

The Contribution of Family and Peer Interaction to the Understanding of Self-Esteem in Adolescents – Gender and Cultural Similarities and Differences

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Abstract

This paper examines the contribution of family and peer interaction in explaining the self-esteem of adolescents from three different cultural environments. For this purpose, we conducted a survey on a sample of 1,033 adolescents from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia using the following scales: the Family Satisfaction Scale, the Scale of Loneliness in the Family, the Friendship Quality Scale, the Social Loneliness Scale and the Self-esteem Scale. There were differences in self-esteem with regard to the cultural background. The highest level of self-esteem was found among adolescents in Croatia, then adolescents from Macedonia, while the lowest self-esteem was that of adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina. There were no gender differences in self-esteem. The results of hierarchical regression analysis indicate a greater contribution from family interaction to the development of self-esteem than from the quality of peer interaction, both in the sample as a whole and in the three groups of adolescents from different cultural backgrounds. The greatest contribution of the family to the development of self-esteem in adolescents was found in Macedonia, then in adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and finally in adolescents from Croatia. The contribution of family interaction was significantly greater in the explanation of self-esteem in both boys and girls than the contribution of peer interaction. The results are consistent with the assumption that family interaction plays a significant role in the development of self-esteem among adolescents.

Key words: family interaction, peer interaction, self-esteem, culture, gender, adolescence

Introduction

Numerous studies have investigated the role of social environment in the adjustment and development of self-concept. Specifically, parents and peers are important factors of the socialised process which are there in the immediate vicinity of the adolescent and thus make his micro-system (Schwartz et al., 2006).

Research in this area can be divided into three groups. One group consists of research aimed at examining the role of parents in adolescents' adjustment, and the second group consists of studies which examine the role of peers. Specifically, the role of parents in the earlier stages of development is not questionable, given that they constitute a significant part of the child's social context. However, adolescence also involves redefining social relations with peers along with the parents. Adolescence is a time when a young person spends considerably more time with friends, while the time spent with parents decreases significantly (Bester, 2007). The third group of studies are those which examine the importance combined effects of parents and peers for development. These studies do not provide consistent results.

Parents and the development of the self-esteem

The largest body of work confirms the important role of parents in the development of adolescents. The notion that the attachment which is developed in the relationship between mother and child forms the basis of the internal working model has been present since the middle of the last century. The importance of this mental framework for the understanding of the family and family processes influences development throughout life (Bowlby, 1973; Buist, Deković, Meeus, & van Aken, 2004a; Klarin, 2006).

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The model is formed on the basis of the interaction with significant persons in the life of a child during early childhood (Bowlby, 1973). From the child's perspective, the person with whom the child develops an attachment is unique and irreplaceable (Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 2000). Attachment also develops in later periods of life, but to people outside the family context. According to Bowlby, these people are the second in the hierarchy of attachment. They may be friends, partners, teachers, and others (Colin, 1996).

Parents remain very important, if not dominant, figures in the lives of adolescents, despite their making relationships with others and developing affections (Castellana, Vilar, & Rodriguez-Tome, 1997). In the family environment the child learns particular patterns of behaviour which form a model for behaviour outside the home (Bell, Cornwell, & Bell, 1988). Research on the family in the adjustment of adolescents is therefore focused primarily on the observation of parent-adolescent relationships (Deković & Buist, 2005; Eichelsheim, Deković, & Buist, 2009; Sharma & Vaid, 2005). Adolescents who developed a secure attachment to their mothers at an early stage of development manifest various forms of adjusted behaviour (Van Den Akker, Deković, & Prinzie, 2010). Adolescents who have better family relationships also develop better social relationships outside the family environment (Bell, Cornwell, & Bell, 1988; Engels, Finkenauer, Deković, & Meeus, 2001), they are more successful academically, more independent, less prone to taking drugs (Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993), and they have higher self-esteem, especially if their mother's support is strong (Hoffman, Ushipz, & Levy-Shiff, 1988). Amato and Ochilree (1986) point out the importance of both structural family variables and process family variables for different competences of the child, and with respect to self-esteem, there is an important role for process variables such as the quality of family interaction, parenting style, and parenting practices. This connection of family variables is stronger in children than in adolescents. In any case, the results of numerous studies emphasise the importance of parents for the psychological adjustment of adolescents (Jimenez, Deković, and Hidalgo, 2009).

Self-esteem, autonomy, and social competence as measures of psychological adjustment are significantly associated with the behaviour of both parents, and especially of the mother (Choo, 2000). In general, it appears that parental support is a significant predictor of global self-esteem, especially in early adolescence. The social support of adults (parents and teachers) is more important for developing self-esteem in girls than in boys (Brajša-Žganec, Raboteg-Šarić, & Franc, 2000). The research conducted on adolescents from two countries (the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) leads to a conclusion about the importance of the role of parents in decision-making in different life situations of adolescents, such as choosing a school/university, academic achievement, and moral values (Klarin, Proroković, & Šimić Šašić, 2010a). The results also suggest cross-cultural differences in the direction of the stronger influence of parents from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Peers and the development of the self-esteem

The studies in the second group are those which deal with the role of peers in development during adolescence. Despite the fact that, especially for adolescents, peer interaction is significant, systematic research in this area began only in the 1970s (Klarin, 2006). Because adolescents spend significantly more time with peers, it is reasonable to assume that the role of peers in adolescence is more important than the role of parents. The development of close peer relationships is a universal task in adolescence (Deković, Engels, Shirai, de Kort, & Anker, 2002), and for this reason social relations are concentrated on friends (Wissink, Deković, & Meijer, 2009). Many authors note which benefits are obtained or not obtained by peer relationships (Asher, Parker, & Walker, 1996; Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1993; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Parker & Gottman, 1989). According to these authors the importance of peers is associated with several aspects of development: emotional security, positive self-image, social competence, the satisfaction of the need for intimacy, the adoption of pro-social behaviour and satisfaction (Klarin, 2006). The relationship with peers and friends plays an important role in satisfying the needs for intimacy and closeness. Failure to satisfy these needs, particularly prominent in adolescence, is the result of difficulties in peer interactions, and the outcome is anxiety and social isolation (Sullivan, 1953). The relationship with a friend has a significant effect on self-esteem (Berndt & Savin-Williams, 1989; Hartup, 1996; Sletta, Sobstad, & Valas, 1995), and can also be a corrective to the negative self-image acquired in the family environment (Boivin & Hymel, 1997).

The group socialization theory of development put forward by Harris (1995) plays a significant role in this area. The theoretical concept proposed is based on the fact of family change and the growing importance of peers for development. Certain characteristics, such as physical appearance, personality traits, health, etc., are transmitted from parents to children. The structure of the family and birth order also determine the role of parents in child development (Harris, 2000). In this context, Bester (2007) presents the findings of research conducted on 98 high-school students. On the basis of correlation analysis, the author concludes that, of 14 personality characteristics, 12 are significantly correlated with peer interaction, while only five personality characteristics are significantly associated with relationships with parents. Likewise, where self-esteem is concerned, it is more strongly associated with peer interaction than with parents. The same is true for boys and girls. The author thereby does not reduce the role of parents in the personality development of adolescents, but points out the importance of peer interactions for the formation of the social context in which a young person has the opportunity to practise socially responsible behaviour (p. 188). The role of friends is also evident in the formation of the motives for achievement and academic self-concept (Bissell-Havran & Loken, 2009). Satisfaction with a friendly relationship contributes to well-being and self-esteem. The sizes of friends' networking sites and the feedback which adolescents receive from their friends in this manner are significantly associated with self-esteem and well-being (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). Furthermore, the relationship between self-esteem and relationships depends on the culture and gender of respondents (Deković et al., 2002).

Self-esteem and gender

Self-esteem as a measure of adjustment varies according to gender. Some studies argue for higher global self-esteem in boys than in girls (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999; Wigfield, Eccles, Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991). Other studies point out a significant difference in physical self-esteem, favouring a higher self-esteem in boys (Bolognini, Plancherel, Bettschart, & Halfon, 1996). There are different sources for the development of self-esteem in young men than in girls. Young men form their self-esteem on the basis of achievement, while girls do so on the basis of relationships with significant others (Josephs, Markus, & Tafari, 1992). Another possible reason for the difference obtained is the tendency of boys to 'inflate' their self-esteem, while girls are more modest in their estimates. Self-esteem in boys is higher in the fields of sport and mathematics, and in girls in the area of language learning (Wigfield et al., 1991). In addition, the self-esteem of girls is changeable due to the physical changes which occur during adolescence (Wigfield et al., 1991). The research differences indicate differences in self-esteem in boys and girls. These differences may be caused by various factors. Some of them are: differences in the severity of self-evaluation; the level of self-evaluation in terms of the dimensions of self-esteem (global or specific); physical changes which are typical of boys and girls; and the sources of self-esteem formation, such as one's own success among boys, and the quality of interrelationships among girls.

Culture and self-esteem

In the context of cross-cultural psychology, there is a particular interest in researching a potential impact of culture as a source of self-esteem (Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2001; Brown, Cai, Oakes, & Deng, 2009). The basic assumption relates the strong influence of cultural factors on self-evaluation and to the presentation of oneself to others. Research suggests the existence of differences in self-esteem among adolescents belonging to different cultures. Thus, e.g. Bagley (1989) comes to the conclusion that 'higher' self-esteem exists in Canadian adolescents than in British adolescents. Chinese adolescents have 'lower' self-esteem than Canadian and British ones, who show greater mutual resemblance (Bagley & Mallick, 1995). In the above studies Cooper Smith's self-esteem scale was used, and the question arises as to the validity of the comparison of results obtained using the same measuring instrument on adolescents from different cultural backgrounds. Markus and Kitayama (1991) point out different sources of self-esteem in different cultural settings. One source is self-realisation, and it is characteristic of Western cultures (individualist), and the other source is one's relationship with others, characteristic of Eastern cultures (collectivist). The 'independent self' is based on the uniqueness of the individual and his/her detachment from others, while the 'interdependent self' is based on the relationship with others and functioning within the group. There is also a difference in the self-presentation. To wit, members of Western cultures tend to present themselves in a positive light, while the tendency of members of Eastern cultures is to present themselves in a negative light, which is apparent in the results of different studies (Tsai et al., 2001).

But if the effect of cognitive self-evaluation is controlled, there are no cultural differences in global self-esteem (Cai, Brown, Deng, & Oakes, 2007). However, the diversity of the above-mentioned sources of self-esteem within the same culture needs to be pointed out, and they relate to gender, age, socioeconomic status, and academic achievement (Tsai et al., 2001). Given the important role of self-esteem for personal well-being, the aim of this study was to determine the role of social context and significant socialisation factors in adolescent self-esteem. This was an attempt to determine the contribution of family and peer interaction to adolescents' self-esteem with regard to their cultural background and gender.

The first problem refers to determining an independent contribution from the quality of family and peer interaction to self-esteem in adolescents in different cultural backgrounds. In this study, participants were adolescents from Croatian, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia are countries which differ with considering its ethnic and nationality (Croats, Bosnians and Macedonians) and religious orientation (Catholic, Orthodox and Muslims). Previous studies indicate differences in socio-economic variables such as place of living, levels of parental education and employment status of the mother (Klarin & Šimić Šašić, 2009; Šimić Šašić, Klarin & Proroković, 2011). The research results indicate the difference in peer interactions (Klarin, Proroković, & Šimić Šašić, 2010b) and family interaction (Šimić Šašić, Klarin & Proroković, 2011).

Starting from the ecological model of development, the theory of attachment, and the results of numerous studies, it seems justified to assume a greater impact of family interaction than of peer interaction on the self-esteem of adolescents (Amato & Ochiltree, 1986; Castellana, Vilar, & Rodrigez-Tome, 1997; Deković & Buist, 2005; Klarin, Proroković, & Šimić Šašić, 2010b; Van Den Akker, Deković, & Prinze, 2010). Likewise, given the research findings which indicate a more significant role of the family (as compared to that of peers) in self-esteem in numerous cultures, we do not expect a significant difference in the contribution of these two groups of variables with respect to the cultural background of adolescents (Castellana, Vilar, & Rodrigez-Tome, 1997; Choo, 2000; Engels et al., 2001; Klarin et al., 2010b).

The next problem refers to possible differences in contribution of family and peer interaction with regard to adolescents' gender. Based on some earlier research, it was expected that there would be a greater contribution from family interaction than from peer interaction in the explanation of self-esteem in both boys and girls.

Method

Participants

A total of 1,033 adolescents from all classes of high schools in three countries participated in this research: the Republic of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia. The sample of Croatian students consisted of 390 subjects (Zadar, mid-Dalmatia), the sample of adolescents in Bosnia and Herzegovina of 353 subjects (Žepče, mid-Bosnia), while the sample from Macedonia consisted of 290 adolescents. In all three countries there were equal numbers of grammar-school and vocational-school students, as well as equal numbers of students from each of the four years (two years from each school). There was a total of 444 male and 581 female subjects. (Eight subjects did not state their gender).

Procedure

The research was conducted in three countries: in the Republic of Croatia, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, during April 2007, and in Macedonia during October of the same year, over a two-week period. The research included two grammar schools and two vocational schools in the above towns, and the application of measuring instruments in each group lasted less than one school hour during regular classes.

Instruments

The Family Satisfaction Scale (Vulić-Prtorić, 2004): The Family Satisfaction Scale measures a child's feelings about his or her family as a whole. It contains 11 items which refer to feelings of safety, happiness and satisfaction with family life. Some of the items characteristic of this scale are: "My family is a source of consolation and satisfaction to me", "My family gets on my nerves". The subjects' task was to mark, on a five-point scale, to what extent the content of the item was true for them, with 1 meaning that the item was not true at all, and 5 meaning that it was completely true.

The author reports a one-factor structure and high reliability for this scale ($\alpha = 0.89$). In this research scale also showed a one-factor structure explaining 45% of the variance and the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was 0.90, and all the items showed high reliability. The average result on the scale was $M=45.48$, and the standard deviation was $SD=7.94$. The result obtained on this scale was interpreted as the level of satisfaction with one's family and family life.

The Scale of Loneliness in the Family and the Scale of Social Loneliness (Ćubela-Adorić & Nekić, 2004): The scales for measuring loneliness in the family and social loneliness are parts of the Scale of Social and Emotional Loneliness by the same authors. *The Scale of Loneliness in the Family* consists of 10 items. The original scale had one more item, which was left out from further analysis due to insufficient reliability ("I truly care for my family"). The subjects' task was to assess the accuracy of each item on a five-point scale on which 1 meant that the item was not true at all and 5 meant it was completely true. The scale measures different types of family relations and one's satisfaction with these relationships, such as, for instance, satisfying the need of family belonging, understanding from family members, offering support, and sharing positive emotions. Some of the items characteristic of this scale are: "No one in my family cares about me", "I feel that I belong to my family". The reliability of the scale is satisfactory (Cronbach alpha 0.87) and it explains 46.70% of common variance. The average mean on the scale for the entire sample was $M=17.37$, $SD=8.43$. *The Social Loneliness Scale* consists of 13 items and measures the assessment of satisfying the needs for understanding, support, and intimacy in friendships. Items characteristic of this scale are: "My friends understand my needs and way of thinking", "I am not satisfied with the friends I have". The internal reliability of this scale is satisfactory; the Cronbach alpha is 0.86, and it explains 38% of common variance. The mean value of the whole sample is $M=25.32$, with $SD=8.43$. Both scales have a one-dimensional structure.

The Friendship Quality Scale (Klarin, 2005): The Friendship Quality Scale consists of 30 items which refer to the assessment of friendship, its evaluation, emotional support, conflict-solving, mutual helping and sharing. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for this scale is 0.94. The scale showed a one-factor structure explaining 38.77% of common variance, while the mean value of the entire sample is $M=120.04$ and the $SD=19.32$. The result on this scale is interpreted as a level of friendship quality. Some of the items characteristic of this scale are: "We always lend things to each other", "My friend defends me if someone gossips about me", "We confide in each other".

The Self-esteem Scale (Vizek-Vidović & Kuterovac-Jagodić, 1996): This scale was constructed according to Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale (Vizek-Vidović & Kuterovac-Jagodić, 1996). It consists of 12 items, including the following: "I have many virtues", "I am satisfied with myself". The reliability results obtained on our sample ($N=1033$) indicate a satisfactory internal reliability. (Cronbach alpha is 0.84). The mean value on this scale is $M=47.43$ while the average deviation is $SD=7.85$. The scale has a one-dimensional structure, and the values obtained on the scale explain 33% of common variance.

Results

This study was conducted in an attempt to answer the question of the role of the family, on the one hand, and peers, on the other, in the self-esteem of adolescents in three cultural environments (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia).

The basic descriptive statistics for the variables related to assessing the quality of family and peer interaction are shown in Table 1.

	CROATIA						BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA						MACEDONIA					
	All		Female		Male		All		Female		Male		All		Female		Male	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Family satisfaction	45.70	7.42	45.96	7.78	45.37	6.93	46.80	7.44	45.73	8.11	48.26	6.19	43.50	8.79	43.83	9.04	43.16	8.60
Loneliness in family	16.20	6.67	15.64	6.88	16.90	6.40	16.90	6.37	16.80	6.84	17.10	5.84	19.5	8.67	18.90	8.61	20.20	8.77
Social loneliness	23.30	8.31	21.30	6.90	25.90	9.25	24.90	8.18	23.95	8.46	25.90	7.51	28.60	7.90	27.60	7.61	29.90	8.11
Friendship quality	118.10	20.71	127.99	14.63	105.50	20.51	121.10	18.18	125.50	15.36	115.60	19.42	121.40	18.57	126.94	16.77	114.50	18.54

Significant differences were found in adolescents' evaluations with regard to nationality, in all the examined variables (post-hoc analysis Scheffe-tests in Appendix).

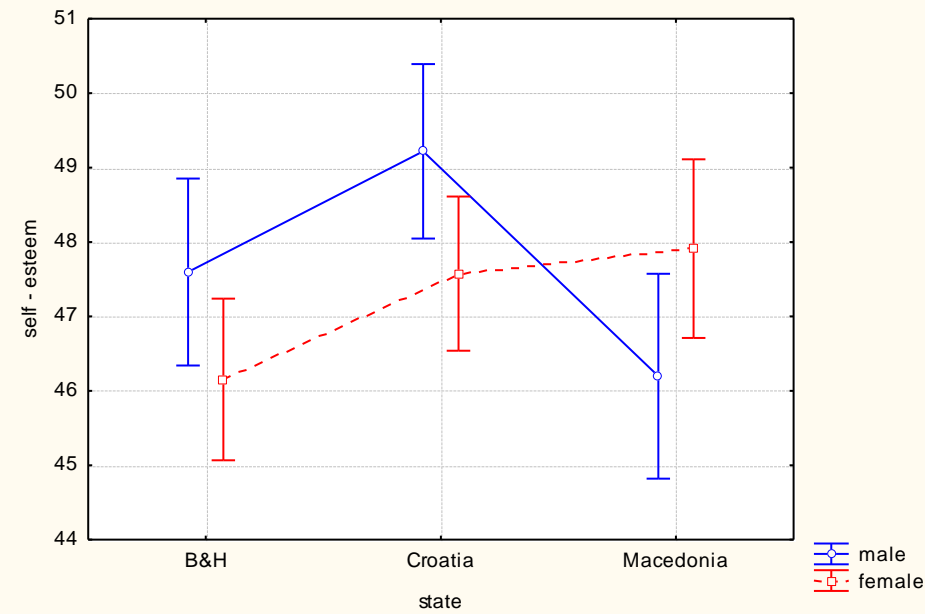
It was shown that adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina were the most satisfied with the quality of family interaction ($F_{(2,1030)}=14.20, p=0.000$). Furthermore, adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina also reported to be the least lonely in the family, along with the Croatian adolescents, while the significant greater loneliness was reported by adolescents from Macedonia ($F_{(2,1030)}=18.12, p=0.000$). The loneliest in social contacts were adolescents from Macedonia and the least lonely were adolescents from Croatia ($F_{(2,1030)}=36.30, p=0.000$). Although adolescents from Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were more satisfied with friendship quality than their Croatian counterparts ($F_{(2,1030)}=3.15, p=0.043$), post hoc analysis indicate that the differences were not statistically significant.

Generally speaking, the findings of these analyses hold that there is a significant difference in social interactions among the three groups of adolescents. These differences were statistically significant mainly between the Macedonian adolescents and the adolescents from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Adolescents from Macedonia, in general, assessed their social relations as worse than the adolescents from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina did. The results of a two-way analysis of variance show that adolescents from the three countries differ in their level of self-esteem, while differences relating to gender were not obtained.

Table 2 – Results of ANOVA (main effects) according to nationality (state) and gender with self-esteem as the dependent variable

	CROATIA		BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA		MACEDONIA		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Female	47.57	7.31	46.15	8.26	47.91	7.98	$F_{state} (2,1021) = 3.72;$ $p=0.024$ $F_{gender}(1,1021)=1.66;$ $p=0.198$ $F_{state \times gender} (2,1019)=4.44;$ $p=0.012$
Male	49.22	7.92	47.60	6.53	46.20	8.68	
Entire sample	48.30	7.69	46.77	7.59	47.17	8.32	

Graph 1. Graphical display of mean values for the variable self-esteem with regard to nationality (state) and gender ($F(2,1019)=4.44, p=0.01$)



The highest level of self-esteem was reported by adolescents from Croatia, while the lowest was found in adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina (post-hoc analysis Scheffe-tests in Appendix). On the other hand, it was shown that the male and female adolescents did not differ in self-esteem. It is also worth mentioning that there is a tendency of the young men from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to have slightly higher self-esteem than the young women, while in Macedonia the opposite is the case; girls have slightly higher self-esteem.

Post hoc analysis show statistically significant difference only between man from Croatia and women from Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is also a reason for the existence of a significant interaction between gender and nationality. In order to answer questions about the similarities and differences in the contribution of family and peer variables in explaining the self-esteem of young people from the three cultural environments, we used the results of hierarchical regression analysis. The family variables were first entered into the analysis and were followed by the peer variables in order to determine the independent contribution of the peer variables in explaining self-esteem. After this, the process was reversed; the peer variables were entered first and were followed by the family variables in order to determine the independent contribution of the family in explaining the dependent variable.

Table 3 – Hierarchical regression analysis predicting self-esteem from family and peer interactions

	predictors	Croatia			Bosnia and Herzegovina			Macedonia											
		male	R ²	ΔR ²	female	R ²	ΔR ²	male	R ²	ΔR ²	female	R ²	ΔR ²						
1st analysis																			
Step 1	Family satisfaction	.39***	.31***		.10	.17***		.37***	.14***		.33***	.18***		.57***	.38***		.31***	.47***	
Family interaction	Loneliness in family	-.21*			-.33**			-.01			-.12			-.06			-.42***		
Step 2	Social loneliness	-.21*		.03**	-.25**		.05**	-.16		.09***	.04		.004	-.27*		.04*	-.33***		.05***
Peer interaction	Friendship quality	.00			-.00			-.20*			.07			-.14			-.01		
2nd analysis																			
Step 1	Social loneliness	-	.15***		-	.15***		-.24**	.16***		-.07	.03		-	.22***		-.56***	.37***	
Peer interaction	Friendship quality	.44***			.39***			.22*			.12			.51***			.07		
Step 2	Family satisfaction	-.10			-.00									-.09					
Family interaction	Loneliness in family	.41***		.20***	.05		.06***	.29***		.07**	.32**		.16***	.57***		.19***	.35***		.16***
Total R ²				.34***			.21***			.22***			.18***			.41***			.53***
n				171			219			149			199			124			163

***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05

It can be concluded that in all samples (defined by country), the contribution of family variables in explaining self-esteem is significantly higher. The contribution of family variables is highest in adolescents from Macedonia (14%) and lowest among adolescents from Croatia (10%). Similarly, the largest peer proportion is among the Macedonian adolescents and the smallest in adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Discussion

The social context of a young person is important for his/her well-being. Family and peers are significant socialisation factors which play an important role in this context. However, not only is the role of socialisation factors determined by a particular cultural context, but also by the time in which a young person, his/her family, and other factors live and interact. Therefore, the study of development, including the development of self-esteem, should be situated in space and time.

Besides this, numerous scientific papers indicate that self-esteem is assessed differently in different cultures; in other words, different social environments accept and evaluate self-presentation differently. In some environments self-presentation is positive and is stimulated, whereas in other environments it is negatively evaluated and is not encouraged among individuals (Tsai et al., 2001). This research was an attempt to answer the question of the role of social context in the development of self-esteem. In doing so, the roles of family and peer interaction were studied in different cultural contexts (countries).

Given the different sources of self-esteem in boys and girls (Josephs, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992), we were interested in the contribution of family and peer interaction with regard to gender. In order to answer the questions, it was necessary to do an analysis of the social interactions that adolescents achieve in their environments. The results obtained show that adolescents from different cultural backgrounds assess the quality of social interactions with 'significant others' differently, which is confirmed by the results of some of our previous studies (Klarin, Proroković, & Šimić Šašić, 2010a, 2010b; Klarin, Proroković, & Arnaudova, in press). Adolescents from Macedonia were the least satisfied with the quality of family interactions, and accordingly felt loneliest in the family environment, compared to adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The quality of family interactions was generally estimated as higher by adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

The differences are even more evident where peer interaction is concerned. Croatian adolescents were the least satisfied with peer interaction, i.e. the interaction with their best friends. Young men from Macedonia were the most satisfied with their quality of friendship, but at the same time felt the loneliest in social, peer interactions. As these two instruments for peer interaction measure relationships in a dyad (quality of the relationship with one's best friend) and group relationships (social loneliness), this finding is not surprising. That is, dyadic and group relationships and their quality do not need to be correlated. Adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina showed the lowest levels of social loneliness and, at the same time, were the most satisfied with the quality of friendship. The assessment of the adequacy of social relationships, in this case peer relationships, contributes to a lower sense of loneliness, which is confirmed by the findings of numerous studies (Sullivan, 1953; Parker & Asher, 1993; Klarin, 2002). Dissatisfaction with social interaction prevents an individual from satisfying basic social needs (the need to belong and the need for intimacy). This leads to feelings of loneliness, which has a negative impact on all aspects of development: social, emotional, and cognitive (Sullivan, 1953). Lonely individuals have lower self-esteem than those who are not lonely; they have a tendency towards depression and anxiety (Buunk & Prins, 1998). They then enter an interaction with this unpleasant emotion, resulting in hostility towards others, which naturally is not approved of. In such situations, society rejects such a person. This kind of social experience results in withdrawal and the corroboration of loneliness (Buunk & Prins, 1998).

It is obvious that adolescents from the three different cultural environments differ in their assessments of the quality of both family and peer interaction. Previous studies have shown that social interactions in traditional social environments are more intense and the social network is stronger, unlike environments which are described as individualist (Triandis et al., 1988; Triandis, 1990, 1993). It could be argued that the adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia assess the support which they have from 'significant others' as stronger, compared to the adolescents from Macedonia. It can also be concluded that the difference is more obvious in the assessment of family interaction, which was estimated as being of least quality by the adolescents from Macedonia.

The roles of the qualities of family and peer relationships in the self-esteem of young people is obvious, though it can also be said that the family plays a more significant role. The support which a young person receives from 'significant others' contributes to his/her self-esteem. Generally, parenting which is characterised by warmth and rational and reasonable control is associated with higher self-esteem in adolescents (Baumrind, 1971). Likewise, the quality and stability of friendships in adolescence contributes to self-esteem (Kroger, 2000). This conclusion is valid for the total sample as well as the sub-samples, i.e. members of different cultural backgrounds. Of the family variables, there is a significant contribution from the quality of family interaction in all groups. We could say that the experience of the family as a safe environment, in which young people have support and are given love and understanding, contributes to the development of self-esteem. Such a family environment encourages the image of oneself as a valuable person. Of the peer variables, the quality of friendship and social loneliness have a significant contribution in self-esteem for adolescents from Croatia; the quality of friendship for adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and social loneliness for Macedonian adolescents.

The findings of this research support the assumption that, in adolescence, parents still play an essential role in the development of their children. Despite the increasingly important role of peers, parents occupy a 'special' place in the lives of adolescents (Castellana et al., 1997; Van Den Akker et al., 2010; McCormick & Kennedy, 1994). The experience of the family as a 'safe nest' contributes to psychosocial adjustment, and is a protective factor in the prevention of internalised and externalised problems during adolescence (Vulić-Prtorić, 2002). Our findings point out the existence of differences in the level of self-esteem of young people in three cultural environments.

Young people from Croatia showed the highest self-esteem, while young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina showed the lowest self-esteem, despite the highest assessment of social interaction, i.e. greater satisfaction with that interaction than the other groups of adolescents. It can be assumed that the reason for this is the possible influence of some other factors which are not primarily a reflection of culture (e.g. economic conditions, post-war tensions...). It is obvious that young people from these three different cultural environments differ with regard to assessing both the quality of social interaction and self-esteem. With respect to possible gender differences and the contribution of family and peer interaction in self-esteem with regard to cultural background, it can be noted that the contribution of family interaction is significantly greater in both boys and girls. However, in female adolescents from Croatia and male adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina, this difference is minimal. In other words, in both these subgroups, family and peer interaction contribute equally to self-esteem.

Finally, it should be said that the quality of family interaction and the quality of peer interaction together account for 26% of the variance in self-esteem of these adolescents. The highest percentage of the variance of self-esteem explained by these two groups of variables was in the Macedonian adolescents (46%), followed by the adolescents in Croatia (23%) and the adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina (18%). Thus, it could be concluded that the social interaction that adolescents from Bosnia and Herzegovina reported themselves to be most satisfied with has the least important role in self-esteem for that very group. On the other hand, young people from Macedonia were the least satisfied with social interactions, particularly those in the family, and it is these very interactions that contribute most to the explanation of self-esteem. A possible explanation is that social interactions significantly contribute to self-esteem when a young person is not satisfied with them. Young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina are the most satisfied with social interactions, which actually least contributes to the explanation of differences in self-esteem. It is evident that social interactions, which play a significant role in the self-esteem of young people, if not satisfactory, represent a risk factor for the development of self-esteem. If young people are satisfied with social interactions (particularly those with 'significant others') it is understood that they do not play a prominent role (since they are present, and individuals are satisfied with them). In this case, some of the risk factors may be the parents' education, poverty, values and norms of the environment, or simply a tendency for negative self-reports. Future studies should investigate the impact of possible trends in upbringing which encourage domination or submissiveness, i.e. stimulate or restrain positive self-esteem, in young people from different cultural backgrounds.

In conclusion, it could be said that self-esteem should be observed in the context of the specific cultural characteristics of the environment surrounding a young person, as it seems that, in the same manner as the micro-system, the broader social context, or macro-system, affects the development of self-esteem. The results obtained in this study should certainly be considered in the context of cultural differences.

Study limitation

It is worth mentioning some specific limitations of the present study. Firstly, it was unfortunately impossible to include all factors that might be important to self-esteem. Future study may need to include factors such as interaction with mothers and fathers, group status in the peer group that might influence on self-esteem. Secondly, our study used a self report measure of self-esteem. How individuals present themselves may differ from how they actually feel about themselves. Thus, future studies should use different methods of measuring evaluation of the self. Thirdly, we didn't control cultural variables such as specific values and norms, to understanding of how cultural orientation relates to self-esteem. Despite these limitations, this study is one of the few that has examined how different culture is related to family and peer interaction and to self-esteem.

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Appendix

Table1. Post-hoc analysis for quality of family interaction

State	Croatia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Macedonia
Croatia			
Bosna and Herzegovina	0,15		
Macedonia	0,00	0,00	

Table2. Post-hoc analysis for loneliness in the family

State	Croatia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Macedonia
Croatia			
Bosna and Herzegovina	0,39		
Macedonia	0,00	0,00	

Table3. Post-hoc analysis for social loneliness

State	Croatia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Macedonia
Croatia			
Bosna and Herzegovina	0,04		
Macedonia	0,00	0,00	

Table4. Post-hoc analysis for friendship quality

State	Croatia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Macedonia
Croatia			
Bosna and Herzegovina	0,12		
Macedonia	0,09	0,96	

Table5. Post-hoc analysis for self-esteem (nationality x gender)

State	Gender	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Croatia	Male						
2	Female	0,51					
3 Bosna and Herzegovina	Male	0,63	1,00				
4	Female	0,02	0,63	0,71			
5 Macedonia	Male	0,06	0,78	0,82	1,00		
6	Female	0,80	1,00	1,00	0,46	0,64	