

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

**The Relation of Parent-Child Facial
Resemblance with Parental Investment and
Relationship Quality**

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Abstract

The current study focuses on how the facial resemblance of parents and their children, and children's level of attractiveness, affects parents' investment and the quality of their relationship with their children.

Past studies have shown that babies' facial "clues" encourage parental caring and parental investment, especially when there is a strong objective or subjective resemblance between parent and child. The relationship was found to be more significant among men than among women. Theories that have attempted to explain these findings have postulated that unlike women, men cannot be sure of their biological parentage of a particular child and are therefore more responsive to features that help them establish their fatherhood. Moreover, it was found that subjective similarity between violent fathers and their children was related to the quality of their connection, fathers that perceived their children to be more similar to them rated the quality of their relationship higher.

A later study that examined the relation between parents' investment and the quality of the parent-child relationship found that parental investment, in terms of time spent by the father with his child and the emotional closeness with that child, was positively correlated with measures of relationship quality, i.e. the father's satisfaction with parenthood and his ability to set boundaries.

Finally, endorsing the "good genes" theory, which postulates that attractiveness and facial symmetry are an indicator of good health and the baby's "quality", children's attractiveness was positively correlated with parents' investment, and children perceived to be more attractive by their parents and by unrelated raters, evoked stronger feelings of emotional closeness in their parents.

Most studies to date dealing with facial resemblance between parents and children evaluated the relation between resemblance and parental investment, and only one study evaluated the relation between subjective facial resemblance and the quality of parents' relationship with their children, in a study sample of violent fathers. Furthermore, the study in question measured the quality of the relationship between parents and their children through just one generalized measure, how parents rated it.

The quality of parent-child relationships is a broad concept that includes various parameters such as the parent's involvement in raising their child, their support, setting of boundaries, etc. Hence, the purpose of the current study was to examine (a) whether as suggested by past studies, objective and subjective facial resemblance between parents and their children predicts parents' parental investment in fathers but not among mother; (b) whether facial resemblance predicts various dimensions of relationship quality, in a normative non-violent population of parents; (c) whether there is a positive correlation between parental investment and different dimensions of parent-child relationship quality (d) whether children's level of attractiveness predicts parental investment, i.e. children objectively more attractive receive greater parental investment from fathers and mothers and the quality of the relationship is better; (e) which factors – facial resemblance or attractiveness – have a more greater influence on parental investment and relationship quality.

The current study included 66 married couples with at least one child between the age of 3 and 7, who were chosen by their parents to participate in the study. This age group was selected because we assumed that it demands greater parental investment in comparison to older ages. The resemblance between parents and their children was rated subjectively by the parents, meaning from their point of view which involves feelings and notions regarding their child, and objectively by twenty neutral outside judges who looked at photos of parents and their children. Children's level of attractiveness was also rated objectively by twenty neutral judges. Parental investment was measured using measures of emotional closeness, which include three scales – relationship, endearment and love and time spent by the parent with their child. Finally, the quality of the parent-child relationship was measured using the parent-child relationship inventory (PCRI) questionnaire, which includes six factors – satisfaction with parenthood, involvement, bonding, boundary setting, autonomy, and attitude towards the role.

The results only partially affirm the study hypotheses, and in some cases contradict them. As per our hypothesis, a positive correlation was found between the level of fathers' love for their children and objective facial resemblance. Additionally, as per our hypothesis, this correlation is stronger among men than among women. However, no correlation was found between relationship quality and parents' affection towards children nor between time spent by fathers with their children and their

objective resemblance. Contrary to our hypothesis, no correlation was found between subjective facial resemblance and parental investment by fathers. In fact, a negative relationship was found between children's attractiveness and the level of parental investment. Findings regarding mothers were also contradictory. Stronger objective resemblance was linked to more time spent away from home and to lower levels of love by mothers.

On the relationship scale, a regression analysis of the three predictive variables together revealed that only attractiveness level was a significant predictor of parental investment. However, contrary to our hypothesis, the correlation was negative - less attractive a children demonstrated stronger relationships with their parents. The results of the love scale also contradicted our hypothesis – not only was objective resemblance a slightly stronger predictor of love compared to subjective resemblance, but subjective resemblance was negatively correlated with love, i.e. the greater a child's perceived resemblance to his father the less love the father felt towards him or her. Regression analyses on mothers revealed that objective resemblance was actually a significant and negative predictor of the love. In addition, level of attractiveness was a significant negative predictor of affection, i.e. mothers with less attractive children felt more affection towards them.

Finally, contrary to our hypothesis, no significant correlations were found between objective and subjective resemblance and the quality of parent-child relationships among mothers or fathers. As per our hypothesis, the more attractive a child was, the higher the level of fathers' involvement and bonding was. This relationship remained significant and was the only predictor of these dimensions when we evaluated the combined contribution of attractiveness and resemblance - both objective and subjective. Finally, contradicting our hypothesis, for dimensions measuring relationship quality – involvement, communication, and satisfaction with parenthood – a negative correlation was found between parent-child relationship and parental investment for both parents and mothers. Ergo, higher relationship quality translated into lower parental investment.

A broader examination of the study's results, while confirming previous studies' findings that parental investment, in terms of love, is positively correlated with objective resemblance to the father and not the mother, and the level of children's

attractiveness is positively correlated with the quality of a father's relationship with his child. In terms of involvement and attachment, many of the study's results contradict previous studies' findings on the matter and our own hypotheses. We offer a number of possible explanations for these variations. First, as this is the first study of its kind carried out in Israel, it is possible that the findings are linked to different perceptions and characteristics of parenthood. There is evidence to suggest that parental investment in Israel is higher overall than that of European parents, which could mean that the variation in parental investment among parents that participated in the study was smaller than that of parents in the countries where previous studies were carried out. Additionally, the emphasis of family values in Israel creates an extraordinary closeness between children and their parents, with parenthood characterized by very high levels of involvement and low levels of parental authority. Therefore, it is possible that measures developed in other countries are not appropriate for evaluating Israeli parents. Unlike previous studies, the current study found no significant correlation between objective and subjective measures, which leads us to assume that there is a greater bias in subjective assessment. Finally, it is possible that these differences are related to the failings of this study, which stem primarily from a different application of the parental investment questionnaire, from not accounting for the children's gender, or due the use of objective measures of children's attractiveness exclusively. Future studies attempting to replicate these findings should generate unique questionnaires that are adjusted to Israeli parents and their unique characteristics.