



The Association Between Demonstrated Paternal Interest and Self-Reported Student Happiness

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Introduction

- Parental involvement is one of the most commonly cited factors in predicting student achievement in American schools (Rahman, 2001)
- Higher levels of parental involvement are linked to higher student achievement (Schueler, McIntyre, & Gehlbach, 2017)
- Student achievement (i.e. grades, etc) can be important and indicative of future opportunities, but is not necessarily indicative of student wellbeing
- General wellbeing is difficult to quantify, but one key piece is typically happiness/satisfaction (Ruggeri, Garcia-Garzon, Maguire, Matz, & Huppert, 2020)
- Student wellbeing (especially happiness/mental health) is linked to future quality of life and income (Evensen et al, 2016)
- As a complex metric, wellbeing can be impacted by anything from parental involvement/demonstrated interest in student life to issues with teachers to whether the student gets along with their peers

Research Questions

- What is the affect of demonstrated parental interest on student happiness?
- How is this relationship impacted by factors such as age, gender, and the prevalence of student issues at school? How does the impact vary for mother and father figures?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=6504) were drawn from the 1994-1995 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a nationally representative sample of American children from grades 7-12.

Measures

- **Demonstrated parental interest** was assessed using the sum of 3 questions about their involvement in child's school life. Each response was coded as a 1 (observed) or 0 (not observed), then summed. Scores ranged from 0 (least involvement) to 3 (most involvement).
- Maternal and paternal interest were measured separately. Questions asked whether the respondent's parent had discussed grades, worked on a project, or discussed non-academic aspects of school life in the last 4 weeks. Survey questions addressed **resident mother/father figures**, not just biological relations
- **Prevalence of individual issues at school** was similarly assessed as a sum of four questions about whether the respondent had experienced particular social or academic issues at school. Scores ranged from

Results

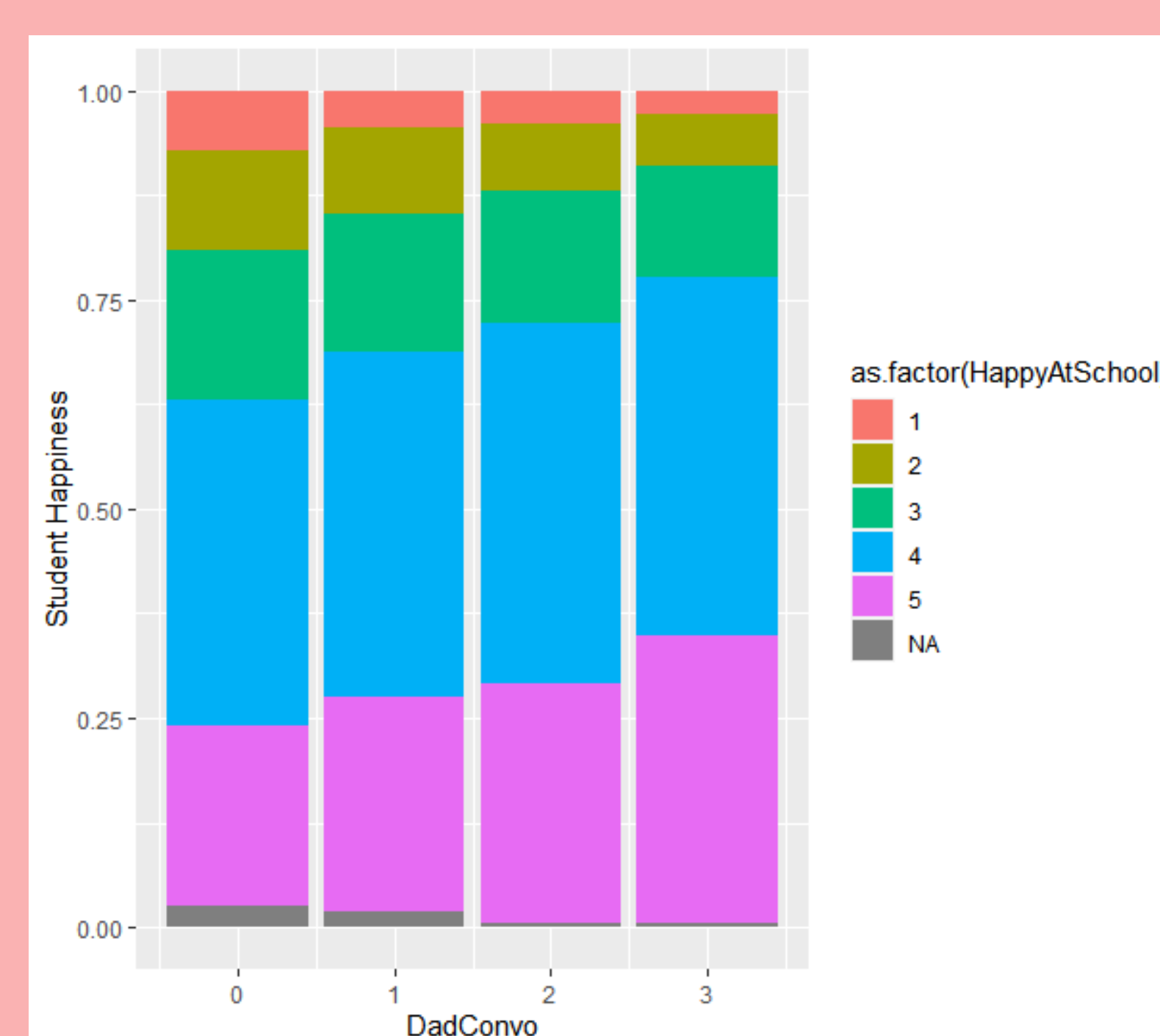
Univariate

- Self-reported student happiness (measured on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being least happy and 5 being most happy) skewed toward higher values with 66.03% reporting a 4 or above
- 48.39% of respondents identified as "biologically male"
- 30.30% of respondents were in middle school (grades 7 & 8)

Bivariate

- A Pearson correlation test showed that **demonstrated paternal interest** was significantly and positively associated with **self-reported student happiness** ($r=0.127$, $p<2.2e-16$).
- A Pearson correlation test showed that **higher levels of issues at school were** significantly and negatively associated with **self-reported student happiness** ($r=-0.272$, $p<2.2e-16$).

Figure 1. Correlation between Demonstrated Paternal Interest (DadConvo) and Self-Reported Student Happiness (HappyAtSchool)



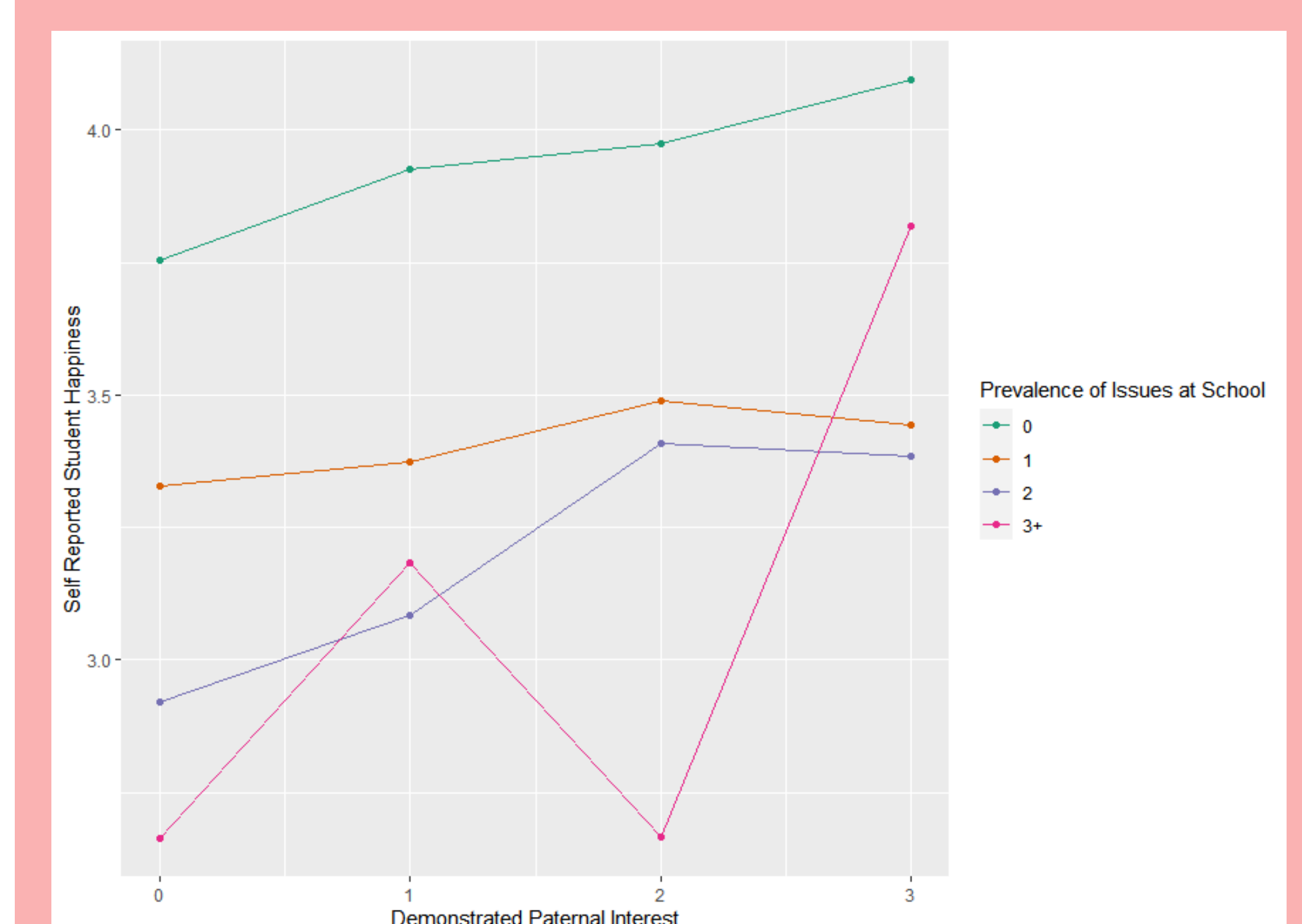
Multivariate Analysis: Losing Maternal Involvement

- A multiple linear regression featuring both demonstrated paternal interest and maternal interest indicated that **paternal interest served as a confounding variable for maternal interest**, making it no longer statistically significant ($p<0.231$)
- Analysis after this regression focused solely on paternal involvement

Multivariate Analysis: Moderating variables

- Higher prevalence of **issues at school** correlated to **lower student happiness**
- With more **issues at school**, paternal interest had a more significant impact
- **"Biological sex": "biologically male" students** correlated to a somewhat higher happiness value per paternal interest level ($B=0.134$, $p<2.96e-05$).
- **Grade level:** middle school students similarly correlated to a somewhat higher happiness value per given paternal interest level ($B=0.160$, $p<3.39e-06$).

Figure 2. Observed Relationship among Paternal Relationship, Issues at School, and Student Happiness



Discussion

- Greater demonstrated paternal interest in a student's life at school is strongly correlated with greater self-reported student happiness.
- The more issues a student has at school, the greater the impact of paternal involvement.
- Middle school boys are the most strongly impacted by demonstrated paternal interest, which makes sense given that boys at that age are generally emotional and can benefit from a caring father figure (see: puberty)
- Paternal involvement is not just beneficial for student achievement, it also results in better student general wellbeing.
- Continued investigation would likely delve into greater demographic analysis, looking into which populations are most strongly impacted by paternal interest and involvement