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Intensive Parenting: Does it Have the Desired Impact on Child Outcomes?

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Intensive Parenting: Does it have the desired impact on child outcomes?

Abstract

Although parental involvement is generally thought to be beneficial for children, it is unclear whether the intensive level of parenting that has become commonplace results in improved child outcomes. Intensive parenting may involve the desire to anticipate and solve children's problems as well as to enroll them in numerous, structured activities that might enhance their physical, cognitive, and social abilities. We surveyed 241 parents to assess intensive parenting beliefs, anticipatory problem solving, enrollment in structured activities, and developmental outcomes of their children ages 2 to 5. Using structural equation modeling, we found that intensive parenting beliefs predicted more anticipatory problem solving, which predicted greater enrollment in creative and physical activities. However, enrollment in structured activities did not predict children's developmental outcomes. Although parents may believe that expensive and time-consuming activities are the keys to ensuring their children's health, happiness, and success, this study does not support this assumption.

Keywords: helicopter parenting, intensive parenting, anticipatory problem solving, fine motor, gross motor, language development, subjective happiness, child outcomes

Introduction

If you asked the average parent what they want for their children, the typical response might be something like, “that they are happy, healthy, and successful.” While these goals seem laudable and relatively straightforward, the best way for parents to help their children achieve these goals is not. Decades of research cite the importance of parental involvement in promoting optimal child development. It is likely that there is an optimal range of parental involvement that promotes positive child outcomes. However, it is not clear that more and more involvement is better for children once some threshold level of involvement has been reached. In fact, more recent research has suggested that there is such a thing as too much involvement that can potentially have a negative impact on child outcomes. Thus, parental involvement can be envisioned as an inverted U-shaped curve (Grant & Schwartz, 2011) with both too little and too much involvement undermining child development (Liss & Schiffrin, 2014).

There is a long history of research indicating that parental involvement (e.g., cuddling, talking, and reading to children) is crucial in achieving optimal child outcomes. Children who experience impoverished environments early in life (e.g., in Romanian orphanages) have been found to have physical, cognitive, and social delays including mild cognitive impairments and attention deficits (Chugani et al. 2001; Fisher, Ames, Chisholm, & Savoi, 1997; Rutter, 1998). These findings combined with data from animals on the impact of environmental deprivation on brain development (Greenough, 1975) have served as the impetus for parents’ increased involvement for the purpose of providing intellectual stimulation to maximize children’s cognitive development (Wall, 2010).

Research has supported the benefits of parental involvement in early intellectual stimulation. Children whose parents talk and read to them more experience gains in their cognitive abilities (Neisser et al., 1996; Hart & Risley, 1995; Weisleder & Fernald, 2013).

Children from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, who are less likely to be exposed to language, had smaller vocabularies and processed language slower at 18 months compared to children from high SES backgrounds (Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013). This gap widened over time resulting in a 6-month lag in language by age two on average. Thus, it is not surprising to see children with parents who are actively involved and provide developmentally appropriate structure exhibit greater competence and academic performance during the school years (Fan & Chen, 2001; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). A meta-analysis of 41 studies concluded that parental involvement had a large effect on academic achievement regardless of children's gender or racial/ethnic background. Different aspects of parental involvement have been found to differentially impact a variety of academic outcomes (Fan & Chen, 2001). High parental expectations for student achievement were found to have the strongest impact on global indicators such as grade point average (GPA) rather than more specific involvement strategies (e.g., monitoring homework) or outcomes (e.g., child's grade in a specific subject).

In addition to cognitive outcomes, parental involvement has been associated with better social and emotional outcomes in children. Mothers who reported being more involved and connected with their children had adolescents who were more prosocial (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009) and had better social skills (Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). In addition, parental involvement has been associated with fewer behavior problems (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Nokal et al., 2010). Finally, parental involvement has been associated with better emotional outcomes including fewer internalizing problems (Cicchetti & Toth, 1998; Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009) and more hope (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009).

Parental involvement seems to be particularly important in children who are raised in a low SES environment. A study that reviewed nearly every randomized, controlled intervention intended to increase children's intelligence from birth through kindergarten found that those who participated in interventions scored an average of 4 to 7 points higher than those who did not on tests of intelligence at the end of the intervention period (Protzko, Aronson, & Blair, 2013). When parents were trained to be more involved by engaging in rich communication exchanges and reading interactively, their children made considerable cognitive gains. Interventions conducted with children residing in Romanian orphanages come to similar conclusions (Sparling, Dragomir, Ramey, & Florescu, 2005). When caregivers are trained to be more involved (e.g., more physical and verbal interaction), children made significant gains in motor, language, and social outcomes compared to the control group of orphans. Thus, there is substantial evidence for the benefits of parental involvement for children who would otherwise not experience it. However, it is unclear whether children whose parents already provide the necessary level of stimulation benefit from further involvement.

As a result of this research on the importance of parental involvement for child outcomes, many parents may believe that more and more involvement is always better resulting in parenting becoming an all-consuming and extremely expensive endeavor. Hays (1996) coined the term "intensive mothering" to describe this style of parenting and identified three primary tenets based on her interviews with mothers of preschool-aged children. She described the pressure women felt because mothers are viewed as the *essential parent* responsible for all childcare tasks as well as children's outcomes. In addition, mothers described the intensive methods required to ensure constant attention and stimulation resulting in a child-centered environment that promotes optimal intellectual, social, and emotional child outcomes. Mothers

often described sacrificing their own needs to ensure optimal child outcomes. Finally, Hays described mothers' views of their children as innocent beings who must be cherished and protected from the dangerous world at all costs.

Subsequent research on intensive mothering has indicated that it is the dominant way that parenting has been conceptualized in the United States for the past several decades (Arendell, 2000). Women have embraced this ideology as the definition of a good mother (Guendouzi, 2005) and believe that adopting this intensive style of parenting can promote optimal child outcomes (Wall, 2010). The constructs associated with intensive parenting have been recently operationalized and quantitative factors were identified including that the mother is the essential parent, that parenting must be child-centered, that parenting is extremely fulfilling, that parents should provide consistent intellectual stimulation, and that parenting is extremely challenging (Liss, Schiffrin, Mackintosh, Miles-McLean, & Erchull, 2013). Mothers hold these intensive parenting beliefs despite the fact that it may have negative consequences on their well-being (Hays, 1996; Liss et al., 2013; Rizzo, Schiffrin, & Liss, 2013). For example, the belief that parenting is the most challenging job in the world was related to increased stress and depression as well as decreased satisfaction with life. The belief that children primarily need their mothers was related to increased stress and decreased life satisfaction (Rizzo et al., 2013). Although mothers may be willing to sacrifice their own well-being (e.g., increased stress and depression) to ensure their children's health, happiness, and success, there is not much evidence to suggest that parenting in this manner actually benefits children.

Although some involvement is clearly beneficial, it is possible that there is an upper limit to the benefits of intensive parental involvement. Children of highly involved mothers are more likely to experience internalizing problems such as depression and anxiety (Barber, Olsen, &

Shagle, 1994; Bayer, Sanson, & Hemphill, 2006; Fischer, Forthun, Pidcock, & Dowd, 2007), even when their mothers' initial levels of anxiety are taken into account (Gar & Hudson, 2008). Over-involvement becomes even more problematic as children age because they are expected to become increasingly independent over time (Erikson, 1968; Kins, Beyers, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2009; Soenens et al., 2007). For example, extremely high levels of parental involvement have been associated with more externalizing problems in adolescence (Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, & Hevey, 2000).

In college-aged students, parental over-involvement (sometimes referred to as helicopter parenting) has been associated with a decreased sense of school engagement (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012) and lower academic achievement (Kim, Wang, Orozco-Lapray, Shen, & Murtuza, 2013; Shoup, Gonyea, & Kuh, 2009). These students also experience decreased well-being (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Schiffrin et al., 2014) including higher rates of medication for anxiety and depression (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Kim et al. 2013) as well as decreased coping skills and increased anxiety (Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, & Montgomery, 2013). Despite the likely intended goal of enhancing the parent-child relationship, over-involved parenting has also been associated with reduced parent-child communication, satisfaction with their family life, and sense of family obligation (Kim et al., 2013; Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, & Murphy, 2012) as well as lower levels of autonomy support from parents (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). In addition, rather than enhancing child outcomes, over-involved parenting has been associated with having adult-aged children with higher levels of narcissism (Segrin et al., 2013) and entitlement (Segrin et al., 2012) as well as a decreased sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to others (Kim et al., 2013; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Schiffrin et al., 2014).

Problems with parental involvement appear to develop when parents fail to adjust their child-rearing strategies to ensure they continue to be developmentally appropriate (Segrin et al. 2012). What might be viewed as “best practices” in parenting a two-year-old (e.g., constant monitoring, directing child behaviors, and intervening to solve problems for child) are not developmentally appropriate as children grow and mature. Parents who fail to modulate their parenting styles in an age appropriate manner may quickly find themselves being over-involved rather than appropriately involved. Parents who try to anticipate and solve all of their children’s problems may find themselves with adult-aged children who do not feel autonomous or competent enough to solve their own problems (Schiffrin et al., 2014). In fact, research has shown that when people even think about how someone has helped or supported them in the past, it decreases their motivation and effort when completing a task (Fitzsimmons & Finkel, 2011).

Thus, parents who anticipate and solve their children’s problems for them may inadvertently be contributing to a cycle of dependence in which their children do not develop the competence to become independent and make autonomous choices for themselves (Liss & Schiffrin, 2014). However, it is unclear when the potential negative effects of problem solving begin. It may be that anticipatory problem solving that is developmentally appropriate (e.g., among preschool-aged children) may be beneficial for children.

One way that parents may try to anticipate and solve their children’s problems is to have them participate in activities designed to promote their children’s physical, cognitive, and emotional development. Such structured activities may be seen as a way to ensure health, happiness, and future success for their children. Fostering children’s knowledge, skills, and talents has become the hallmark of high SES parenting regardless of child’s gender or

racial/ethnic background (Lareau, 2002). While this “concerted cultivation” provides some significant advantages that allow children to successfully navigate their environments, is it always beneficial?

There are some benefits to participating in structured activities (Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006). The breadth of different activities that high school students participate in has been associated with greater academic achievement, fewer internalizing and externalizing problems, as well as lower usage of alcohol and drugs (Fredricks & Eccles, 2010). In one study, the variety and amount of activities youth participated in during 10th grade predicted positive academic outcomes in 12th grade as well as educational status two years after graduation (Fredricks, 2012). A meta-analysis of 29 studies suggested that the relationship between extracurricular activities and academic achievement was relatively small. Participation in leadership activities (e.g., student council) seemed to have the strongest effect on GPA, while participation in sports was not related to grades, but was associated with high school completion (Shulruf, 2010). However, the causal direction of the findings cannot be determined given the methodologies of the studies available.

Despite these potential benefits, there is mounting evidence that participation in too many activities may have a negative impact on child outcomes. A non-linear relationship has been found suggesting that there is an upper limit to the benefits of participating in activities with the possibility of declining academic performance at the highest levels of activity (Fredricks, 2012; Fredricks & Eccles, 2010). Involvement in more than five extracurricular activities for a total of 14 hours per week was associated with lower levels of academic achievement (Fredricks, 2012). Another study found a similar inverted U-shaped relationship between extracurricular activities and academic outcomes. High school students who were involved in two different

types of extracurricular activities (e.g., leadership, sports, etc.) benefitted, but students involved in more than two types of activities reported lower levels of academic achievement, engagement, and belongingness (Knifsend & Graham, 2012). It is possible that overscheduling children in extracurricular activities could have the opposite effect desired by parents. Rather than increasing children's happiness and success, overscheduling can take time away from their ability to succeed academically and participate in social activities with friends in family (Farb & Matjasko, 2012), which may increase their stress and anxiety levels (Melman, Little, & Akin-Little, 2007).

The majority of studies on the relationship between extracurricular activity participation and child outcomes have focused on adolescent-aged children. However, parents are enrolling their children in enrichment activities at younger and younger ages out of fear that their children may get left behind (Warner, 2005). Thus, the question remains whether participation in a variety of physical and creative activities does, in fact, promote children's physical, cognitive, and emotional development.

The primary goal of this study was to examine how belief in the ideology of intensive parenting predicted behaviors associated with over-involved parenting (i.e., anticipatory problem solving and overscheduling) to determine if these behaviors, in turn, predicted the physical skills (i.e., gross and fine motor skills), cognitive abilities (i.e., language), and happiness of children. To do this, we tested a model to determine whether parents were accurate in their assessment that holding intensive parenting beliefs and engaging in intensive parenting behaviors would benefit child outcomes (see Figure 1). We hypothesized that beliefs associated with intensive parenting such as considering the mother to be the essential parent, providing constant stimulation, believing parenting is challenging, and being child-centered would positively predict anticipatory

problem solving by parents. We believed that anticipatory problem solving would, in turn, positively predict children's involvement in creative and physical activities. Finally, we believed that involvement in creative and physical activities would positively predict the outcomes of gross motor skills, fine motor skills, language development, and subjective happiness.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from 241 parents of children who were four years old on average ($M = 48.27$, $SD = 14.15$). The parents were 33.47 years old ($SD = 5.95$) on average with a range of 20 to 54 years old. The majority of participants self-identified as White (77.2%), followed by Black (5.4%), Multi-Racial (3.3%), Asian or Pacific Islander (2.1%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (.8%), and 1.2% identified as "other." In terms of socioeconomic status, participants primarily identified as being upper-middle class (16.2%), middle (45.6%), or working (24.5%) class; smaller numbers identified as being wealthy (0.8%) or living in poverty (2.5%). All participants had at least a high school education with 7.1% having a high school diploma or equivalent, 19.9% reporting some college experience, 9.5% having an associate's degree, 32% graduating from college, 14.5% completing a Master's level degree, and 7.1% having a Doctoral or professional degree. The majority (71.8%) reported being married or with a domestic partner, 8.7% reported being single, 5% were engaged or in a committed relationship, and 5% were separated or divorced. Approximately half of participants were employed full-time (46.1% outside of home and 5.0% from home), a fifth were employed part-time (14.1% outside of the home and 4.6% from home), and a fifth (20%) were not currently employed. Approximately 10% of participants elected not to provide demographic information.

Procedure

A survey was created and distributed online using Survey Gizmo. Participants were mainly recruited for our study through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is an online source that can be used to recruit participants who are paid a nominal amount to complete a number of possible tasks, including research surveys. Research has suggested that data from MTurk has a similar level of reliability to data from other recruitment sources (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). When our survey was selected, participants were taken to an introductory page on the website SurveyGizmo containing our consent form; once consent was given, participants completed the survey and then were shown a debriefing statement. Participants were paid a nominal sum (i.e., \$0.50) through MTurk for their time and participation upon completion of the survey. Other participants were recruited through online parenting blogs, and social media sites, such as Facebook and Tumblr, and were not compensated for completing the questionnaire. A link was posted to each site that led participants to an informed consent form prior to taking the survey and presented them with an electronic debriefing form at the close of the survey.

Measures

Parenting Beliefs. The Intensive Parenting Attitudes Questionnaire (IPAQ) has 25 items and 5 scales: Essentialism (e.g., “Although fathers may mean well, they generally are not as good at parenting as mothers.”); Fulfillment (e.g., “Being a parent brings a person the greatest joy they can possibly experience”); Stimulation (e.g., “Finding the best educational opportunities for children is important as early as preschool”); Challenging (e.g., “It is harder to be a good mother than to be a corporate executive”), and Child-centered (e.g., “Children’s needs should come before their parents”; Liss et al., 2013). Questions were answered on a 6-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). In the original development of the scale internal

consistency was good based on Cronbach's alpha for Essentialism ($\alpha = .85$), Fulfillment ($\alpha = .77$), Challenging ($\alpha = .76$), and Child-centered ($\alpha = .70$) as well as adequate for Stimulation ($\alpha = .64$). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .87 for Essentialism, .68 for Challenging, .78 for Child-centered, and .72 for Stimulation. One item was inadvertently left out of the on-line measure for the three item Fulfillment scale, and it was, therefore, omitted from further analysis.

Anticipatory Problem Solving. Behaviors indicative of overparenting were assessed using the Anticipatory Problem Solving (APS) scale of an overparenting measure (Segrin et al., 2012). The APS scale was selected because it best operationalized behaviors that might occur as a result of intensive parenting beliefs. This scale consists of 12 items (e.g., "I try to help my child steer clear of any troubles that s/he might encounter in the world.") measured on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability of this measure was .87 in the original study and .88 in the current study.

Structured Activities. We asked parents to indicate the number of hours per week (0 to 10) that they enrolled their children in both creative (e.g., music lessons, art classes, etc.) and physical activities (e.g., gymnastics, soccer, t-ball, etc.).

Gross and Fine Motor Skills. We created a measure to assess gross (e.g., "Jump rope") and fine motor skills (e.g., "Cuts paper with scissors") based on developmental milestones for children ages 2 to 5 from the Child Development Review (Ireton, 1996). Parents responded to the 33-item list answering whether or not their child could do the activities. The number of affirmative responses were summed for both gross and fine motor skills yielding reliable measures of these skills; Cronbach's alphas were of .85 and .90, respectively.

Language Usage. A parent report measure of children's language usage adapted from the MacArthur Communicative Development Inventory by the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey

– Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) was used. It consisted of 6 questions asking parents to rate their child’s general communication skills (e.g., “Child uses appropriate social greetings”) on a 5-point scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 5 (*always*). In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha was .82.

Subjective Happiness Scale. This was a 4-item scale that measured global subjective happiness (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1997). We converted this self-report measure into parent-report of child’s happiness. Parents responded to choices on a 7-point scale with different descriptive anchors (e.g., In general, I consider my child: 1 (*not a very happy child*) to 7 (*a very happy child*)). The scale had an alpha of .80 in the original study and .83 in the current study.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and ranges for participants’ scores for all measures can be found in Table 1. Participants scored relatively high on the IPAQ scales for being child-centered, providing constant stimulation for children, and finding parenting challenging. However, endorsement for mothers being the essential parent was generally low with the group average falling below the mid-point on the scale. In terms of parenting behaviors, parents scored above the average on anticipatory problem solving; however, children between the ages of 2 and 5 years old were in less than 2 hours each of creative and physical activities. Although there was variability among participants in child outcomes, the average levels of gross motor, fine motor, and language skills as well as subjective happiness were above the mid-point.

Partial correlations among all variables can be found in Table 2. Variance due to the age of the child was partialled out to control for the natural developmental progression on outcome variables due to age (i.e., older children would be expected to score higher regardless of parenting beliefs and behaviors). Other than essentialism and stimulation, the IPAQ scales were highly correlated with each other, and all of the IPAQ scales had a strong correlation with the

APS. However, the parenting beliefs and behaviors examined in this study had only small relationships to relatively few of the child outcomes under examination. Essentialist beliefs were related to slightly lower fine motor skills. Beliefs in the importance of providing constant stimulation for children were associated with slightly higher scores on child's language use and happiness. Participants who reported that they find parenting to be challenging also reported having children who were happier. Finally, parents who believed that they should be more child-centered also reported putting their children in more hours of creative and physical activities per week. In terms of parenting behaviors, parents who reported more anticipatory problem solving also put their children in more creative activities. Participating in these creative activities was associated with being enrolled in more physical activities and having better gross motor skills. Although parenting beliefs and behaviors were not highly correlated with child outcomes, positive child outcomes tended to be related to each other; parents who reported that their children had better motor skills also tended to report higher language and happiness scores as well.

Path analysis with maximum likelihood estimation was used to test our hypothesized model (see Figure 1) using M-plus version 6.12 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010). The effects of age on each variable were controlled for, and variables at the same level of the model were allowed to intercorrelate. The model had good fit to the data, $\chi^2(28) = 31.78, p = .28$; CFI = .996; RMSEA = .03; SRMR = .04 (see Figure 2 for standardized path loadings). While the model fit well, we did not find many of the relationships among the modeled variables that we had anticipated. Three of the IPAQ scales, essentialism, stimulation, and child-centered, predicted anticipatory problem solving. As hypothesized, anticipatory problem solving did positively predict child involvement in both creative and physical activities. However, the only significant

relationship between activity involvement and the outcome variables was a positive relationship between involvement in physical activities and gross motor skills.

Discussion

In this study, we had anticipated a path wherein intensive parenting beliefs would predict anticipatory problem solving, which would predict enrolling children in structured activities, which would, in turn, predict increased skills. We found partial support for this model, but little prediction of gains in children's skills. The intensive parenting components of essentialism, stimulation, and child-centered did predict anticipatory problem solving. Parents who desire to create a child-centered environment where children are consistently intellectually stimulated may be more likely to try to anticipate and solve problems for their children. To date, much of the research on anticipatory problem solving focuses on adult children, for whom anticipatory problem solving is more clearly developmentally inappropriate (e.g., Segrin et al., 2012). Anticipatory problem solving is clearly a tactic frequently used by parents of younger children as the average score was above the midpoint of the scale and is related to intensive parenting beliefs.

Anticipatory problem solving also predicted engagement in both creative and motor structured activities. It could be that one problem that parents hope to solve for their young children is how to fill up their time. Furthermore, parents may view engagement in structured activities as skill building, designed to solve potential future problems by ensuring that their children excel in both the cognitive and motor domains. They may also hope that these activities will make their children happy and, thus, improve their level of subjective happiness.

However, our model showed almost no links between participating in cognitive and motor activities and improved skill levels or happiness. Although there was a link between

participation in physical activities and gross motor skills, no other links between structured activities and motor, cognitive, or emotional benefits were found. Thus, parents who are trying to anticipate and solve future problems by enrolling their children in activities that would allow them to gain critical skills for social and academic success may find that these activities have little or no effect. In addition, many activities that pre-school students may be enrolled in are time intensive and expensive. Engaging in them may contribute to the sense that parenting is expensive, challenging, and time consuming. It may be that parents enroll children in these activities at the expense of allowing children to participate in unstructured play with parents or peers. However, unstructured play has been shown to have positive benefits for both parents and children (Ginsburg, 2007; Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012).

Examination of the bivariate correlations also indicated few direct relationships between intensive parenting beliefs and child outcomes. There was a small negative relationship between a belief in the mother as the essential parent and fine motor skills. There were also small positive relationships between the belief in the importance of intellectual stimulation and language as well as between both stimulation and the belief that parenting is challenging and subjective happiness. It makes sense that the belief that parents should provide intellectual stimulation to their children would relate to language abilities. However, it is important to note that this benefit was not mediated by enrolling a child in structured activities in order to promote language. Promoting language can be as simple and cost efficient as talking to and reading to children (Weisleder & Fernald, 2013), rather than enrolling them in expensive and time-consuming activities.

Research has consistently shown that parental involvement has positive benefits on children's social, academic, and developmental outcomes (e.g., Neisser et al., 1996; Hart &

Risley, 1995; Weisleder & Fernald, 2013); however, our study does not indicate that such involvement needs to include expensive and time consuming activities for pre-school aged children. We did not specifically document any negative effects of overinvolvement; however, research does indicate that involvement in too many extracurricular activities among school-aged children can be related to negative outcomes (Fredricks, 2012; Fredricks & Eccles, 2010). The desire to enroll children in such activities appears to be part of a belief that parenting should be intensive, expensive, and time-consuming and that parents should anticipate and solve their children's problems. Although we did not find any directly negative effects associated with anticipatory problem solving, parents who attempt to anticipate and solve their children's problems as their children age are more likely to have adult children with mental health difficulties (Segrin et al., 2012).

It should be noted that the families in this study were largely middle and upper-middle class. The pressures on parents to "cultivate" children and ensure their optimal success have been described as being concentrated on this socio-demographic group (Lareau, 2002). It is not clear whether the lack of relationship we found between involvement in activities and cognitive or motor skills would also been seen in different demographic groups. It may be that our middle and upper-middle class families are already at the top of the inverted U-shaped curve of involvement such that further engagement in activities does not result in additional benefit. Children that have very uninvolved parents may benefit from engaging in structured outside activities such as those they may receive in early intervention programs (e.g. Protzko, et al., 2013; Sparling et al., 2005).

In addition, the results of our study should be interpreted in light of the limitations associated with self-report data. Future research should consider using direct assessments of

children's language or motor skills to determine more clearly whether intensive parenting attitudes or engaging in structured activities relate to increased skill levels. It should also be noted that all of the relationships are correlational and, while we modeled a specific causal direction, it is probable that the relationships we measured work in both directions. For example, the positive relationship between participation in motor activities and gross motor skills may indicate that those activities improve gross motor skills, but is just as likely to indicate that parents of children with advanced gross motor skills are more likely to enroll their children in sports-related activities.

In sum, parents feel a lot of pressure to provide constant activities for their children in an attempt to "cultivate" them and optimize their developmental outcomes. This desire is related to intensive parenting beliefs, a set of beliefs that includes the ideas that parenting should be child-centered, involve intellectual stimulation, be challenging, and primarily involve the mother (Hays, 1996; Liss et al., 2013). Intensive parenting has been linked to poor mental health consequences for mothers (Rizzo et al., 2013), but some parents may consider it to be worth sacrificing their own mental health if it would ensure their children's optimal development. We found intensive parenting beliefs to predict anticipatory problem solving, which may be a precursor to overinvolved, helicopter parenting if parents do not learn to let children solve their own problems as they become more developmentally mature (Segrin et al., 2012). In older children, anticipatory problem solving has been linked coping deficits and narcissism (Segrin et al., 2013). Our results indicate that intensive parenting beliefs, anticipatory problem solving, and engagement in structured activities have few beneficial effects on child outcomes, at least among the largely middle and upper middle class participants in our study. Thus, parents may wish to re-think their emphasis on concerted cultivation and the expense and effort that it requires.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Measured Variables

Measures	<i>M (SD)</i>	Possible range	Actual range
1. IPAQ- Essentialism	2.40 (0.95)	1.00-6.00	1.00-5.00
2. IPAQ- Stimulation	4.78 (0.93)	1.00-6.00	1.00-6.00
3. IPAQ- Challenging	4.24 (0.89)	1.00-6.00	1.00-6.00
4. IPAQ- Child centered	3.92 (1.15)	1.00-6.00	1.00-6.00
5. Anticipatory Problem Solving	3.37 (.71)	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00
6. Creative Activities	1.82 (2.53)	0.00-10.00	0.00-10.00
7. Physical Activities	1.69 (2.30)	0.00-10.00	0.00-10.00
8. Gross Motor	11.00 (3.69)	0.00-17.00	0.00-17.00
9. Fine Motor	11.18 (4.22)	0.00-16.00	0.00-16.00
10. Language	2.93 (0.68)	0.00-4.00	0.00-4.00
11. Subjective Happiness	5.32 (0.85)	1.00-7.00	3.00-7.00

Table 2

Summary of Partial Correlations Among Measured Variables Controlling for Age of Child

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. IPAQ- Essentialism	--									
2. IPAQ- Stimulation	.02	--								
3. IPAQ- Challenging	.31***	.48***	--							
4. IPAQ- Child centered	.26***	.51***	.40***	--						
5. Anticipatory Problem Solving	.21**	.50***	.33***	.55***	--					
6. Creative Activities	.12	.11	.05	.18**	.17**	--				
7. Physical Activities	.05	.13	-.002	.15*	.16	.52***	--			
8. Gross Motor	-.02	.13	.06	.09	.05	.20**	.32***	--		
9. Fine Motor	-.15*	.08	-.02	-.06	-.10	.10	.14	.61***	--	
10. Language	-.06	.15*	.13	.02	.03	.06	.11	.37***	.42***	--
11. Subjective Happiness	.02	.14*	.14*	.12	.10	.10	.10	.31***	.23***	.28***

Note. $N = 203$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

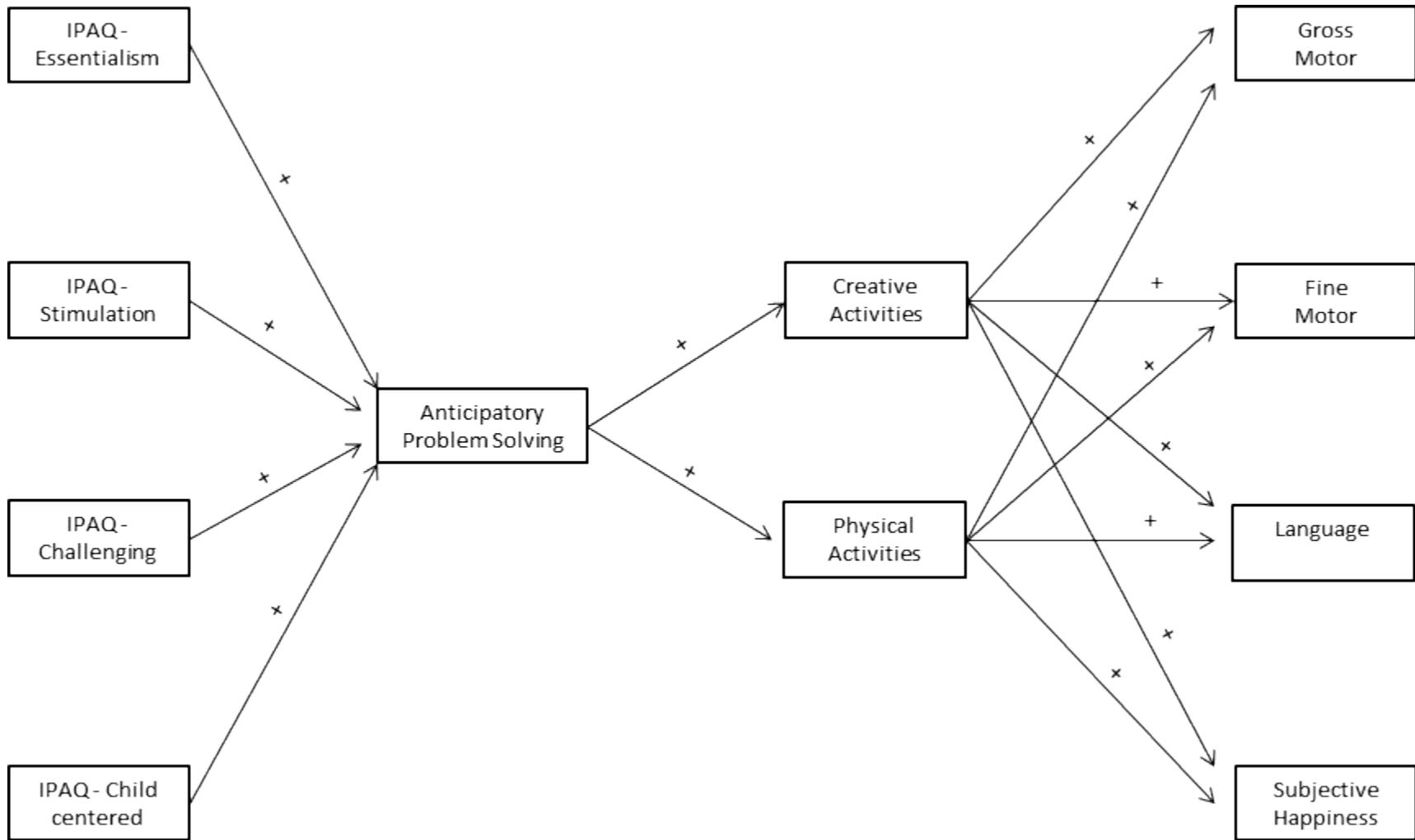


Figure 1. Hypothesized model.

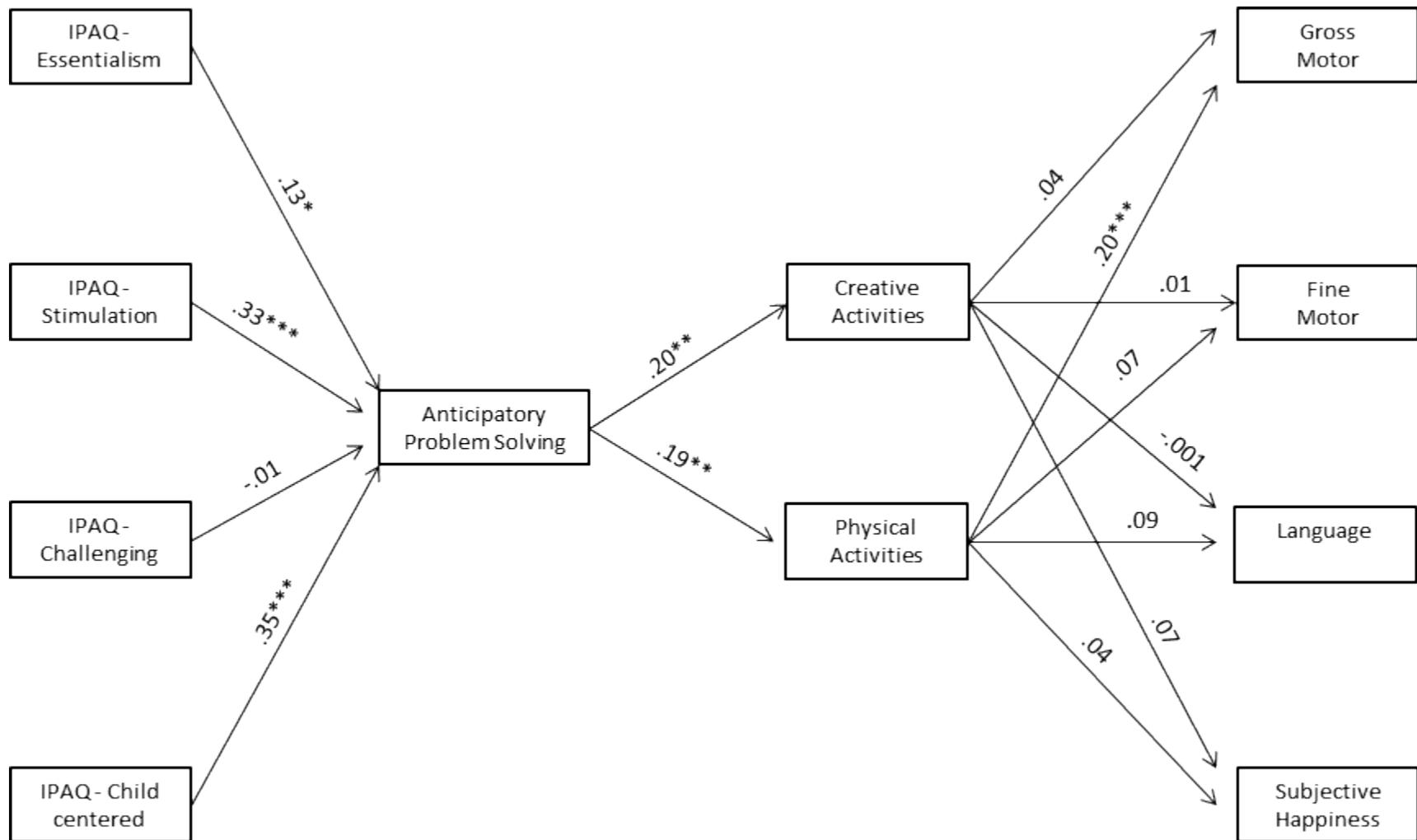


Figure 2. Final path model of the relationships among the variables of interest. The fit of the model to the data was good, $\chi^2(28) = 31.78, p = .28$; CFI = .996; RMSEA = .03; SRMR = .04. Standardized path coefficients are reported. Variables at the same level of the model were allowed to intercorrelate, and the effects of age on all the variables was controlled for (relationships not pictured). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

