

**An Exploratory Study of the Characteristics Associated with Father-Child Rough-and-Tumble Play
Quality**

Taylor Hadlow

B. Psychology (Honours, Class 1)

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Clinical
Psychology, School of Psychology, University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW, 2038

December 2018

Declarations

Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to a copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository**, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Statement of Authorship

I hereby certify that the research presented in this thesis has been completed in collaboration with Dr Linda Campbell, Dr Jennifer St George and Dr Emily Freeman, and student researchers Michael Spark, Holly Ride, Marissa Black and Katie Rolf. I participated in designing the current study, recruiting participants, and collecting data, and was wholly responsible for the data preparation and analyses referred to herein. I was the sole writer of this thesis with appropriate supervision from Dr Linda Campbell and Dr Jennifer St George.

Statement of Manuscript Style

The manuscript section of this submission has been written in accordance with publication instructions for The Journal of Child and Family Studies (see appendix A). All else has been written in accordance with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association – Sixth Edition (2010).

Signed:

Taylor Hadlow

Date: 11th December 2018

The conduct of this report was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Newcastle).

Approval number: H – 2010 – 1300.

Student Name: Taylor Hadlow

Signed:

Date: 11th December 2018

Supervisors: Dr Linda Campbell and Dr Jennifer St George

Signed: _____
Dr Linda Campbell

Signed: _____
Dr Jennifer St George

Date: 11.12.2016

Date: 11.12.2016

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge and thank my supervisors Dr Linda Campbell and Dr Jennifer St George for the effort, guidance and time that they have provided me throughout my Masters degree. Without their on-going support and compassion, I am not sure how I would have made it throughout this process. I would also like to thank Dr Emily Freeman for her support and advice with statistics, and in conducting the research.

I would like to recognise and acknowledge my fellow student researchers, Michael Spark, Holly Rice and Marissa Black, who were instrumental in making this project happen. I also feel eternally indebted to Katie Rolfe, who was both a student researcher and friend. I would also like to thank all of the volunteers who contributed their time to the project. Their assistance with recruitment and data entry was invaluable.

I would also like thank my peers, Renee, Nicole, Amir, Jen and Briana, for being unwavering pillars of support. Whilst you provided me with encouragement that helped me get through this degree, you also provided me with something greater – lifelong friendships. Words cannot and will never describe how grateful I feel to have met you and have you all in my life.

Finally, to my family – particularly, my mother, Sharon Hadlow and father, Michael Hadlow. You have always believed in me, encouraged me, and had patience with me. You have provided me with unconditional love and support throughout my studies - and without this, I know that I would not be where I am today.

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Abstract

Parent-child interactions are critical for a child's overall wellbeing and growth, however there are distinct differences in the types of interactions that mothers and fathers engage in. For example, fathers more commonly utilize physical play, such as Rough-and-Tumble Play (RTP), to interact and bond with their child. Father-child RTP is thought to contribute to a range of child outcomes, including social, emotional cognitive and behaviour development. Literature suggests that the quality of the interaction mediates the effect of RTP interactions on child developmental outcomes. However, little is known about the influence of father and child characteristics on the quality of RTP. Therefore, this study explored the association of both father and child characteristics to the quality of RTP interactions. The study included 64 families of fathers, mothers and their child (aged 18-24 months). Fathers and mothers completed questionnaires concerning child and father characteristics including child social-emotional development. Child developmental attainment was assessed using the Bayley-III scales. In addition, fathers and their child completed a video-recorded play interaction, where fathers were instructed to play RTP as they would at home. Results demonstrated that the quality of RTP was associated with the frequency of RTP, child age and child social-emotional development. The results provide further evidence of the positive link between father-child RTP and child developmental outcomes. This study highlights the importance of furthering our understanding of the impact of father-child interactions.

Key Words: rough-and-tumble play, quality of play, child development, father play, father-child interaction

An Exploratory Study of the Characteristics Associated with Father-Child Rough-and-Tumble Play Quality

Interactions between parents and children are characterised by complex patterns of behaviours, feelings, and expectations that are engaged in by both the parent and the child (Anthony, Anthony, Glanville, Naiman, Waanders, & Shaffer, , 2005). Kerr and colleagues (2004) reported that when parents engage in positive interactions with their children (distinguished by warm and caring behaviours), children are less likely to display disruptive or externalising behaviours. In addition, parents who demonstrate emotional support (e.g., empathy) and cohesiveness (e.g., matching body language) during parent-child interactions have children with stronger social skills and capacity (Haven et al., 2014). The way parents interact with their children, depending on context and needs, is often categorised as social (e.g., smiling), functional (e.g., feeding), or physical (e.g., affection, playing) in nature (John, Halliburton, & Humphrey, 2013). Although each of these types of interactions are critical for the child's overall wellbeing and growth, physical interactions, particularly play, are more likely to foster prosocial behaviours, such as cooperation and emotional self-regulation, in children than functional interactions (Pellis, Pellis, & Bell, 2010; Ramchandani, Domoney, Sethna, Psychogiou, Vlachos, & Murray, 2013). Whilst both mothers and fathers play with their children, there can be differences in the way they interact and play with their children. Increasingly, evidence supports the beneficial impact of father-child physical play, including rough-and-tumble play (RTP), on children's behavioural, cognitive and social development (St George, Fletcher, & Palazzi, 2017). It is now understood that positive outcomes are not simply related to how frequently fathers and children engage in RTP but rather the quality of those interactions, though little is known about the parent and child characteristics that contribute to the quality of RTP (Fletcher, St George, & Freeman, 2013; Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, London, & Cabrera, 2002; St George, Fletcher, & Palazzi, 2017).

Physical play can be vigorous and may involve bursts of high energy with frequent body contact (Engelisch, & Zimmermann et al., 2002; Grossman, Grossmann, Fremmer-Bombik, Kindler, Scheuerer 2002; St George, Fletcher, & Palazzi, 2017). Throwing and catching, dancing, and swinging paired with exhilarating emotions such as surprise, humour and fright are common in this type of play (Grossman et al., 2002; Hazen, McFarland, Jacobvitz, & Boyd-Soisson, 2010). Although both mothers and fathers engage in physical play with their child (Ramchandani et al., 2013), research suggests that fathers do it more