United States. Finally, a cross-national difference was found in terms of household structure. Japanese children who live in extended household are much more sociable than their counterparts who live in nuclear families. This difference, however, was not found in the United States. This may be due to the different reasons why extended households are formed in the two countries. That is, the three-generational households in the United States are more likely to be formed because of the caregiving needs for the elderly parents whereas they are formed in Japan out of obligations. In the United States, even though children may live with more adults in three-generational households, their interaction with the grandparents may be limited due to health problems of older family members. Therefore, different household structures (nuclear vs. extended) may not provide as much varying and diverse experiences for American children as Japanese children.

This study has a few limitations. First, the sampling is not random thus my findings cannot be generalized to a larger population of Japanese and American families. However, the use of data collected from fathers, mothers and children in my study is an important departure from the previous studies that used mothers' reports about children. Second, only quantitative dimension of parenting was used in this study as opposed to more qualitative dimensions of parenting. As Palkovitz (1997) argues, paternal involvement is a complex concept that ranges from everyday child rearing to their breadwinning roles. Future studies, therefore, need to examine, in greater detail, how different types of paternal involvement influence children's sociability. Future research in this area also needs to examine a possible interaction effects between parental involvement and child's gender, and the number of siblings because these variables are also found as significant predictors of school-aged children's sociability.

The findings of the current study also have several important implications. First, fathers play an important role in their school-aged children's social development. In Japan, a massive campaign to increase paternal involvement was produced in 1998 in response to the dramatic decline in birth rates. The recent effort by the Japanese government includes an attempt to increase the rate of men taking child care leave from work to approximately 10% of the workforce. The assumption behind these efforts is that wives whose husbands actively participate in child care are more willing to have babies. My finding that paternal involvement is also critical for school-aged children's social development suggests that the governmental efforts should also be directed to emphasize this healthy child out-
come of active fathering. Second, my finding that children's perception of their parents' involvement plays an important role suggests that the effort to increase paternal involvement needs not be a one-way process, i.e., only from fathers' perspective. Whenever possible, children's direct voices need to be reflected in creating programs and policies that are targeted to increase fathers' involvement in child rearing.

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