

# Maternal and Paternal Parenting Styles in Adolescents: Associations with Self-Esteem, Depression and Life-Satisfaction

Avidan Milevsky · Melissa Schlechter · Sarah Netter · Danielle Kehn

Published online: 13 September 2006  
© Springer Science+Business Media, Inc. 2006

**Abstract** Our study examined variations in adolescent adjustment as a function of maternal and paternal parenting styles. Participants included 272 students in grades 9 and 11 from a public high school in a metropolitan area of the Northeastern US. Participants completed measures of maternal and paternal parenting styles and indices of psychological adjustment. Authoritative mothering was found to relate to higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction and to lower depression. Paternal parenting styles was also related to psychological adjustment, however, although the advantage of authoritative mothering over permissive mothering was evident for all outcomes assessed, for paternal styles the advantage was less defined and only evident for depression. Our study highlights the importance of examining process-oriented agents as part of the broader interest in well-being variations in adolescents.

**Keywords** Parenting styles · Self-esteem · Depression · Life-satisfaction · Adolescence

Recent advances in systems theory approaches to the study of child development have contributed to an increased interest in examining the interconnection between familial variables and adjustment (Magnusson & Stattin, 1998). More specifically, several socialization studies have examined the relationship between parental behaviors and well-being in childhood and adolescence.

From a theoretical perspective, Individual Psychology's Parenting Model, based on Adlerian theory, suggests that an autocratic parenting style may not be effective because it implies a superior/inferior relationship between parent and child. This approach to child rearing fails to produce responsibility in children. Furthermore, permissive parenting is

---

A. Milevsky (✉)  
Department of Psychology, Touro College South, Miami Beach, FL 33139  
e-mail: avidan.milevsky@touro.edu

M. Schlechter · D. Kehn  
Department of Psychology, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown, PA 19530

S. Netter  
Department of Education, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown, PA 19530

potentially harmful for children because it fails to give them a sense of personal achievement. A democratic parenting style was suggested as the most ideal for psychological adjustment because behavioral compliance and psychological autonomy are viewed as interdependent objectives (Gfroerer, Kern, & Curlette, 2004).

Empirically, many studies on parenting practices and child outcomes have built upon Baumrind's (1971) seminal classification of parenting styles which originally suggested three distinct styles most present in family atmospheres. Authoritative parenting, marked by patterns of warmth, non-punitive discipline, and consistency, was found to be associated with the presence of several adaptive behaviors in children, in comparison to authoritarian styles, marked by patterns of low warmth, harsh discipline, and inconsistency, and permissive styles, discernible by low levels of supervision (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parenting styles have been found to relate to children's classroom adjustment as well (Kauffman et al., 2000). Additionally, authoritative parenting has also been shown to foster secure attachments between children and their caregiver and to contribute to a greater sense of autonomy (Karavasilis, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2003).

Although the majority of work on parenting styles and adjustment has focused on childhood, several studies have examined these associations in adolescence. Gonzalez, Holbein, and Quilter (2002) found that authoritative parenting fosters adolescents' positive well being and enhances learning goals.

Subsequent research has expanded on Baumrind's three parenting styles by utilizing a fourfold classification of parenting styles, differentiating between two categories of permissive parenting; indulgent and neglectful (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994). Lamborn et al. (1991) found that adolescents who considered their parents to be authoritative had higher levels of psychological competence and lower levels of psychological and behavioral dysfunction in comparison to adolescents who perceived their parents as neglectful. Students who believe they have authoritarian parents do well with obedience and conformity to adult standards however, they show relatively poor self-conceptions. Adolescents with permissive/indulgent parents have a strong self-confidence but they also experience more problems with drug experimentation and misconduct in and outside of school. In a two year follow-up of the Lamborn et al. (1991) study, Steinberg et al. (1994) reported similar patterns of adjustment as a function of parenting style over time.

The fourfold classification of parenting styles has been used in studies examining the relationship between parenting behaviors and academic achievement as well (Fletcher, Darling, Dornbusch, & Steinberg, 1995; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996).

Although current research indicates that parenting behaviors are related to adolescent adjustment, the existing literature is deficient in three primary areas. First, the majority of work on the socialization practices of parents has been limited to investigations of children without considering the uniqueness of the adolescent years. Second, current trends in parenting styles research suggest differentiating between two categories of permissive parenting; indulgent and neglectful (Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994). Finally, almost all work in the area has combined maternal and paternal styles in a general categorization of parenting styles without considering the unique contribution of paternal parenting styles.

The current study addresses the limitations in the existing literature in several ways. First, the current study examines parenting styles and adolescent adjustment using a fourfold classification of parenting styles, differentiating between two categories of permissive parenting; indulgent and neglectful (Steinberg et al., 1994). Recent work on parenting styles suggest differentiating between indulgent parents, those parents exhibiting low levels of demand-ingness with high levels of responsiveness, and neglectful parents, those who engage in low

levels of demandingness but also involve low levels of responsiveness. Traditionally these two categories of parenting styles have been lumped together, possibly due to the inherent difficulty in obtaining a sample of adolescents from neglectful homes. The majority of work on adolescents and their families, employing “active” consent procedures (i.e. requiring written consent from parents before their adolescents participant in the study), has screened out a disproportionate number of potential participants from neglectful homes since the “neglectful” parents may be less likely to respond to the researchers’ request. The current study, employing a passive consent procedure described in the methodology section, assessed the relationship between all four parenting styles and psychological adjustment in a sample of adolescents.

The second goal of the current study was to examine variations in adolescents’ adjustment as a function of parenting styles by examining maternal and paternal parenting styles separately. Previous work has focused on overall parenting styles, assuming that both parents employed the same parenting style, and maternal parenting style without consideration of paternal involvement (Baumrind, 1971; Durbin, Darling, Steinberg, & Brown, 1993; Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997). The current study examines maternal and paternal parenting styles separately utilizing the person-in-environment perspective as a framework and focusing on the separate, yet interactive, variables involved in the developmental process (Magnusson, 1998).

## Method

### Sample

Participants in the current study included 272 students (145 males and 127 females) in grades 9 and 11, from a public high school in a metropolitan area of the Northeastern U.S. By ethnicity the sample consisted of 253 European-Americans, 10 African-Americans, 5 Hispanic-Americans, 3 Asian-Americans, and 1 with no ethnicity data.

### Procedures

As mentioned, current work on parenting styles has suggested differentiating between two categories of permissive parents, which traditionally have been lumped together in studies on parenting practices; those who are indulgent parents and those who are neglectful parents (Steinberg et al., 1994).

However, the majority of work on adolescents and their families, employing “active” consent procedures (i.e. requiring written consent from parents before their adolescents participant in the study), has screened out a disproportionate amount of participants from neglectful homes. The use of “active” consent procedures may result in a significant sampling bias by limiting the number of students with adjustment and family problems in the sample. Studies attempting to assess the outcomes associated with “neglectful” parenting, as the current study was attempting, may have a very limited amount of participants in this category because these “neglectful” parents may be less likely to respond to inquiries about their child and hence may not respond to the request by the researchers.

Hence, in the current study, with the approval of the school district and our university’s Internal Review Board, we employed a “passive” consent procedure (i.e. informing the parents in advance about the nature of the study and providing the opportunity for the parents to call our research office if they did not want their child participating in the study) enabling

us to truly assess all four categories of parenting including the “neglectful” style. Studies employing similar procedures have been approved by the U.S. Department of Education (See Steinberg et al., 1994).

Letters were sent to the parents of the students in the target classes informing them of the nature of the study and the opportunity to contact the child’s school or our office about the project was provided. Less than 1% of parents requested that we not involve their child in the project. Participants were administered questionnaires in class and received a small gift for taking part in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

## Measures

Measures included indices of maternal and paternal parenting style as well as indices of psychological adjustment. The following specific measures were analyzed in the current study.

### *Maternal and paternal parenting style*

Parenting styles were assessed, for maternal and paternal styles separately, using the acceptance/involvement and the strictness/supervision sub-scales of the Authoritative Parenting Measure (Steinberg et al., 1994). Sample items on the acceptance/involvement sub-scale, which assesses the adolescents’ perception of parental love, acceptance, involvement and closeness, included “I can count on my mother/father to help me out if I have some kind of problem” and “When my mother/father wants me to do something, she/he explain why.” Responses to each of the 9 items on the acceptance/involvement sub-scale were scored on a 1 to 4 scale, with higher scores indicating higher acceptance/involvement. Sample items on the strictness/supervision sub-scale, which assesses the adolescents’ perception of parental supervision and monitoring, included “How much does your mother/father try to know where you go at night?” and “How much does your mother/father really know what you do with your free time?” Additionally, the strictness/supervision sub-scale included the items “In a typical week, what is the latest you can stay out on school nights?” and “In a typical week, what is the latest you can stay out on weekends?” Responses to each of the 8 items on the strictness/supervision sub-scale were scored using a likert style scale, with higher scores indicating higher strictness/supervision. Alpha reliabilities were .82 for the maternal acceptance/involvement subscale, .71 for the maternal strictness/supervision subscale, .85 for the paternal acceptance/involvement subscale, and .77 for the paternal strictness/supervision subscale. The scores were used to place participants into one of four parenting style categories as detailed in the result section.

### *Psychological adjustment*

Psychological adjustment was assessed with three commonly used self-administered measures. These were measures of self-esteem, depression and life-satisfaction.

### *Self-esteem*

Self-esteem was assessed with the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (1965). A sample item is “I am able to do things as well as most other people.” Each of the 10 items is given a score

from 1 to 5 and higher scores indicate more positive self-esteem. The alpha reliability for the sample was .90.

### *Depression*

Depression was assessed with the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Short Depression Scale (Andresen, Malmgren, Carter, & Patrick, 1994; Radloff, 1977). In this scale participants are given a list of feelings and behaviors and are asked to indicate how often they have felt this way during the past week. Sample items include “I was bothered by things that usually don’t bother me,” and “I felt that everything I did was an effort.” Responses to each of the depression items were scored on a 1 to 4 scale, 1 being “rarely or none of the time” and 4 being “all of the time,” with higher scores indicating higher levels of depression. The alpha reliability for the sample was .80.

### *Life satisfaction*

Life satisfaction was measured by asking the participants to indicate on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being extremely dissatisfied and 7 being extremely satisfied, how satisfied they are with their life as a whole these days (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976).

## **Results**

In order to assess the influence of parenting styles on sibling relationships, the sample was divided into four parenting style groups based on a median split of acceptance/involvement and strictness/supervision scores. The current study used the categorical approach of parenting practices, as opposed to the dimensional approach, in order to reflect the theoretical paradigm of parenting practices proposed by Baumrind (1971). Based on the categories outlined by Baumrind (1971) *authoritative* parents were those scoring above average on both the acceptance/involvement and strictness/supervision scales, *authoritarian* parents were those scoring below average on the acceptance/involvement sub-scale and above average on the strictness/supervision sub-scale, *permissive* parents were those scoring above average on the acceptance/involvement sub-scale and below average on the strictness/supervision sub-scale, and *neglectful* parents were those scoring below average on both the acceptance/involvement and strictness/supervision scales. This categorization was followed separately for maternal and paternal styles. Information on the size of each of the four maternal and paternal categories can be found in Table 1.

Differences in well-being between the four maternal and paternal parenting styles were assessed using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with parenting styles and gender as the independent variables and self-esteem, depression and life-satisfaction as the dependent variables. This procedure was followed separately for maternal and paternal styles.

The main effect of maternal parenting style was significant for self-esteem,  $F(3,262) = 14.43$ ,  $p < .01$  depression,  $F(3,262) = 8.20$ ,  $p < .01$  and life-satisfaction,  $F(3,262) = 14.97$ ,  $p < .01$ . Additionally, the main effect for paternal parenting style was significant for self-esteem,  $F(3,253) = 11.72$ ,  $p < .01$  depression,  $F(3,253) = 7.10$ ,  $p < .01$  and life-satisfaction,  $F(3,253) = 12.18$ ,  $p < .01$ .

**Table 1** Sample size of each maternal and paternal parenting styles category

Parenting style	Parent			
	Maternal		Paternal	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Authoritative	99	36.8	71	27.3
Authoritarian	60	22.3	34	13.1
Permissive	31	11.5	47	18.1
Neglectful	79	29.4	108	41.5
Total	269	100	260	100

*Note.* Participants without a mother or a father were excluded from analysis.

### Maternal parenting style

Post hoc comparisons for maternal style yielded significant differences between the authoritative style and the remaining three styles, with the authoritative style scoring higher on self-esteem and life-satisfaction and lower on depression than the remaining three styles. Additionally, the post hoc comparison yielded a significant difference between the permissive style and the authoritarian and neglectful style, with the permissive style scoring higher on self-esteem than the authoritarian and neglectful style (Table 2).

### Paternal parenting style

Post hoc comparisons for paternal style yielded significant differences between the authoritative style and the authoritarian and neglectful styles, with the authoritative style scoring higher on self-esteem and life-satisfaction than the authoritarian and neglectful styles. Additionally, the post hoc comparison yielded a significant difference between the authoritative style and the permissive and neglectful styles, with the authoritative style scoring lower on depression than the permissive and neglectful styles (Table 3).

## Discussion

Overall the results indicate that parenting styles are related to well-being in adolescents. Authoritative parenting was found to relate to higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction and to lower depression. These findings are consistent with previous work on children suggesting a link between parenting practices and adjustment (Karavasilis et al., 2003; Kauffman et al., 2000; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

**Table 2** Self-esteem, depression, and life-satisfaction for maternal parenting style categories

Maternal parenting style	Outcomes					
	Self-esteem		Depression		Life-satisfaction	
	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )
Authoritative	4.20 <sup>abc</sup>	(.62)	1.70 <sup>abc</sup>	(.45)	5.97 <sup>abc</sup>	(.98)
Permissive	3.87 <sup>ade</sup>	(.88)	2.00 <sup>a</sup>	(.69)	5.23 <sup>a</sup>	(1.55)
Authoritarian	3.71 <sup>bd</sup>	(.76)	1.97 <sup>b</sup>	(.54)	4.96 <sup>b</sup>	(1.36)
Neglectful	3.51 <sup>ce</sup>	(.73)	2.09 <sup>c</sup>	(.56)	4.78 <sup>c</sup>	(1.34)

*Note.* a, b, c, d and e denotes a significant difference from each other at  $p < .05$ .

**Table 3** Self-esteem, depression, and life-satisfaction for paternal parenting style categories

Paternal parenting style	Outcomes					
	Self-esteem		Depression		Life-satisfaction	
	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )
Authoritative	4.13 <sup>ab</sup>	(.63)	1.67 <sup>ab</sup>	(.46)	5.94 <sup>ab</sup>	(1.03)
Permissive	4.14 <sup>cd</sup>	(.79)	1.89 <sup>a</sup>	(.57)	5.59 <sup>c</sup>	(1.33)
Authoritarian	3.77 <sup>ac</sup>	(.77)	1.91	(.62)	5.32 <sup>ad</sup>	(1.35)
Neglectful	3.56 <sup>bd</sup>	(.74)	2.07 <sup>b</sup>	(.56)	4.80 <sup>bcd</sup>	(1.35)

Note. a, b, c, and d denotes a significant difference from each other at  $p < .05$ .

However, of particular note is that although the advantage of authoritative mothering over permissive mothering is evident for all outcomes assessed, for paternal styles the advantage is less defined and is only evident for depression. These findings seem to indicate that permissive fathering may not be as detrimental to the child as permissive mothering. The importance of fathers in the lives of children has received recent attention in empirical studies (Lamb, 1986). Nevertheless, although fathers are beginning to play a large role in the lives of children, fathers seem to serve a different function in parenting than do mothers (Lamb, 1986), which may account for the differences found in the current study. It is possible that since fathers play a more playful role in the lives of children, having a permissive father may complement the fatherhood role and hence may not interfere with the child's well-being as much as having a permissive mother. As parenting studies assessing these relationships seldom included separate analyses for mothers and fathers, conclusions regarding these dynamics are necessarily speculative. These differences highlight the importance of examining the consequences of parenting practices separately for mothers and fathers.

In addition, our study highlights the importance of examining process-oriented agents as part of the broader interest in well-being variations in adolescents. In general, it is evident that the interconnection between maternal and paternal parenting styles and well-being is a complex one that appears to be dependent upon many variables and that may function differently at differing developmental stages. This interconnection is further evidence for the need to examine specific relationships in the context of the entire social network system. The dynamic nature of social relationships, and the importance of assessing these integrated processes, has been the focus of several recent theoretical and empirical investigations (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1993; Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1994; Magnusson & Stattin, 1998).

There are several limitations to the current study which future work in this area should address. First, the study does not solve the direction-of-effects problem. There is a possibility that the relationship between parenting styles and well-being is due to the influence of individual differences in adjustment on parenting styles, rather than the reverse. Additionally, the present results may not generalize beyond the homogeneous sample included in the study. Finally, based on new developments in systems theory and the interconnection between support providers and adjustment, future work must examine the outcomes associated with specific relationships in the context of the entire social network system. As Magnusson (1998) acknowledged, "the developmental processes of an individual cannot be understood by studying single variables in isolation from other, simultaneously operating variables (p. 38)."

In sum, our results indicate that parenting practices are related to well-being in adolescence. Additionally, the current study breaks new ground by examining maternal and paternal parenting styles separately and their association with adolescent well-being. Finally, when the



current findings are viewed within the context of previous results on parenting practices and adolescent adjustment, there is some indication that these dynamics may be associated with developmental changes in these relationships across childhood and adolescence (McHale, Updegraff, Tucker, & Crouter, 2000). These developmental issues must be addressed in future research on parenting practices and adolescent adjustment.

**Acknowledgments** Portions of this paper were presented at the meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Boston, March 2005. The research was conducted while the first author was an assistant professor of psychology at Kutztown University. The authors would like to thank Moshe Machlev, Melissa Leh, Ann Marie Kolb, Keri Spedding, Dan Zebrowski, Brad Christ, and Carole Walker for their assistance with data collection.

## References

- Andresen, E. M., Malmgren, J. A., Carter, W. B., & Patrick, D. L. (1994). Screening for depression in well older adults: evaluation of a short form of the CES-D (Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale). *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, *10*, 77–84.
- Baumrind, D. (1971). Current patterns of parental authority. *Developmental Psychology Monographs*, *4*(Part 1).
- Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., & Rodgers, W. L. (1976). *The quality of American life*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Durbin, D. L., Darling, N., Steinberg, L., & Brown, B. B. (1993). Parenting style and peer group membership among European-American adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *3*, 87–100.
- Fletcher, A., Darling, N., Dornbusch, S., & Steinberg, L. (1995). The company they keep; Relation of adolescents' adjustment and behavior to their friends' perceptions of authoritative parenting in the social network. *Developmental Psychology*, *31*, 300–310.
- Gfroerer, K., Kern, R., & Curlette, W. (2004). Research support for individual psychology's parenting model. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, *61*, 379–388.
- Glasgow, K. L., Dornbusch, S. M., Troyer, L., Steinberg, L., & Ritter, P. L. (1997). Parenting styles, adolescents' attributions, and educational outcomes in nine heterogeneous high schools. *Child Development*, *68*, 507–529.
- Gonzalez, A., Holbein, M., & Quilter, S. (2002). High school students' goal orientations and their relationship to perceived parenting styles. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *27*, 450–471.
- Karavasilis, L., Doyle, A., & Markiewicz, D. (2003). Associations between parenting style and attachment to mother in middle childhood and adolescence. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *27*, 153–164.
- Kauffman, D., Gaston, E., Santa Lucia, R., Salcedo, O., Rendina-Gobioff, G., & Gadd, R. (2000). The relationship between parenting style and children's adjustment: The parents' perspective. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *9*, 231–245.
- Lamb, M. E. (1986). *The father's role: Applied perspectives*. New York: Wiley.
- Lamborn, S., Mounts, N., Steinberg, L., & Dornbusch, S. (1991). Patterns of competence and adjustment among adolescents from authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful families. *Child Development*, *62*, 1049–1066.
- Levitt, M. J., Guacci-Franco, N., & Levitt, J. L. (1993). Convoys of social support in children and early adolescence: Structure and function. *Developmental Psychology*, *29*, 811–818.
- Levitt, M. J., Guacci-Franco, N., & Levitt, J. L. (1994). Social support and achievement in childhood and early adolescence: A multicultural study. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *15*, 207–222.
- Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent-child interaction. In P. H. Mussen (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology* (4th Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 1–101). New York: Wiley.
- Magnusson, D. (1998). The logic and implications of a person approach. In R. B. Cairns, L. R. Bergman, & J. Kagan (Eds.), *Methods and models for studying the individual* (pp. 33–63). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Magnusson, D., & Stattin, H. (1998). Person-context interaction theories. In R. M. Lerner (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology. Theoretical models of human development* (Vol. 1, pp. 685–760). New York: Wiley.
- McHale, S. M., Updegraff, K. A., Tucker, C. J., Crouter, A. (2000). Step in or stay out? Parents' roles in adolescent siblings' relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *62*, 746–761.
- Radloff, L. S. (1977). The CES-D scale: A self-report depression scale for research in the general population. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, *1*, 385–401.



- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Steinberg, L., Lamborn, S., Darling, N., Mounts, N., & Dornbusch, S. (1994). Over-time changes in adjustment and competence among adolescents from authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful families. *Child Development, 65*, 754–770.
- Weiss, L., & Schwarz, J. C. (1996). The relationship between parenting types and older adolescents' personality, adjustment, academic achievement, and substance abuse. *Child Development, 67*, 2101–2114.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.