



The Meaning of Parent-Child Closeness in The Digital Era

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Highlights

- According to the latest research, parent-child closeness can be seen from openness in communication, understanding, love, and respect. Parent-child closeness also consists of three aspects: intimacy, positive affect, and self-disclosure.
- This study adds three themes there are: being a support system, guiding, and admiring the parents' characteristics. A parent's presence in a child's life also promotes closeness because the parent who constantly accompanies and makes time for the child will be more meaningful to them.

Abstract

Background: The advancement of technology information in the digital era brings changes that affect parent-child relationship. Closeness with parents is considered an important thing that can help children dealing with conflict, life problems, and delinquent behaviors. *Study aims:* To describe the meaning of closeness between parent-child in the digital era. The research question are what the meaning of closeness to parents from children's perspective who grew up in the digital era? *Method:* This research used a qualitative descriptive research approach and was analyzed by content analysis. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling with subjects with the inclusive criteria The number of participants collected was 1256 students. Then, it was filtered into 1216 students who fit to the inclusive criteria. Data was collected by distributing an e-questionnaire instrument consisting of one closed and one open question. *Result:* The study found 9 themes about the meaning of parent-children closeness namely: establishing communication, guiding, building harmonization, providing comfort, love and affection, being a support system, a source of happiness, something valuable, and admiring parent's character *Conclusion:* Research findings recommended as aspects in fostering closeness between parents and their children who grow up exposed to information technology in the digital era.

Keywords: Closeness; Parent-Child Relation; Digital Era

INTRODUCTION

Family is the initial environment of growth and development for a child. Individuals in a family are interrelated, not only by blood or marriage ties but also through the fulfillment of primary instrumental and expressive functions for the members of the network (Lestari, 2012). In light of this, family plays a crucial role in addressing not only biological needs but also psychological and sociological ones. The fulfillment of these functions ensures the quality of a family relationship.

One of the predictors of a good family relationship quality is the closeness between parent and child. This closeness between parent and child is seen as an expression of a child's contentment with the quality of the relationship with their parent. Parent-child closeness can be seen as the warmth a child feels from the parent and a parent's support and acceptance. It can also facilitate a child's smooth transition into adulthood (Boutelle, Eisenberg, Gregory, & Sztainer, 2009).

Openness in communication, understanding, love, and respect are signs of parent-child closeness. When parents respond to their children in an open and relaxed manner, children, especially those in their teen years, feel more comfortable opening up to them (Branje, 2018). This type of closeness can go both ways, from children to parents and vice versa (Breuk et al., 2007). How emotionally close a parent and child are to one another, according to Collins and Laursen (2004), is a key factor in the parent-child relationship.

As times have changed, society has undergone numerous shifts in social values. There is no doubt that these changes would have an impact on how parents and children interact. In this era, interaction pattern between parents and children is impacted by generational differences. Parents are more familiar with the traditional values that have been passed down from previous generations, whereas children are more drawn to new and experimental things. In order to best care for and educate their children, parents are now expected to adapt to the changing times and digital technologies. Those who are unable to overcome generational differences or even ignore them will see a decline in closeness to their children (Pickhardt, 2018). Therefore, parent-child closeness can actually measure whether parents can cope with changing social values.

According to the latest research, parent-child closeness consists of three aspects: intimacy, positive affect, and self-disclosure (Lestari, 2016). Dependency and a sense of connectedness to one another are signs of a close relationship between parent and child. Nurhayani (2019) emphasizes that the closeness between parent and child is strong when both parties make time for each other, listen to each other, and engage in discussions. Furthermore, Hartama, Dwitri, and Gunawan (2022) note that discussions between parent and child should be two-way exchanges that can help a parent understand what a child needs.

Latipun (2019) and Irawan (2015) argue that the behavior of seeking out, maintaining, and developing closeness to parents, also known as attachment, is a fixed feature of every human being. Humans went through a process known as bonding formation since infancy. Attachment Theory creator Bowlby (1961, as cited in Latipun, 2019) explains that a child's attachment to a parent figure is crucial to them. However, it must be understood that this attachment will decline over time.

Closeness to parents is crucial for a child's life in the future, particularly in their early adulthood years. According to Musfiroh (2011), a child's relationship with a parent fosters a mental construction of oneself and others, impacting their ability to adapt to their surroundings. Aside from that, parent-child closeness has a negative correlation with delinquency in academic settings (Saefudin, 2019). In other words, when a child is close to their parent, they are less likely

to be involved in bullying, stealing, street fighting, and violence. Based on the preceding descriptions, it is urgent to conduct research to understand better the meaning of closeness with parents for children who grew up in the digital era, where they have been exposed to the advancement of information technology from an early age. The research question are what the meaning of closeness to parents from children's perspective who grew up in the digital era?

METHOD

Study design

In this research, a descriptive qualitative approach was used to obtain an in-depth interpretation of the topic studied. The data collection process entails distributing an e-questionnaire with open-ended and closed-ended questions. Researchers identified keywords from a phenomenon and then categorized the relationship of each existing keyword into a context (Budiasih, 2014).

Participant

The population of this research was active students of Universitas Diponegoro, with a total of 1256 participants who completed an e-questionnaire. The next step was to select participants that matched the research inclusion criteria, and 1216 students were selected, with 555 females and 699 males, ages ranging from 17-23 years old. Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, was used to select the participants. The following are the participant inclusion criteria: (1) an active student of Universitas Diponegoro; (2) Generation Z aged 17-23 years old; (3) living with parents; and (4) willing to be a research participant. The selected participants then went through another selection process based on relevant criteria, and 1158 participants were obtained, of which 377 participants have closeness to their mother, 13 participants have closeness to their father, and 864 have closeness to their mother and father.

Instruments

Data is collected using an e-questionnaire consisting of one close-ended and one open-ended question. The close-ended question is, "Do you feel close with your father or mother?" and the open-ended question is, "What is the meaning of the closeness to your parents?". The e-questionnaire was distributed in person during lectures. Before distributing the e-questionnaire, researchers obtained permission from instructors in each faculty. The reason for using an e-questionnaire was to ease the scoring process and minimize input errors.

Procedure

Researchers assembled an e-questionnaire consisting of open-ended and close-ended questions based on the constructs being studied. Next, the e-questionnaire was distributed to the participants who met the inclusion criteria. Later, content analysis was conducted to analyze the data obtained.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the content analysis method, which is a process for creating reality and meaning. The findings were coded after the researchers identified themes and patterns (Cho & Lee, 2014). In order to construct reality and understand the meaning, researchers paid close attention to the process, events, and authenticity. The content analysis method must observe communication phenomena and precisely define what is being studied, basing all activities on

that goal. Following that, researchers selected the unit analysis to be reviewed and the research object as the target analysis. The first step in the data processing process was open coding, which categorized phenomena based on questionnaire responses. The second step was to create an axial coding in which researchers linked the open coding categorization into the same characteristics. The third phase was to create selective coding, which involved researchers formulating primary categories by connecting categories identified during the axial coding stage (Budiasih, 2014).

RESULT

Participant's characteristics

The table below show detailed information about the participants in this research.

Table 1.

Gender differences

Gender	Total	Percentage
Male	702	55.9
Female	553	44

Table 2.

Age of participants

Age	Total	Percentage
17	85	6.8
18	793	63.1
19	267	21.2
20	55	8.9

Data analysis

The results of qualitative data analysis show that participants interpret closeness to their parents differently. According to data from 1216 participants, 95.64% of them had a close relationship with their parents. Nine themes were identified in the meaning of a close relationship with parents, establishing communication, providing comfort, love and affection, building harmony, being a support system, a source of happiness, something valuable, guiding, and admiring the parents' characteristics.

Table 3.

The Meaning of Closeness to Parents from Children's Perspective

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Total	Percentage
Close Relationship	Establishing communication	287	24.42%
	Providing comfort	214	17.60%
	Love and affection	169	13.90%
	Building harmony	142	11.68%
	Being a support system	101	8.30%
	A source of happiness	81	6.66%

	Something valuable	80	6.58%
	Guiding	76	6.25%
	Admiring the parents' characteristics	3	0.25%
Not Close Relationship	Responsibility	41	3.37%
	Not feeling close	4	0.33%
	Respect	2	0.16%
Others	Others	6	0.49%

DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 3, there are nine themes that can be found in the meaning of closeness to parents in the digital era for Generation Z: establishing communication, providing comfort, love and affection, building harmony, being a support system, a source of happiness, something valuable, guiding, and admiring the parents' characteristics. Further explanations of each theme are provided below:

Establishing Communication

For the majority of Generation Z, maintaining good communication equates to being close to one's parents. Effective parent-child communication can be achieved when parents encourage open communication by providing a safe space to share stories and concerns for their children. When a parent and child are close, they can make a good conversation partner and exchange stories on a wide range of topics. Additionally, communication can occur through making jokes as well as through exchanging ideas and feelings. According to Batoebara and Hasugian (2021), effective communication can be seen by the exchange of information that results in attitude change and a good relationship between sender and receiver. Santosa (2019) adds that communication between parent and child within a family can promote closeness. Below are some of the participants' statements regarding maintaining communication as the meaning of parent-child closeness:

"Closeness to parents is essential because it helps to maintain communication in the family." (S0536)

"Closeness to parents is very important because they are my confidant when I face problems." (S0200)

"Being close with parents means being able to make jokes and talk to them about many things." (S0331)

"It's easy to exchange ideas with parents." (S0164)

One of the signs of effective communication is openness. In a relationship, openness requires mutual trust from both parties. Parents allowing their children to express themselves without having to hide anything indicates openness in the parent-child relationship. A child's openness can be developed if they have a close relationship with their parents (Wulandari, 2020).

Sholikhah (2011) adds that in order to build closeness and comfort in a parent-child relationship, an open attitude is required. Interestingly, openness accounts for the majority of participants' responses in this research. Below are some of the participants' responses:

“Closeness is when my parents and I have no secrets because we trust each other; that secrets only exist for those who do not trust each other.” (S0960)

“When we dare to freely express ourselves in front of our parents and dare to tell them about all of the problems we are facing.” (S0510)

Providing Comfort

Generation Z also described closeness to parents as providing a sense of comfort. What a sense of comfort means is the absence of awkwardness, pressure, and pride in the parent-child relationship. With the presence of comfort, it is easier for children to become closer to their parents as they feel at ease to be themselves. Generation Z also linked comfort in the parent-child relationship with the quality of looking after each other and seeing parents as a place to return to. A close parent-child relationship can also be seen when parents become a place for children to confide and gain support through life. According to Arif and Busa (2020), a parent is the oldest formal education institution responsible for educating, nurturing, caring for, and protecting children to ensure their development. However, the protection of a parent for their children is not intended to make the children dependent on others but to teach them how to be a good person and be loved by many.

Generation Z also linked a sense of comfort to how their parents accompany them no matter the circumstance. In other words, parents are always there and make time to be with their children. If parents can act as friends to their children, who are there with them in both good and bad times, their relationship can grow closer. Putri Sutjipto and Puspita (2021) explain that there are several things parents can do to grow closeness to their children, one of which is to spend time together and share stories. Ikhsaniyah and Wijaya (2022) add that parents can develop closeness with their children by playing the role of their best friend. The role of a best friend refers to how parents can provide support, comfort, and advice to their children when they are in need. Below are statements from respondents regarding comfort in the parent-child relationship.

“Closeness to parents, in my opinion is that we are seen not only as their child, but also as friends with whom we can go out and share stories about good old days.” (S0037)

“Always be there for me in good and bad times.” (S0048)

“For me, closeness means not being awkward when we're together.” (S0165)

“Taking care of each other.” (S0242)

“Always making time to gather, never far away, and giving advice to each other.” (S0312)

“Very meaningful, because family is a place to return to and a place to discuss and encourage each other.” (S1156)

“Parents are the ones who will always be there and will remain a place to return to.” (S1219)

Love and Affection

Generation Z described that being close to their parents meant that they showed each other love and affection, which accounts for 13,9% of the responses. According to the participants, love and affection are demonstrated by parents' understanding of their children. With the presence of love and affection, both parents and children will want to try to understand each other. Parents' sincerity, warmth, care, and attention to their children convey feelings of love and affection. Children, on the other hand, can express love by wanting to make their parents happy. According to Hakim's (2012) research in a Javanese household, parents who are able to demonstrate care and affection for their children help the children feel closer and more trusting to their parents. This finding is congruent with Sari, Devianti, and Safitri's (2018) study, which shows that love emerges when parents are nurturing, attending to, and meeting the needs of children, as well as the presence of trust and acceptance in the relationship. Below are some of the participants' statements regarding love and affection in the parent-child relationship.

“My parents are understanding of me.” (S0685)

“I can feel what my mother feels. When she is sad, I am also sad, and vice versa.” (S1047)

“Everything, because the most sincere people are only parents.” (S1205)

“Closeness to parents is the affection and love that parents show to their children, as well as the affection, respect, and love that children show to their parents, resulting in a bond and closeness to parents.” (S0115)

“Closeness to parent is very important because it can induce warmth and harmony inside me.” (S0677)

“Closeness to parents is very important. Because the closest people and most caring of us are parents. Without them, we won't be anything.” (S0384)

“Caring for each other and being selfless when doing it.” (S0476)

“Parents are everything, and as long as they are alive, I must always be close to them and make them happy.” (S0127)

Building Harmony

The fourth meaning of closeness to parents is the effort to build harmony. Specifically, Generation Z described two important elements that make up a harmonious parent-child relationship: reciprocity and interconnectedness. A harmonious relationship provides closeness, concord, and attachment between parent and child. It is also important for parents to have faith in their children in order to build a harmonious relationship. Papalia (2009) explained that harmony emerges from attachment which is an active, affectionate, and reciprocal relationship between individuals. Attachment then sprouts the behavioral seeds that nurture the emotional bond and closeness between parents and children (Sari, Devianti, & Safitri, 2018). Below are provided some of the participants' statements regarding harmony as the meaning of parent-child closeness:

“A relationship that is reciprocal and interrelated wherein there exists invaluable care and affection in it.” (S0041)

“Building a relationship as a family member that is a parent with a child.” (S0992)

“A reciprocal relationship between a child and a parent.” (S0195)

“An emotional relationship between a parent and a child in which both requires consistent contact and feel anxious or uncomfortable when seperated.” (S0104)

“The formation of intimacy.” (S0407)

“Living in harmony, being dutiful to parents, and upholding human rights between children and parents.” (S0237)

“Closeness to parents is a relationship between two individuals that are interrelated to each other.” (S0230)

“A very important thing is to build trust and sense of belonging between parents and children.” (S0123)

Being a Support System

Fifth, parent-child closeness is described as parents acting as a support system for their children. It means that when a parent is supportive and encouraging to his or her child, the parent blesses the child's activities, motivating the child to continue to rise and progress in the pursuit of excellence. Furthermore, parents are people who can be relied on. They help when their children are in need and nurture them from infancy so they can become who they are today. When parents always give their best to their children, it can pave the way to success for the children. Children also feel supported by their parents and are not only in material terms but also in maintaining their mental health. A support system is considered a type of social support, which means the comfort, care, respect, and assistance of a person or group of people to a particular person (Sarafino & Smith, 2011). This support can come from anyone, but in this study, it is the support that parents provide for their children in order for them to achieve the best results. Several types of social support include emotional, instrumental, information, and physical (Sarafino & Smith, 2011). Fulfilling these needs is another challenge for parents because they must be able to align their children's needs with restrictions that must be applied so that it does not conflict with adopted values (Kobak et al., 2017). According to the data obtained, the most common type of social support felt by participants was emotional support. This emotional support can help Generation Z to feel closer to their parents. Children can sense their parents' warmth and presence in their lives, which helps to maintain their mental health. Research done by Dutton, Choi, and Choi (2020) added that parental support is one of the most important factors in maintaining the well-being of adolescents. Below are some of the participants' responses regarding parents being their support system:

“Something that is needed for a child.” (S0222)

“Close because it complements life.” (S0174)

“Fulfill my mental needs.” (S0334)

“My parents are my support system.” (S1101)

“Can help me when I’m confused.” (S1225)

“Parents can be an uplifting force in my daily life.” (S0428)

“Being close to parents is equal to being close their blessings.” (S0821)

“In my opinion, it is parents who make us have the motivation to move forward and achieve things.” (S1019)

“In my opinion, closeness with father and mother is the most important thing because they are the first people that I can turn to for help and are always the most dependable.” (S0060)

“Closeness to parents is very important because they are the ones who take care of me and a place to return to, so closeness is very important to me.” (S0942)

“Helping each other.” (S0888)

“If it weren’t for them, I wouldn’t be where I am today.” (S0178)

“Closeness to parents is a process of intense interaction between parent and child that can lead to certain benefits.” (S0814)

“Because feeling close to the parents that we love can benefit our mental health.” (S0421)

“Having a close relationship with parents makes everything in life easier to overcome, because parents will do everything they can to support their children.” (S0507)

“A pathway to success.” (S0778)

A Source of Happiness

Generation Z also described parent-child closeness as a source of happiness. Happiness occurs when parents help their children understand the meaning of life and improve their mood. Additionally, parents are also seen as a gift or a blessing from God. A psychological concept defined similarly to happiness is subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). Subjective well-being refers to an individual’s experience of positive affect and evaluation of satisfaction with life (as cited in Snyder, Lopez & Pedrotti, 2011). Happiness will arise if the individual can live his or her life positively. Happiness itself comes from an individual's evaluation of his or her subjective life depending on the individual's experience. When a person is happy, he or she has a high level of life satisfaction, frequently experiences positive affect, and rarely experiences negative affect. Ramsey et al. (2018) state that parents can influence their children's happiness. Interconnectedness is a key factor contributing to happiness in parent-child relationships. Furthermore, for teenagers, the form of happiness that parents provide is when parents understand their children's emotions well. The presence of parents who can bring happiness can make the children feel grateful and will be meaningful to them. The following are some examples of respondents' statements about happiness.

“Absolute happiness in life.” (S0412)

“Very meaningful, because without the presence of parents, life is so empty.” (S0887)

“Can improve our mood, tell stories, and talk more often.” (S0251)

“Because it is a God’s blessing that I must always protect.” (S1015)

Something Valuable

Next, Generation Z described having closeness with parents as very valuable. The parent-child relationship closeness is regarded as essential, meaningful, and precious. Indeed, every family wishes for a close parent-child relationship. However, it is the role of parents to build closeness with their children initially. Parents play an important role in their children's development, especially during adolescence. During that period, children will face numerous problems and confusion, and it is the presence of parents who can understand and accept the problems that children need the most. Respondents said parents are very important figures to them, and they desire closer relationships with their parents. Here are some of the participants' responses:

“A precious thing we have.” (S01330)

“Closeness with parents is something priceless that a child often forgets because they are too preoccupied with their friends.” (S0418)

“It means a lot to my life.” (S0949)

“It's very meaningful because my parents are the most precious.” (S0885)

“It means everything.” (S0153)

Guiding

Closeness in the parent-child relationship is defined as parents guiding their children in shaping their character. The closeness of a parent to their child can influence the development of a child's personality and mindset. Guiding can manifest itself in various ways, including providing advice and solutions and assisting the child in decision-making. Parents who have a close relationship with their children can guide the children to stay focused on their life path. Sugiarti et al. (2022) assert that one of the responsibilities of parents is to guide their children. Parents can shape good character in children by guiding them. Fang (2018) adds that parenting style is also an important factor in shaping a child's character, particularly in assisting a child in developing social skills. Below are some of the participants' statements about parental guidance in the meaning of parent-child closeness:

“I believe that a child's closeness to their parents influences the development of their personality in social situations” (S0131)

“Children should be close to their parents so that parents can direct their children's future for the better” (S0310)

“Closeness with parents is very influential, when I have something I would like to do I will consult my parents first” (S1193)

“It is important for my mental health and the advices that they gave will be very useful in the future” (S0272)

“Easing my problems, because I can share my concerns with them and get the best solution” (S0065)

“Being close to my parents allows me to be more focused on my life path with the advice they gave, and my life can be more colorful” (S0665)

Admiring the Parents' Characteristics

The final theme in the meaning of parent-child closeness is admiring the parents' characteristics, such as being a good listener and role model for their children. Children think their parents can accept every concern they have, be an inspiration, and be a place for children to lean on. According to the participants, their closeness to their parents is a result of the manner in which their parents have interacted with them since they were very young. In the study conducted by Wilson and Durbin (2012), parents' characteristics have an impact on how they respond to the needs of their children. Those who have positive characteristics will demonstrate that they have greater responsiveness and vice versa. Here are some of the participants' responses regarding their parents' characteristics:

“We are very close, but not in the way that friends are. My parents are an inspiration and someone to lean on. They care so much for their children. They always ask what we're up to. They also make us (their children) feel safe.” (S0705)” (S0705)

“A good listener” (S0871)

CONCLUSION

Findings in this study suggest nine themes in the meaning of closeness to parents in the digital era for Generation Z: establishing communication, providing comfort, love and affection, building harmony, being a support system, a source of happiness, something valuable, guiding, and admiring the parents' characteristics. Interestingly, in this research, the majority of participants associated close relationships with their parents with various emotional states such as love, harmony, comfort, support, and happiness. A parent's presence in a child's life also promotes closeness because the parent who constantly accompanies and makes time for the child will be more meaningful to them. The research findings may be recommended to foster a parent's close relationship with their child growing up in the digital era. For future researchers, it would be interesting to investigate the meaning of a child's closeness to a parent based on gender and to compare the parent's closeness to a boy and a girl in greater detail, especially with the impact of information technology development on children.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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