
Early Parental Presence and Self-Other Overlap: An Empirical Examination of Chodorow's Theory of the Reproduction of Mothering

by John E. Myers
Psychology

Faculty Mentor: Sara Hodges, Psychology

Abstract

This study was inspired by Nancy Chodorow's (1978) Theory of the Reproduction of Mothering (TRM). The study empirically scrutinized Chodorow's hypothesis that male-dominant, father-absent societies in which women do most of the parenting for children of both sexes reproduce themselves by creating dissimilar atmospheres in which young girls and boys develop their gender identities. According to Chodorow, these disparate atmospheres make women view themselves in relationship to others and, in contrast, making men view themselves as separate from others. Ninety college students completed a battery of pen and paper measures that included, among other things, measures of self-other overlap and parental egalitarianism. Although TRM was not supported, parental egalitarianism correlated with increased perceptions of self-other overlap with both parents regardless of whether the subject was male or female. Further, parental egalitarianism was associated with decreased perceptions of self-other overlap with close others in males.

Introduction

Everyone has a set of heuristics that helps to categorize any individual as being either male or female. Some of these rules of thumb are biological and almost universal. Other indicators of gender are behavioral—more products of society than biology. While some people believe that many behavioral differences between men and women are primarily biological, most would concede that socialization also plays an important role in the development of gender-specific behaviors. One particularly interesting difference between males and females is found in parental involvement: women tend to be more involved in the lives of their children than men. This might be the most intuitively biological behavioral gender difference, but to what extent do social forces foster the gendered division of parental responsibilities? Nancy Chodorow (1978) has posited that social factors are paramount in creating gendered differences in parenting. However intriguing her theory is, few empirical studies have tested its elements.

In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), Chodorow attempted to explain how behavioral differences between men and women come about. Her Theory of the Reproduction of Mothering (TRM) states that male dominant, father-absent societies in which women do all or most of the parenting for children of both sexes “reproduce” themselves. Chodorow proposes that this occurs because the absence of a father in the modern patriarchal family unit creates different atmospheres in which young boys and girls develop gender identities.

According to the theory, young boys lack a same sex primary caregiver with whom to identify at the time that their gender identities are developing. When they realize that their mother is a different

sex from them, they feel a need to reject her as a model, although she is the person who has, in most cases, performed the bulk of their nurturing. Consequently, boys learn to identify themselves as being different or separate from others. Furthermore, Chodorow proposed that rejecting one's mother and, by extension, all things feminine (e.g., nurturance), leads to a definition of masculinity characterized by little more than the rejection of femininity. This identity hinders how males relate emotionally to other people, and thus encumbers their ability or willingness to tend to their own children's emotional needs, while priming them for work outside the home.

Young girls, on the other hand, have access to a same-sex primary caregiver and are thus able to develop their gender identities much less traumatically than their male counterparts. As a result, females come to identify themselves in relation to others as they develop into adulthood, making them much more prepared and willing to care for their own children. Accordingly, the odds that a woman will eventually do all or most of the parenting for her children are greatly increased (Chodorow, 1978).

According to Chodorow's reasoning, relational differences between males and females should be apparent as soon as children can understand which gender they are. Some research has shown that girls and boys as young as 53 months (under five years of age) differ in how they present themselves in photographs taken with infants. Specifically, girls tend to smile at, touch and stand closer to infants (especially when pretending to be an infant's parent) than boys. In fact, boys tend to stand farther away from infants once they begin pretending to be an infant's parent (Reid, Tate, & Berman, 1989).

While it is likely that preschool children learn parenting

behaviors through the observation of their own parents, TRM would also cite disparities in the availability of a same-sex parent in the familial environment of young girls and boys to explain these behavioral differences. Lending some support to TRM, Williams, Radin, and Allegro (1992) found that individuals tend to have less traditional attitudes about employment and childrearing with increased paternal involvement. Also, individuals (especially boys) tend to report high paternal involvement as being advantageous (Williams, *et al.*, 1992). Could it be that increased parental egalitarianism leads to more similarities in how boys and girls develop their gender identities and, thus, less polarized views of male/female gender roles, as would be predicted by TRM?

As it turns out, paternal emotional involvement has been associated with greater femininity in both male and female children (Deutsch, Servis, & Payne, 2001). It is reasonable to assume that paternal emotional involvement might be related to children's preference for feminine activities because fathers who are more emotionally involved with their children might themselves be more feminine and, thus, provide a more feminine role model for their children. However, TRM might postulate that emotional identification with fathers, especially in male children, leads to a decrease in rejection of femininity (i.e., masculinity) and, thus, an increase in femininity.

Empirical studies have shown that very early in their development boys are generally less relational than girls and that greater paternal involvement fosters greater femininity with more egalitarian attitudes about gender roles. Generally, these effects have been accounted for by prior researchers within the context of social learning and modeling. Duindam and Spruijt (2002),

however, ran one study within the framework of TRM and found that males who were inspired by their own fathers' parenting tended to spend more time with their children and that males who maintained a strong relationship with their own fathers tended to be more likely to continue performing more childcare throughout their children's development.

These findings are exactly what would be predicted by TRM. Despite empirical studies that show support for TRM, the theory has not gone without criticism. In fact, it is a hotly debated concept that is easily explained away with manifold confounding variables. For example, it could be that an egalitarian father will raise an egalitarian son, not because of his son's ability to develop his gender identity in an optimal environment, but because egalitarian families socialize their children differently from traditional families. In addition, the findings of several studies have refuted TRM. For example, Sabattini and Leaper (2004) found no differences in gender attitudes between participants from traditional and egalitarian families. This was true when household labor was defined as childcare and housework together, housework alone, or childcare alone.

The most salient problem for TRM is that it has yet to be verified empirically, whereas the more widely accepted theories of gender role development have been studied quite extensively. While the predictions made by TRM are rarely tested explicitly, they are often indirectly supported by researchers who study gender role development in other contexts. Indeed, many of the studies cited here to support TRM employed some other cognitive theory of gender development as their basis.

Two theories that compete with Chodorow's explanation of gender role differences are social cognitive theory (Bussey,

& Bandura, 1999) and gender schema theory (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002). Both of these theories state that children learn their gendered behaviors through the observation of male and female role models, but the theories differ in their explanations of how this learning occurs.

Gender schema theory states that children categorize people as being either male or female by forming gender schemas that they derive through the observation of people around them. A gender schema is a set of mental representations that provides information about gender and about one's self. According to the theory, all that is necessary for a gender schema to develop is the formation of a gender identity and the ability of a child to associate certain traits and behaviors to a particular sex. The theory claims that gender schemas, once formed, allow children to categorize people, including themselves, as being either male or female, using increasingly abstract heuristics (e.g., interests, personality, and salient emotions) as they develop. Through this categorization process, some gender differences are exaggerated, or possibly even fabricated. The theory posits that these gender schemas are generally adaptive because they allow us to better remember, and recognize people of a particular sex while also providing us with information about how individuals of a particular sex should act (Martin, *et al.*, 2002).

Gender schema theory implies that individuals learn gender appropriate traits and behaviors almost exclusively through observation. Thus, according to this theory, increased paternal presence might lead to differences in gender role attitudes, not because individuals from egalitarian families had male care givers with whom they relate and identify, but because fathers

in egalitarian family units might be very different models than absent fathers. The most apparent divergence between TRM and gender schema theory is that, according to TRM, increased paternal involvement should have dramatic effects on gender role attitudes and how individuals relate. Gender schema theory, on the other hand, might predict fewer differences between individuals from traditional and egalitarian families, because the presence of a father only provides children one additional model to observe.

Bussey and Bandura (1999) developed a social cognitive theory of gender development in an effort to integrate the concepts of more narrow theories into one unified whole. Their social cognitive theory states that the process of evolution affects our gender development, but, rather than dictating our gendered behaviors, evolution's role in gender development represents potentialities.

For social cognitive theory, the environment in which we develop plays a much more important role in gender development than does biology. Social cognitive theory argues that there are three kinds of environments. The *imposed* environment is forced upon us. An example would be a child who has little control over whether to go to school. The *selected* environment constitutes the actual experienced environment. We choose with whom we socialize, to what we pay attention, our goals and hobbies. Finally, we create our *constructed* environment through intentional generative efforts. For example, children construct a play environment by choosing playmates, play activities, and rules for the play activities. Thus, the environment, too, presents a set of potentialities over which we have ample control.

Social cognitive theory also posits that there are three modes of influence on gender differentiation. The first and most basic mode

is *modeling*. Peers, parents, and the media all portray how males and females act, and children are able to understand and learn these models from a very early age. The second, and somewhat less efficient mode of influence, is *enactive learning*. Children glean information about gender appropriate behaviors through the observation of the outcomes of their actions. If a parent or peer reacts negatively to a particular gendered behavior, the child learns that it is one that he or she should not continue. Finally, *direct tuition* is the verbal communication of gender appropriate behaviors. This mode is, in many ways, a combination of the two others and is much more direct. Yet, it is also less efficient than modeling because of the abstract nature of language and the difficulty that young children have comprehending what is being said to them.

Given the complexity of social cognitive theory and its view of gender role development, increased paternal involvement might have little effect on the development of one's gender identity. As with gender schema theory, social cognitive theory is unable to establish the relationship between increased paternal involvement and its influence on one's developing gender identity. Rather, the effects of paternal involvement may be highly variable depending upon the femininity/masculinity of the father and the influence of several equally important confounding variables. TRM, on the other hand, claims that increased paternal involvement will universally lead to a decline in gender polarization, regardless of a father's personality, by providing males with a same-sex primary caregiver with whom to identify, while dampening extreme maternal identification in females.

Both of these two cognitive theories of gender development are

valid and widely held, but it is difficult to resist the allure of TRM with its psychoanalytic approach. TRM stands alone in describing the systemic, social, and cognitive factors that lead to the persistence of gender-role inequities not only in psychological terms, but also in activist, sociological terms. In other words, not only does TRM explain gender-role inequalities, it also provides possible solutions to them.

Testing some of the tenets on which TRM is based, in particular the correlations between paternal involvement and self-other overlap, may help determine the validity of TRM. That is so because measures of self-other overlap are accepted as operationalizations of how individuals relate to and identify with others.

Aron, Aron, Tudor, and Nelson (1991) demonstrated how close relationships can be gauged by measuring levels of self-other overlap. They performed three experiments to determine the correlation between self-other overlap and relationship closeness. In their first experiment, recruited college students were instructed to allocate money to a close friend or a stranger. In one condition, the subjects were told that the friend/stranger would not know how the money was allocated. In another condition, the participants were told that the friend/stranger would know how the money was allocated. Aron *et al.* (1991) found that while there were no effects for gender or whether the other knew how the money was allocated, there was a significant effect for close friend versus stranger, with more money allocated to the close friend. To investigate this result further, the researchers did a follow-up study using most of the same procedures, but instructing participants to allocate money to a disliked other. Also, the researchers left out the variable of "other will/will not know how the money was allocated." Again, there

were no effects for gender, but there were significant effects based on how the participant viewed the other. The researchers found a significantly greater difference between allocations to the friend and stranger than the difference between allocations to the disliked other and stranger.

The researchers pointed out that these two findings, taken together, indicate that providing greater rewards to friends cannot be explained by the friend's potential reciprocity, in that the friend, in some cases, did not know how the money was allocated, a factor that had no effect on how participants allocated the money. Second, because the close friend did not put forth any effort in the study the allocation of money was not based on a desire to maintain equity. . Rather, Aron *et al.* (1991) concluded that we perceive the resources of close others as if they were, to some extent, our own resources. They reached this conclusion by indicating that if liking alone was the factor that determined how the money was allocated, the difference between the allocation of money between a friend and a stranger and between a disliked other and a stranger should have been more similar. They point out, however, that they may have attained these results because participants liked their friends more than they disliked their disliked others.

Another study that explored the association between relationship closeness and self-other overlap (Aron *et al.* 1991) presented twenty female college students with 60 concrete nouns, each for 10 seconds. While the participants viewed each of the 60 nouns, they were asked to form a vivid image of one of three target persons interacting with the item to which the noun referred. The target persons that the subjects were asked to imagine were themselves, their mothers (i.e., a close other), and Cher, a well-

known female entertainer who, at the time of the study, would have been about the same age as the participants' mothers. After each noun was presented for 10 seconds, the subjects wrote down their image before the next noun was presented. After all of the nouns had been presented, the subjects were given 5 minutes to write down as many of the nouns as they could remember in a surprise memory test. The researchers found that subjects remembered a significantly greater number of nouns with Cher than the number of nouns they recalled with their mother. Furthermore, Aron *et al.*, found that the difference between the number of nouns recalled with mother and self was not significant.

Aron *et al.* (1991) posited that there is a difference between how we perceive others and ourselves in our physical world. That is to say, we see the entire body of another person—*i.e.*, as a “figure,” rather than just our hands or other body parts that we would see in the perception of ourselves, the “ground.” Aron *et al.* claim that this perceptual difference makes our mental representations of others interacting with some object more salient, and thus easier to recall. However, if this phenomenon were strictly perceptual, one would expect more similarity between nouns recalled with Cher and nouns recalled with one's mother. The experimenters hypothesize that this difference could indicate that while imagining one's self or one's mother (or anyone with whom we are extremely close), the target person is perceived as being more “ground-like.” On the other hand, when the target person is a prominent entertainer, the target is perceived as being more “figure-like.”

To ensure that the difference in the number of nouns remembered for one's mother and Cher was not an artifact of Cher's novel and flashy persona, the researchers re-ran the experiment using seven

female subjects who had lived with their mothers within the last two years. In this study, each subject was instructed to imagine one of her mother's friends rather than a prominent entertainer. Also, the researchers asked that the selected friends be ones with whom the subjects were not close. The results were similar to those of the original study. Subjects recalled more nouns associated with their mothers' friends than they did for their own mothers. Again, there was no significant difference between the number of nouns recalled for a subject's mother and a subject's self. Furthermore, the researchers found that the difference between nouns recalled for mother and mother's friend was strongly related to closeness with mother ($r = .56$).

The results of these studies seem to show that subjects tend to perceive individuals with whom they have a close relationship as "self-like." The researchers concede, however, that the small sample sizes of the two studies detract from the strength of their findings. Also, there might be other explanations for their results. For example, it could be that fewer nouns were recalled for one's mother because it requires less effort to imagine her. The researchers dismiss this explanation, however, by pointing out that it should be just as easy to imagine Cher interacting with an object because, as a prominent entertainer, this is how she is almost universally perceived in the physical world.

Finally, in their third experiment, Aron *et al.* (1991) revealed a confusion of the self with a close other. Ten (8 women) married graduate students were asked to complete a questionnaire while they were waiting for a social psychology seminar to begin. The questionnaire had subjects rate how much 90 traits applied to themselves, their spouses, and Bill Cosby. After they finished the

questionnaire, they attended the seminar and were called out of it individually sometime between 15 minutes and 2 hours from its start. The seminar served as a distraction task. When participants were called out, they then completed a computer task in which they were instructed to indicate as quickly as possible whether each of the 90 traits applied to themselves. Researchers presented the set of 90 adjectives to each subject three times, with the traits listed in random order each time. The computer recorded responses and response times.

The results showed that individuals took longer to respond to adjectives for traits which were dissimilar to their spouses than to respond to adjectives they shared with their spouses. Aron *et al.* also analyzed data from response errors—those adjectives that subjects reported as being representative of the self on the questionnaire, but were not reported as such during the computer task. Consistent with the previous finding, the results showed that subjects made more errors with adjectives when they perceived differences with their spouses than with adjectives when they perceived shared qualities.

The findings of this study seem to show that subjects had trouble separating their representations of themselves from their representations of their spouses. It appears that the subjects had difficulty perceiving a trait that applied to their spouses as not applying to themselves. The researchers point out, however, that these results may have occurred because more mundane traits may have been reported for self and spouse than for Bill Cosby. They re-ran the study with ten additional people (4 women). In this follow-up experiment a friend of the subject's spouse was used as the third target rather than Bill Cosby. The results showed that

the differences in reaction time for traits that were similar to the participant's spouse lacked significance, although the results were in the same direction. Recognizing the gender difference between the samples taken in the two experiments (8 women in the first, 4 in the second), the researchers analyzed the data for just the four women in the second study. The researchers found that the longer response times to traits dissimilar to spouse were significant, but the results were unreliable because of the small sample size (Aron *et al.*, 1991).

The results from the three experiments presented in Aron *et al.*'s (1991) article are compelling and demonstrate that the closer one is to another individual, the more "self-like" that other individual becomes. Using the phenomenon of self-other overlap as a measure of how individuals relate to others, it becomes possible to examine one of the most important tenets of TRM. Therefore, to test TRM's assertion that males and females will vary in how they relate to others depending upon both maternal and paternal presence, I formulated four hypotheses with regard to paternal involvement and self-other overlap. First, on average, participants should perceive less self-other overlap with their opposite-sex parent than with their same-sex parent, as the same sex should provide more overlapping qualities for self and the parent. Second, males should show less self-other overlap with their mothers than females do with their fathers. In both cases, overlap should be reduced because it is with the opposite sex parent, but males should show less overlap with their mothers, as a result of rejecting their mothers as models for sex-typed behavior, whereas females, according to TRM, are not required actively to reject their fathers' masculinity. Third, because male participants should generally have learned to avoid nurturing

and closeness relative to female participants, the male participants will perceive less self-other overlap than female participants will perceive with the person with whom they are the closest, other than their parents (e.g., a close friend or significant other). Finally, the differences described above will be dampened among participants whose parents shared parenting responsibilities equally. That is to say, male and female participants whose parents shared parental responsibilities more equally will show less of a discrepancy between their overlap with their mothers, fathers and close other.

Method

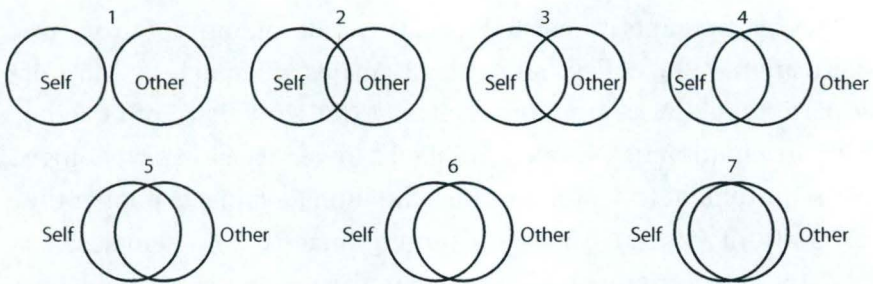
Participants

The participants consisted of 90, predominantly European-American ($n = 67$), college students (31 males, 59 females). Most of the participants were undergraduates at the University of Oregon; their participation in the study satisfied a lower division psychology class requirement ($n = 80$). Because the human subjects pool at the University of Oregon consists of approximately 70% females, 10 male student participants were recruited from the same pool but were paid \$10 for their participation.

Design and Materials

After granting their informed consent, participants, in groups of one to five, completed an hour-long questionnaire followed by a debriefing with the researcher. The questionnaire included two measures of self-other overlap. The first measure was a checklist of 114 adjectives based on a list used by Davis, Conklin, Smith, and Luce (1996). The participants completed lists for themselves and each of their parents. Also, each participant completed a list for a self-selected person with whom that participant was the closest

(relationship noted). The purpose of this measure was to gauge levels of perceived self-other overlap by determining the number of shared adjectives participants report having with each of the three target individuals. The second measure of self-other overlap was Aron, Aron, and Smollan's (1992) *Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale* consisting of seven pairs of circles that overlap to varying extents. Participants completed that measure for each of the three target individuals by choosing which of the seven pairs of overlapping circles best represented their relationships with each of the three targeted individuals (both parents and the self-selected person). (see Figure 1).



Please circle the picture which best describes your relationship with the PERSON WITH WHOM YOU ARE THE CLOSEST OTHER THAN A PARENT (e.g. best friend ore significant other)

How would you describe your relationship with this person (e.g., best friend, spouse, boy/girlfriend)?

Figure 1: Example of Aron *et al.*'s (1992) "Close Other" Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale.

To minimize demand characteristics, the adjective checklist for self was the first task completed by each participant. Also, given the limited time participants had to complete the questionnaires, the various other measures completed before the participants reached

the adjective checklists for the three target individuals served as distracter tasks. Participants completed a wide range of other scales, including the *Adult Attachment Questionnaire* (Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996), the *Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ)* short scale (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1974), and the *Gender Role Conflict Scale* (O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Writsman, 1986).¹ These scales were used to gauge levels of androgyny and attachment style.

Participants also completed a *Parental Involvement Scale* created specifically for this study. This Likert scale asked participants to rate how their parents divided five facets of childcare—discipline, emotional support, play, physical care, and time spent with the child—at three periods during the participants' youth (birth to 5-years-old, 6- to 10-years-old, and 11- to 18-years-old). A score of 1 indicated that a particular duty was performed much more by a participant's mother; a score of 7 indicated that a particular duty was performed much more by a participant's father; and a score of 4, the mid-point of the scale, indicated parental egalitarianism. Only the retrospective measure of parental egalitarianism from birth to age five was used in this study because it is the most theoretically important measure of parental egalitarianism in testing the predictions made by TRM. In order to attain more equal cell sizes, a median split was employed to distinguish between participants who were raised in families with high paternal involvement versus low paternal involvement. The median was 3.4, whereas the midpoint of the scale—representing equal contributions from both mother and father—was 4. Thus, the “egalitarian” label that is used in the analyses that follow is a relative term. Among subjects in the egalitarian group, there were some with families that were actually

slightly more maternally oriented, some truly at the “egalitarian” midpoint, and yet others who were more paternally oriented. Finally, each participant completed a demographic questionnaire. In addition to collecting data on age and ethnicity, the demographic questionnaire asked participants to explain the structure of their families throughout their lives (see Appendix 1).

Results

Aron *et al.*'s IOS data were analyzed using a 2 (participant gender) x 2 (family type, egalitarian versus traditional) x 2 (target parent, which was within-subjects) within-between ANOVA. (See Table 1 for means and standard deviations of parental IOS scores by gender and family type; see Figure 2 for a bar graph of these

Group	Mean Maternal IOS Score and Standard Deviation	Mean Paternal IOS Score and Standard Deviation	Mean Close Other IOS Score and Standard Deviation
Male – Traditional Household	M = 3.78, sd = 1.52	M = 2.56, sd = 1.25	M = 5.56, sd = 1.42
Male – Egalitarian Household	M = 4.85, sd = 1.72	M = 4.45, sd = 1.76	M = 4.38, sd = 1.50
All Males	M = 4.23, sd = 1.67	M = 3.38, sd = 1.76	M = 5.06, sd = 1.55
Female – Traditional Household	M = 4.06, sd = 1.63	M = 2.78, sd = 0.94	M = 5.40, sd = 1.54
Female – Egalitarian Household	M = 4.85, sd = 1.90	M = 4.41, sd = 1.69	M = 5.78, sd = 1.37
All Females	M = 4.42, sd = 1.78	M = 3.52, sd = 1.56	M = 5.58, sd = 1.46

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of participants' maternal, paternal and close other IOS scores (means can range from 1-7).

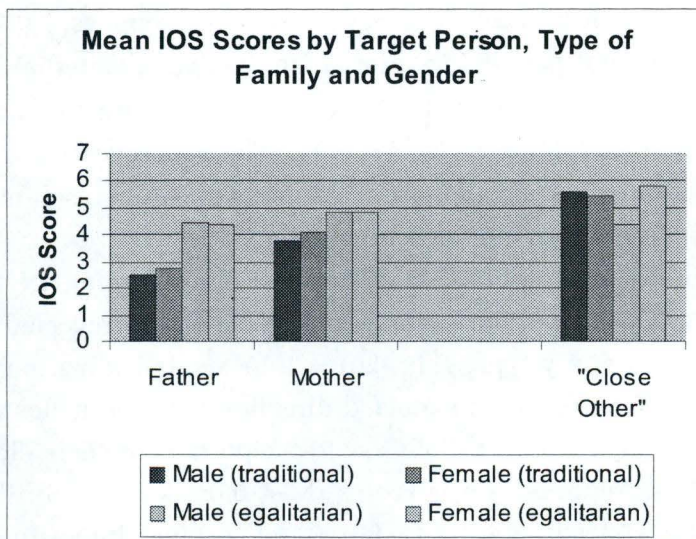


Figure 2: Mean IOS scores by target person, type of family and gender.

means.) One main effect related to family type, with participants from egalitarian families reporting greater closeness with their parents, $F(1, 86) = 22.68, p < .001$. Overall, subjects perceived greater self-other overlap with their mothers than with their fathers, $F(1, 86) = 17.00, p < .001$. This difference was marginal in males, $t(60) = 1.9, p = .06$, but significant in females, $t(116) = 2.91, p = .004$. Both these effects were moderated by the interaction of the target-parent and family-type variables, $F(1, 86) = 4.92, p = .03$. Parental IOS scores showed no significant difference in males, $t(24) = .45, p = .66$, or females, $t(52) = .91, p = .37$, who came from egalitarian families. In traditional families, however, both males and females reported greater closeness with their mothers (respectively, $t(1, 31) = 2.86, p = .008$; $t(1, 59) = 3.69, p = .001$). The data suggest that being raised in an egalitarian family significantly increases paternal

IOS scores in males, $t(29) = -3.68$, $p = .001$, and females, $t(57) = -4.65$, $p < .001$, but parental egalitarianism increases maternal IOS scores with only marginal significance in males, $t(29) = -1.83$, $p = 0.08$ and females, $t(57) = -1.72$, $p = 0.09$. The data reveal no main effect for participants' sex in their perceptions of parental self-other overlap, and there were no other interactions.

In addition, a 2 (participant gender) $\times$ 2 (family type) ANOVA test on the IOS scores for participants' close-others revealed no main effect by family type, $F(1, 86) = 1.49$, *ns*, but a marginally significant difference in the expected direction between males and females was apparent in the IOS scores reported for their close-others. Males reported lower scores ($M = 5.06$, $sd = 1.55$), than females ($M = 5.58$, $sd = 1.46$), $F(1, 86) = 3.60$, $p = .06$. Interestingly, the data showed an interaction between participant gender and family type, $F(1, 86) = 5.54$, $p = .021$. Aron et al's (1992) IOS Scale revealed that being raised in an egalitarian household significantly *decreased* close-other IOS scores in males (traditional $M = 5.56$, $sd = 1.42$; egalitarian $M = 4.38$, $sd = 1.50$), $t(29) = 2.21$, $p = .04$, while having no significant effect on close-other IOS scores in females (see Table 1 for means and standard deviations of close-other IOS scores by gender and family type and Figure 2 for a bar graph of these scores).

Comparing the number of matched adjectives between participants and each of their target individuals revealed some significant correlations. Those matches could be either positive (participants checked the adjective for themselves and the target individual) or negative (participants did not check the adjective either for themselves or the target individual). An analysis of participants' adjective checklists showed that parental IOS scores

and parental adjective overlap were significantly correlated for mothers, Pearson's $r = .22$, $p = .034$, and for fathers, Pearson's $r = .26$, $p = .014$. In contrast, the correlation between close other IOS scores and adjective overlap between self and close-other was not significant (Pearson's $r = -.017$, $p = .87$). Further analysis of adjective overlap showed that parental egalitarianism had no significant effect on maternal, paternal, or close-other adjective agreement in males or females. For males, however, these effects, while not significant, were in the predicted direction—that is, greater overlap for male participants from egalitarian families—for maternal, $t(29) = -1.46$, $p = .16$; paternal, $t(29) = -1.61$, $p = .12$; and close other, $t(29) = -1.62$, $p = .12$ adjective overlap. (See Table 2 for means and standard deviations.)

Maternal Agreement, Traditional Household	M = 77.5, sd = 9.97
Maternal Agreement, Egalitarian Household	M = 83.85, sd = 15.18
Paternal Agreement, Traditional Household	M = 75.83, sd = 10.15
Paternal Agreement, Egalitarian Household	M = 82.67, sd = 13.92
Close Other Agreement, Traditional Household	M = 78.44, sd = 10.15
Close Other Agreement, Egalitarian Household	M = 84.92, sd = 12.10

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviation for Male Participants' Paternal Adjective Agreement by Familial Organization (means can range from 0-114).

Simpson *et al.*'s (1996) *Adult Attachment Questionnaire* showed no effects or interactions for gender or parental egalitarianism on levels of avoidance, but males were significantly more ambivalent ($M = 33.74$, $sd = 8.16$) than females ($M = 28.91$, $sd = 8.85$) across levels of parental egalitarianism, $F(1, 86) = 6.82$, $p = .011$. Levels of ambivalence in males who were raised in traditional households did not differ significantly from males who were raised in egalitarian households. There were no other main effects or interactions on ambivalence. O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, and Writsman's (1986) *Gender Role Conflict Scale* indicated that parental egalitarianism had no significant differences between males and females on such measures as emotional restrictiveness, competitiveness/desire for power, or degree of homophobia. Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp's (1974) *Personal Attributes Questionnaire* revealed that parental egalitarianism had no significant effect on the levels of masculinity or femininity among males and females.

Discussion

The central research hypothesis was that participants should perceive less self-other overlap with their opposite-sex parent than with their same-sex parent and that males should show less self-other overlap with their mothers than females do with their fathers, but the data seem to indicate that both male and female participants generally perceived significantly greater levels of self-other overlap with their mothers than with their fathers. When one takes levels of paternal involvement into account, however, the picture changes somewhat. According to the results of the current study, participants from traditional families tended to perceive significantly more self-other overlap with their mothers than with

their fathers. Participants from egalitarian families, on the other hand, perceived nearly the same amount of self-other overlap with both parents. This finding can be explained without much reflection: when participants' fathers shared parental responsibilities more equally, participants developed relationships with their parents that were equally close. This straightforward explanation, however, is complicated by the fact that male and female participants from egalitarian households perceived greater self-other overlap with *both* parents than participants from traditional households. One general expectation is that both males and females would perceive greater self-other overlap with involved fathers than absent fathers, but the current research offers no way to explain why greater paternal involvement increased maternal IOS scores. Although the maternal IOS score increase in participants from egalitarian families was only marginally significant in both males ($p = .08$) and females ($p = .09$), it is a compelling finding that warrants some attention.

Chodorow might claim that males from egalitarian families were closer to their mothers than males from traditional families because having access to a same-sex caregiver made them more relational and less rejecting of their mothers' femininity. That position, however, falls short of an adequate explanation. Specifically, TRM fails to explain why females from egalitarian families should perceive greater maternal self-other overlap than females from traditional families. In fact, TRM would predict that females from egalitarian families would perceive less overlap with their mothers than females from traditional families.

Although many of the findings of the current study cannot be explained by TRM, they might be accounted for in a variety of other ways. One possible explanation that fits with the data is that

families in which fathers dedicate themselves to child rearing might be inherently “closer knit” than traditional families. With access to a same-sex parent, males might feel more inclined to participate in familial activities rather than turn to peer groups for recreation and support. Thus, these males would have more exposure to their mothers and, in turn, develop closer relationships with them. More difficult to explain is why increased paternal involvement was associated with higher maternal IOS scores in females. Perhaps the regular presence of a father in the family unit increases the likelihood that all of the members of a family will frequently interact with each other. It is possible that “complete” families play or eat at the dinner table together often, whereas, members of “incomplete” families feel more independent from the family unit, and thus, turn to peer groups more frequently for social interaction, a shift that may lead to lower parental and higher close-other IOS scores.

The finding that males reported lower close-other IOS scores than females, while only of marginal significance ($p = .06$), seems to support the hypothesis that male participants should perceive less self-other overlap than female participants with the individuals with whom they are the closest. Males from egalitarian households, however, reported significantly lower close-other IOS scores than males from traditional families. This runs in stark contrast with what TRM would predict. Perhaps, once again, males from egalitarian families relied less on peer groups than males from traditional families who would have less experience with cultivating close relationships with individuals outside of their family unit. Females from traditional and egalitarian families, however, did not differ in close-other IOS scores. The difference in the effect of parental egalitarianism on close-other IOS scores

in male and female participants might simply be a function of socialization. That is, females might be socialized to foster close relationships outside of the family unit more than males, regardless of levels of parental egalitarianism (or familial closeness). The finding that male participants were significantly more ambivalent in terms of attachment than female participants, regardless of the extent of their fathers' involvement, supports this idea to some extent. The finding that close-other adjective agreement and IOS scores were uncorrelated, while parental adjective agreement and IOS scores were correlated, lends further support to this position.

Finally, the finding that parental egalitarianism had no effect on trait measures of masculinity, femininity, competitiveness/desire for power, emotional restrictiveness, or homophobia for either males or females undercuts support for TRM.

Although the current study reveals some significant correlations, raises questions about the validity of TRM, and posits some avenues of further research, it suffers from three major limitations. First, only 31 males participated in the study. This small sample detracts from the strength of the study's findings. Second, the median split used to distinguish traditional families from egalitarian families was not an optimal method of differentiation. Using the median split, the score that indicated parental egalitarianism was 3.4. However, the actual score that theoretically indicated parental egalitarianism was 4.0. Thus, rather than indicating whether a participant was from a truly egalitarian family, the median split simply indicated whether a participant was from a more egalitarian family. Finally, the data collected for parental involvement was retrospective and used a new measure that has yet to be validated. As it is unlikely that participants actually remembered how their parents divided

parental responsibilities from their birth until they were five years old, a considerable degree of guesswork may have gone into participants' reports of parental involvement.

Despite these limitations, the current study seems to show that paternal involvement may have some impact on how males and females relate to their parents and close-others. Many of the findings of this study, however, cannot be explained within the framework of TRM, and in some cases, the findings actually refute that theory. More research needs to be conducted to identify how and why paternal involvement affects the ways in which individuals relate to the people with whom they are the closest.

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Notes

¹ Participants also completed the Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979), and the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence, & Helmreich, 1972). The data collected from these two scales were not analyzed. An unpublished Gender Traits and Behavior Scale developed by Laurent (2005) was also completed by participants. The data gathered from Laurent's scale was not analyzed in the current study, but is being used to continue the development of the scale.

Appendix 1. The demographic questionnaire used in the study.

Please complete the items with which you feel comfortable.

Sex: Male ☐ Female ☐

Age:

Ethnicity:

Is English your native language? Yes ☐ No ☐

If no, how long have you been speaking English?

Year: Freshman ☐ Sophomore ☐ Jr. ☐ Sr. ☐ Graduate ☐ other

Major(s):

Have you at any time lived in a single parent household? Yes ☐ No ☐

If so, for how long (years/months)?

And from what ages? From the time I was until I was

And with which parent?

Have you ever lived in a nontraditional/non-nuclear family (e.g., with grandparents, foster family, lived with extended family, etc.)? Yes ☐ No ☐

If so, for how long (years/months)? My whole life ☐

If not your whole life, from what ages?

From the time I was until I was

Please use the space provided on this and the following page to describe your family (e.g. foster family, lived with grandparents from age X to age X, etc.)?
