

Abstract

Children use others as looking glass in developing their own sense of self based on the imagined appraisal of themselves by significant others. We propose that mother's empathy may serve as a piece of looking glass in such process. The present study aimed at investigating the relationship between mother's empathy and child's self-appraisal. 97 pairs of mother and child were invited to participate in an interactive play which the child had to do a difficult cognitive task in front of the mother. After the task, an interview would be conducted on measures of empathy (i.e. mother's empathic resonance and empathic accuracy) and measures related to performance appraisal (i.e. child's reflected appraisal towards mother, child's self-appraisal, and mother's actual appraisal of the child). Results showed that mother's empathic resonance significantly predicted child's reflected appraisal, while mother's empathic accuracy did not. Moreover, mother's empathic resonance was indirectly associated with child's self-appraisal via child's reflected appraisal, with child's actual performance, mother's actual appraisal, and mother's empathic accuracy controlled. We conclude that mother's empathic resonance, which may imply mother's attempt to understand child's emotion and to feel for them, play an important role in facilitating a positive self-appraisal of the child.

Keywords: empathic resonance, empathic accuracy, reflected appraisal, self-appraisal, looking-glass self