

Parenting Styles, Young Adults' Self-Concepts, and Evaluations of Parents

Thomas S. Parish and James J. McCluskey

Over the past fifty years, research has generally shown that parenting style may have a strong impact upon children's and adolescents' development (Collins and Kuczaj 1991). Models of how parents interact with their children have been offered by numerous researchers. Schaefer (1959) and Becker (1964) surveyed parents regarding their behavior with offspring. Baumrind (1971, 1972) used long-term repeated observations of parents' interactions with their children/adolescents. Maccoby and Martin (1983) reviewed the literature on child-rearing strategies in order to gain further insight into these crucial parent-child interactions. As noted by Adams (1980), all of the models represent variations in how parents prompt (or fail to prompt) their children/adolescents to communicate effectively, take control of their lives, and, in so doing, enhance their self-concepts.

According to Brody and Schaefer (1982), parents who are warm and loving tend to have children with high self-esteem. Baumrind (1977) and Coopersmith (1967) similarly reported that parental warmth combined with firm discipline is needed in order to produce high self-concepts in children and adolescents. More recently, findings by Amato (1986) and Bishop and Ingersoll (1989) provided additional support for the view that such parental practices are associated with higher self-concepts in young adults.

Notably, both Baumrind (1975) and Coopersmith (1967) reported a significant modeling effect in that parents of children with high self-concepts tended to be more poised, active, and confident themselves. Similarly, a recent study by Parish (1988) reported highly significant correlations between how loving the parents were perceived to act and their adult children's self-concepts.

The association of self-concept with type of parenting style was re-examined in the present study. In addition, evaluations of fathers and mothers were examined in relation to parenting style.

Method

A total of 123 college students, who were enrolled in a human development class at a large midwestern university, voluntarily participated in the present study. The age range was eighteen to thirty-four years; mean age was 20.9 years.

The students were asked to (1) rate on a seven-point scale the level of restrictiveness vs. permissiveness of each of their parents, and (2) rate on a seven-point scale the level of warmth vs. hostility of each of their parents. This procedure has been found to be effective in previous research (Parish 1980).

In addition, the students were asked to evaluate themselves, their mothers, and their fathers using the Personal Attribute Inventory (Parish, Bryant and Shirazi 1976) with their score being the number of negative adjectives checked for each. All measures were administered in a counterbalanced fashion.

Pearson product-moment correlations were used in the analyses.

Results

Table 1

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Parenting Styles and Evaluations of Self, Mother, and Father

Perceptions of Parenting Style	Evaluations of		
	Self	Father	Mother
Mothers' Restrictiveness/Permissiveness	.04	.10	-.37**
Fathers' Restrictiveness/Permissiveness	-.05	-.37**	-.04
Mothers' Warmth/Hostility	.21**	.21*	.76**
Fathers' Warmth/Hostility	.32**	.71**	.35**

* $p < .025$
 ** $p < .0001$

As shown in Table 1, students' self-concepts were not significantly associated with mothers' and fathers' restrictiveness/permissiveness scores, but they were significantly related to mothers' and fathers' warmth/hostility scores. Evaluations of fathers were not significantly associated with mothers' restrictiveness/permissiveness score, but were significantly related to fathers' restrictiveness/permissiveness score, as well as to mothers' and fathers' warmth/hostility scores. Evaluations of mothers likewise were not found to vary as a function of the opposite-sex parents' (i.e., fathers')

restrictiveness/permissiveness score, but did significantly vary as a function of mothers' restrictiveness/permissiveness score and both mothers' and fathers' warmth/hostility scores.

Discussion

The self-concepts of the college students in the present study were found to vary directly with the perceived level of warmth displayed by both their mothers and fathers, but not as a function of their parents' level of restrictiveness. That parental warmth was so related is in accordance with findings noted earlier (e.g., Brody and Schaefer 1982), but that parental restrictiveness was not differs from previous research. Notably, however, young adults were surveyed in the present study, while children and adolescents were examined in previous studies, and that difference may account for the variance in the findings.

Regarding evaluations of parents, the findings shown in Table 1 strongly suggest that fathers' warmth and permissiveness are significantly associated with enhanced ratings of fathers by their young adult children. Similarly, mothers' warmth and permissiveness are significantly related to enhanced ratings of mothers. These findings provide support for the view that parents' actions (i.e., "the model effect") may systematically impact upon how they are perceived by their young adult children.

Of additional interest is the finding that the opposite-sex parents' level of warmth (but not level of restrictiveness) also correlated with how each parent was rated. This finding suggests that mothers' actions (i.e., warmth) may impact upon how the fathers are perceived, and fathers' actions (i.e., warmth) may impact upon how the mothers are perceived.

References:

- Adams, J. F. 1980. *Understanding adolescence: Current developments in adolescent psychology*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Amato, P. R. 1986. Marital conflict, the parent-child relationship, and self-esteem. *Family Relations* 35: 403-10.
- Baumrind, D. 1971. Current patterns of parental authority. *Developmental Psychology Monographs* 4 (1): Pt. 2.
- _____. 1972. Socialization and instrumental competence in young children. In *The young child*, edited by W. W. Hartup (Vol. 2). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- _____. 1975. The contributions of the family to the development of competence in children. *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 14: 12-37.
- _____. 1977. What research is teaching us about the differences between authoritative and authoritarian child-rearing styles. In *Human dynamics in psychology and education*, edited by D. E. Hanachek. 3d ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Becker, W. C. 1964. Consequences of parental discipline. In *Review of child development research*, edited by M. L. Hoffman and L. W. Hoffman. Vol. 1. New York: Russell Sage.
- Bishop, S., and G. Ingersoll. 1989. Effects of marital conflict and family structure on the self-concepts of pre- and early adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 18: 25-8.
- Brody, G. H., and D. R. Schaefer. 1982. Contributions of parents and peers to children's moral socializations. *Developmental Review* 2: 31-75.

THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY JOURNAL

- Collins, W. A., and S. A. Kuczaj. 1991. *Developmental psychology: Childhood and adolescence*. New York: Macmillan.
- Coopersmith, S. 1967. *The antecedents of self-esteem*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.
- Maccoby, E. E., and J. Martin. 1983. Socialization in the content of the family. In *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. Socialization, personality, and social development.*, edited by P. H. Mussen and E. M. Hetherington. 4th ed. New York: Wiley.
- Parish, T. S. 1980. Perceptions of parents' attitudes and behaviors as evidence that children affect parents. *Psychological Reports* 46: 1037-38.
- _____. 1988. The love/hate checklist: A preliminary report. *Psychological Reports* 63: 67-70.
- Parish, T. S., W. Bryant, and A. Shirazi. 1976. The personal attribute inventory. *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 42: 715-20.
- Schaefer, E. S. 1959. A circumplex model for maternal behavior. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 59: 226-35.
-

Thomas S. Parish is a professor of counseling and educational psychology at Kansas State University

James J. McCluskey is an assistant professor of journalism and broadcasting at the University of Oklahoma.

Reprinted from *Adolescence*, Vol. 27, No. 108, Winter 1992 with permission of Libra Publishers, Inc.