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The Influence of Parental Involvement on Academic Motivation and Achievement in College Students

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THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON ACADEMIC
MOTIVATION AND ACHIEVEMENT IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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The Influence of Parental Involvement on Academic Motivation and

Achievement in College Students

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Abstract

Parental involvement is defined as a parent providing resources, being interested in, attentive to, and providing emotional resources for a child (Guay, Larose, Ratelle, & Senecal, 2005). The purpose of the current study is to examine the relationship between parental involvement and academic motivation and achievement in college students. Approximately 115 undergraduate students completed the Perceptions of Parental Autonomy-Support and Control Scale (Robbins, 1994), and the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand, 1992). The students' cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) were used as a measure of academic achievement. Results from independent samples t tests indicated that those students with low parental support scored significantly lower than students with high parental support on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and that students with high parental control scored significantly higher on amotivation than those students with low parental control.

The Influence of Parental Involvement on Academic Motivation and

Achievement in College Students

Parental involvement in students' academics can range from presence in a school

environment, as a motivating factor for children, or as a support system from home. In general,

parental involvement is defined as a parent providing resources, being interested in, attentive to,

and providing emotional resources for a child (Guay, Larose, Ratelle, & Senecal, 2005). One

area fundamentally important to children's success is parental involvement in the children's

academics.

When parents are involved in a child's home life, there is greater likelihood for higher

academic motivation and achievement (Assouline, Colangelo, Cole, Cutrona, & Russell, 2004).

Yet, there is also the possibility of a parent becoming over-involved. The question becomes,

what is the optimal level of involvement from a parent, and how can it affect a child's schooling?

Several studies have examined the type of parenting practiced by parents, and how this affects

children's academic motivation and achievement.

Studies using surveys administered to parents of elementary and high school students

have found that parents' likelihood to become involved in a child's schooling is dependent solely

on internal factors, such as believing their involvement is useful for success (Georgiou &

Tourva, 2007). Georgiou and Tourva suggest that the likelihood that a parent becomes involved

in a child's schooling depends parents' thinking they have the ability to help their child achieve.

Without an intrinsic motivation from parents to become involved, they may not do so, leaving

children to suffer the consequences. Findings suggest that students whose parents offer a support

system in home activities in addition to school activities are more likely to succeed (Georgiou &

Tourva, 2007). A student whose parents take the time to attend school events help a child learn

that school is important, and should be taken seriously. Parents who become involved and supportive of their children's academics from a young age lead by example. Darling, Kleiman, and Larocque (2011) suggested that involvement of family in school activities is a leading factor in students' success. Their study used examples such as parents volunteering at schools, helping children with their homework, taking on leadership roles in the school, and visiting the child's classroom as indicators of parental involvement.

On the contrary, there are instances in which parents can negatively affect students' academics. Factors that may impair parental involvement include socioeconomic factors as well as logistical barriers (Darling & et al., 2011). For example, parents who are unable to help children with homework due to language barriers, or keep in touch with a teacher due to extended work hours, may leave children at risk. The inactive parent can further lead to a child struggling with school at a young age.

In addition, a conflict-filled home environment can impede children's academic achievement (Esmaeili, Juhari, Manson, & Yaacob, 2011). When students are involved in an unhappy home environment, they adjust poorly, which can negatively affect their academic achievement. This model, referred to as the parental-conflict perspective, was tested with teenagers age 15-18 (Esmaeili et al., 2011), making it applicable to students in mid-adolescence, while in high school. Similar studies conducted on younger children show that parental acceptance and guidance are crucial for successful academics (Steward & Suldo, 2011). Although studies have focused on acceptance and guidance in children, few have viewed the impact of the parent-child relationship on college-aged students.

While the presence of parents in schooling and home situations is a key factor in academic success, frequently when adolescents reach college age their parents are no longer

present in the academic setting. Oftentimes, students choose to attend a college far from home, seeking independence by living and providing for themselves. Because college students possess greater independence from parents than children, the question arises if parents' involvement is as prominent in college-aged students' academic motivation and achievement.

Applying parent's involvement to an academic situation, two levels of involvement become apparent. A parent can exert academic support, or academic control at varying levels (Dumas, Loose, & Regner, 2009). The extent to which parents have an effect on children's academics becomes clear when distinguishing between these two types of contributions.

Parental support is defined by Ratelle (2005) as the affirmation of the child as a unique, active, and volitional being evidenced in behaviors such as acknowledging the child's perspective, encouraging independent thinking, and providing opportunities to make choices. On the contrary, parental control is defined as pressure exerted by a parent for a child to conform to certain expectations (Duchense & Ratelle, 2010).

Several studies provide evidence that parental support is beneficial to students' achievement and well-being, whereas parental control is hindering. For example, results of a longitudinal study conducted on students from the time they began their last year of elementary school until the time they entered junior high, showed that parental involvement was associated with less anxiety in children (Duchense & Ratelle, 2010). Parents who exhibited parental support had children who showed open communication, asked for assistance if needed, and established emotional closeness with their parents. By establishing this healthy relationship, parents can aid in their children's achievement in school. Results also indicated that parental control can raise students' anxiety and depression levels. Without an adequate mental state, students' functioning and achievement will likely be negatively affected. Further evidence from this study

demonstrates that the types of behaviors exhibited by parents not only affect students'

communication and well-being, but can also affect students' goals in academics.

Achievement goal theory is an academic motivation-based theory that suggests students'

intentions in academic tasks will direct their cognitive activity, emotions, and behaviors

(Duchense & Ratelle, 2010). Two types of academic goals stem from this theory: mastery goals

and performance goals. The differences in these goals lie in the type of motivation exhibited by

students. Motivation to achieve goals based on acquiring new skills and learning, known as

mastery goals, are connected with academic support (Regner, Loose, & Dumas, 2009). On the

contrary, academic monitoring/control can lead to competitive goals, known as performance

goals. Performance goals focus on the motivation to do better than others (Dumas & et al., 2009).

Thus, controlling parents may not encourage youth to fulfill their potential, but instead foster a

competitive approach to academics.

Achievement motivation based on performance goals can be detrimental if students fail to

complete the task at hand. If parents exert control over children, children may feel obligated to

outperform other students, creating performance goals. On the contrary, if students perceive

support from their parents to achieve whatever they are capable of, mastery goals towards

achievement may result. Likewise, if parents believe they are supportive, but their children

perceive otherwise, the involvement itself is not effective for children or their academic

performance. Therefore, how a student perceives this involvement is important for a student's

success (Guay & et al., 2005).

Similarly, attachment theory suggests that a secure, supportive relationship with parents

will result in low anxiety, and a greater likelihood to explore the environment and gain self-

confidence (Ainsworth, 1982; cited in Assouline, Colangelo, Cole, Cutrona, & Russell, 1994). A

lifetime of parental support allowing individuals to explore and develop skills without self-doubt or anxiety will also help students achieve academically. The attachment formed in childhood is beneficial to a child's well-being in life. A study of younger children showed that poor adult and couple attachment among parents can lead to a child's low academic achievement in first grade (Cowan, Cowan, & Meth, 2009). These results indicate that if healthy attachment is not created between a parent and a child, a child may struggle academically.

Studies conducted on college-aged students from the perspective of attachment theory have shown mixed results. For example, a study of undergraduate college students in the Southeastern United States found that neither parent nor peer attachment was correlated with college GPA, whereas both parent and peer attachment was correlated with high school GPA (Fass & Tubman, 2002). These results may be explained by a college-age student becoming independent and attributing successes and failures to themselves rather than others.   A second study conducted based on attachment theory in college students predicted that parental support would lower anxiety, and therefore promote academic self-efficacy, which would contribute to better performance in the classroom (Assouline & et. al., 1994). Students at the University of Iowa completed surveys measuring perceived support from parents, family conflict, and parental achievement orientation. Results indicated that parental social support was more predictive of grade point average than both family conflict and parental achievement orientation. Further testing indicated that while parental support predicted GPA and ACT scores, support from friends and romantic partners did not, highlighting the importance of parental involvement. Results also indicated that the reassurance of worth and social integration were the most predictive aspects of parental social support (Cutrona & et. al., 1994).

A follow-up study expanding on the relationship of parents and college students viewed how parental social support relates to adjustment during the transition in the first 2 years of college (Cutrona & et. al., 1994). Findings suggested social support from both parents played an important role in children's well-being. These findings also support the "stress-buffering" hypothesis, predicting that when students interact with parents in times of stress they can cope and adapt better (Cutrona & et. al., 1994). The mixed results from previous studies suggest the need for further testing of the impact of parental involvement on students' academic achievement.

There have also been different results in regards to how the amount of pressure and control exerted by parents can influence students' motivation. Evidence regarding children at a young age has shown that that motivation facilitated through parents can be beneficial in children's achievement (Cheung & Pomperantz, 2012). A model referred to as parent-oriented motivation suggests that parents become involved in children's academics, fostering parent-oriented motivation onto children, which enhances a child's engagement leading to achievement (Cheung & Pomperantz, 2012). This type of motivation can be beneficial to children who feel engaged to succeed, even if not for personal reasons. If functioning properly, the purpose of parent-oriented motivation is for children to one day develop intrinsic motivation. However, this type of motivation can obstruct performance if children begin to exhibit guilt and anxiety. Once reaching an older age, children must be able to shape parent-oriented motivation to intrinsic motivation in order to achieve. Previous studies have indicated parent-oriented motivation leads more to extrinsic than self-directed behavior, but that this extrinsic motivator is internalized as the child gets older (Cheung & Pomperantz, 2012). Therefore, students who have the ability to

control their own behavior, and complete their own work based on internalized motivation are more likely to succeed as they become older.

The Parental Autonomy-Support and Control scale measures parental involvement as two independent factors, parental autonomy-support and parental control (Robbins, 1994). Findings from studies using this scale suggest that perceived parental autonomy-support and control continue to have psychologically important correlates with college students, such as high self-esteem, vitality, and self-actualization (Robbins, 1994). On the contrary, parental control was linked to high levels of student depression, separation-individuation, and pathology and was negatively associated with self-esteem and self-actualization (Robbins, 1994). Further, students who perceived parents as highly supportive of self-determination tended to have higher self-esteem, and more autonomous motivational orientations.

A study conducted using the Motivation Engagement Scale indicated parental and home factors such as home resources, parental assistance, parenting style, and parental involvement in school play a critical function in predicting student motivation and engagement, even more so than demographic factors (Mansour & Martin, 2009). A sample of 100 Australian high school students indicated parents' influence, students' planning, task management, self-handicapping and relationship with teachers all predict student motivation and engagement.

Although results from studies using the Motivation Engagement Scale indicate parental involvement is a crucial factor in student motivation, other studies examining parenting styles have shown that parental involvement is not crucial. A study of college-aged students showed no significant relationship between any type of parenting styles and college students' ideal and actual motivation (Azhar, Dorso, Renk, & Silva, 2008). Therefore, there is contrasting evidence

of parental involvement and its impact on college-aged students' motivation; thus, more research should be conducted.

A similar scale to the Motivation Engagement Scale was created by Vallerand and colleagues (1993). The Academic Motivation Scale's validity was tested through administration of the test to 217 junior-college students (Vallerand et. al., 1993).

This scale focuses specifically on academic motivation, using self-determination theory (SDT). Deci and Ryan (1985) sought to view the different levels and types of motivation. Whereas it is common to view motivation levels, the Academic Motivation Scale views the underlying attitudes and goals that cause motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2006). It differentiates between internal motivation, referring to acting on something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable and extrinsic motivation, or doing something because it leads to separable outcomes (Deci & Ryan 2000). Third, amotivation is the absence of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Self-determination theory proposes that humans are intrinsically motivated to approach activities that are interesting, challenging, and spontaneously satisfying, and are externally motivated by behaviors that are consistent with societal values and norms.

Previous studies testing self-determination theory indicated that support from parents predicted adolescents' well-being (Bernstein et. al. 2006). Further, this study indicated that support from parents was a significant predictor of adolescents' autonomous self-regulation for continuing education from high school to college. Thus, support from parents can enhance intrinsic motivation for children in academics.

A previous study conducted on first year college students using Vallerand's Academic Motivation Scale (Reynolds & Weigand, 2010) found results that students who were motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically had a greater ability to cope with stress and adversity through

academic and social engagement. Those who were amotivated were least able to cope with stress and demands of college through social and academic engagement.

Previous studies have indicated that the type of parenting received by students is correlated to their achievement in schooling. A study conducted on college-aged students who had authoritative mothers in childhood reported higher GPA in both high school and college (Azhar et al., 2008). Similarly, fathers' authoritative parenting correlated to higher high school GPA. Azhar's study on college-aged students is related to parental support because authoritative parenting is associated with high warmth and autonomy granting, and parental control because authoritarian parenting is high in control and low in warmth (Azhar & et al. 2008). A study examining father parenting and academics (Kazmi, Pervez & Sajjid 2011) found that permissive parenting was associated with the lowest grades in students. Thus, students with permissive parents, or parents who offer little support, control, and boundaries have students who struggle in school. A study of parental involvement including both academic motivation and academic achievement is needed to continue gaining knowledge of the influence of parental involvement.

Previous research is focused on the area of children and parental support and control and the influence on academic achievement and motivation, while there is limited research in this area that focuses on college students. The studies conducted have produced mixed results. Similarly, no previous studies have used both the Parental Autonomy Scale and the Academic Motivation Scale. Without empirical research offering knowledge as to the valuable quantity of parental involvement in college-age students, college students may not engage to their full potential. For the purpose of this study, it is predicted that parental autonomy-support will correlate to college-aged student's motivation and engagement, as well as be predictive of their academic achievement. On the contrary, parental control will associate to both academic

amotivation and poor achievement in college students. Specifically, it is expected that high parental support will be associated with high intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, whereas high control will be related to amotivation. Over-exerting control over children has consistently shown to have a negative effect on academic achievement (Duchense & Ratelle, 2010; Robbins, 1994). It is predicted the same will occur here. This prediction is consistent with the notion that supportive parents will encourage their children's self-determination, whereas controlling parents will discourage this development.

Method

Participants

The participants included 113 undergraduate students (95 women, 18 men, $M = 20.16$, $SD = 1.26$) enrolled at Eastern Illinois University. All participants received either extra credit or course credit in psychology courses.

Materials

The materials included two previously used scales, the Parental Autonomy-Support and Control Scale (Robbins, 1994) (See Appendix A), as well as the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand, 1992) (See Appendix B). Partially adapted from previous research (Grolnick, Ryan & Deci, 1991; Ryan & Grolnick 1986), Robbin's 1994 Parental Autonomy-Support and Control Scale added new items to include dimensions of parental autonomy-support and control. The self-report measure consists of a 15-item scale including 9 support items (e.g., My parents listen to my opinion or perspective when I've got a problem), and 6 control items (e.g., My parents try to tell me how to run my life). Although commonly thought of as mirror images of one another, Robbins' pilot study found that support and control are two separate variables. The pilot study examined the validity and reliability in the new scale. The Chronbach alpha was .80 for

perceived maternal autonomy-support as well as maternal-control, .83 for perceived paternal autonomy-support, and .81 for perceived paternal control, indicating high internal consistency for both mothers and fathers. Ratings of mothers and fathers are also highly correlated, yielding Pearson's coefficients ranging from .67 to .68 (p<.01). Participants reported on a 6-point Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (*never)* to 6 (*all the time).*

Vallerand's 1992 Academic Motivation Scale was used to assess academic motivation. This 28-item scale measures 3 types of motivation: Intrinsic motivation (12 items), extrinsic motivation (12 items) and amotivation (4 items). The scale's validity was tested among its own subscales, among other motivational constructs, and motivational consequences, resulting in adequate levels of concurrent and construct validity (Blais & et. al., 1993). Cumulative GPA was used as a measure of students' academic achievement.

Procedure

Participants received a consent form describing the nature of the study and approval to collect data. The consent form also included approval to obtain the participant's GPA and ACT score for use in data analysis. Each participant received a Parental-Autonomy Support and Control Scale and Academic Motivation Scale. The order of the scales was counterbalanced to account for order effects; therefore, half of the participants completed the Parental Autonomy Support and Control Scale first and the Academic Motivation Scale second and vice-versa. It took participants approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the study.

Results

Preliminary correlations indicated that significant correlations for both support, and control. Parental support correlated with motivation and parental control correlated with amotivation. Additional analyses explored these relationships. A median split on the two types of

parental involvement divided each type into high and low groups. An independent samples t test indicated students who scored high on parental support (M = 4.46, SD = 1.02) scored significantly higher on intrinsic motivation than the low support group (M = 4.46, SD = .95), t(110) = 2.48, p = .015 (See Table 1). Similarly, for extrinsic motivation, the high parental support group (M = 6.2, SD = .65) scored significantly higher than the low support group $(M$ = 5.84, SD = .89$)$, t(110) = 2.68, p =009 (See Table 1).

On the parental control dimension, students in the high parental control group (M = 1.55, SD = .74) scored significantly higher on amotivation than students in the low control group (M = 1.29, SD = .56), t(110) = 2.06, p = .04) (See Table 2). No significant findings regarding GPA resulted, although the difference was in the predicted direction, indicating that those in the high parental support group (M = 3.07, SD = .56) had higher GPA's than those in the low group (M = 2.88, SD = .68) t(108) = 1.58, p = .16.

Discussion

Although previous studies have shown that parental support is beneficial to children's development, while control is hindering, the dynamic of a parent-child relationship at the college level is more complex. Results from the current study indicate that students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are both positively related to parental support. This finding is consistent with the results from other studies that found parental supportive behavior leads to positive student outcomes (Assouline, Colangelo, Cole, Cutrona, & Russell, 1994; Duchesne, & Ratelle, 2010; Guay, Larose, Ratelle, & Senecal, C., 2005; Robbins, 1994). My findings provide evidence that supportive parents, while granting autonomy, can foster high academic motivation in college-age students. The findings also support previous research showing that controlling

parents can negatively affect student outcomes (Duchense, & Ratelle, 2010). Findings from the present study suggest that high parental control can lead to student amotivation.

College students often choose to move from home while pursuing a college degree. The findings show that supportive parenting, even while a child is in college, is related to positive academic motivation. Parents should become aware of the support they offer their children while they enter college. Furthermore, the finding that a controlling parental style is related to amotivation in students points to the unique nature of the relationship between college students and their parents. Whereas younger children may need a structured environment, with rules and regulations, college students are young adults. If parents seek to control their semi-independent children from a distance, this may cause students to reduce their motivation for academic achievement. A lack of academic motivation can lead to poor achievement and ultimately result in problems later on, such as the inability to obtain and maintain a job.

The finding that parental control is associated with amotivation could lead to schools targeting students who are amotivated. Implementing programs to help inform parents and students of amovation could help bring the two groups together, target problems, and result in better student achievement.

Several limitations present in the current study should be addressed in future studies. Due to the correlational nature of this study, there is no way to assume that parental support automatically leads to high intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Future studies should seek to control for other factors that can affect academic motivation, such as peer influences, self-esteem, previous teachers, or prior achievement.

Additionally, the current study included a self-report survey based on perceptions, a relatively subjective measure. Future studies should take into account perceptions of both

students and parents, to examine differences in their perceptions. The study also failed to account for divorce of parents, absent parents, or other non-nuclear families.

The lack of significant findings regarding GPA may be due to the relatively homogenous sample. All participants were undergraduate psychology students, most of whom participated to receive course credit in introductory psychology. Therefore, their academic achievement may have varied lass than would a more representative sample.

Finally, data collected from a homogenous sample of all Eastern Illinois University students offer little external validity. Because all the participants were college students, they may be relatively achievement-oriented. Future studies should strive to increase the internal and external validity of the present study.

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Table 1

Parental Support high and low group means for Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

| | Support Group | | *t* | *df* |
	High	Low		
Intrinsic	4.93 (1.02)	4.46 (.95)	2.48*	110
Extrinsic	6.24 (.65)	5.84 (.89)	2.68**	110

Note. * = $p \le .05$, ** = $p \le .01$ Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

Table 2

Parental Control high and low group means for Amotivation

| | Control Group | | *t* | *df* |
	High	Low		
Amotivation	1.55 (.74)	1.29 (.56)	2.06*	110

Note. * = $p \le .05$, Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

Appendix A

Parental Autonomy-Support and Control Scale

Directions: *Please circle the level to which you agree with each statement:*

1————2————3————4————5————6

Disagree   Agree Completely

_____

1. My parents seem to know how I feel about things.

2. My parents whenever possible, allow me to choose what to do.

3. My parents expect me to act right away when they make a request.

4. My parents try to tell me how to run my life.

5. My parents try to understand how I see things

6. My parents are always telling me how I should behave.

7. My parents tell me exactly how to do my work.

8. My parents listen to my opinion or perspective when I've got a problem.

9. My parents try to tell me what kind of friends I should have.

10. My parents allow me to contradict or disagree with their opinion.

11. My parents insist upon me doing things their way.

12. My parents are usually able to consider things from my point of view.

13. My parents can always tell how I feel about important manners.

14. My parents help me to choose my own direction.

15. My parents aren't very sensitive to many of my needs.

Appendix B

Directions: *Using the scale below, indicate to what extent each of the following items presently corresponds to one of the reasons why you go to college.*

1. Because with only a high-school degree I would not find a high-paying job later on.

2. Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things.

3. Because I think that a college education will help me better prepare for the career I have chosen.

4. For the intense feelings I experience when I am communicating my own ideas to others.

5. Honestly, I don't know; I really feel that I am wasting my time in school.

6. For the pleasure I experience while surpassing myself in my studies.

7. To prove to myself that I am capable of completing my college degree.

8. In order to obtain a more prestigious job later on.

9. For the pleasure I experience when I discover new things never seen before.

10. Because eventually it will enable me to enter the job market in a field that I like.

11. For the pleasure that I experience when I read new things.

12. I once had good reasons for going to college; however, now I wonder whether I should continue.

13. For the pleasure that I experience while I am surpassing myself in one of my personal accomplishments.

14. Because of the fact that when I succeed in college I feel important.

15. Because I want to have "the good life" later on.

16. For the pleasure that I experience in broadening my knowledge about subjects which appeal to me.

17. Because this will help me make a better choice regarding my career orientation.

18. For the pleasure that I experience when I feel completely absorbed by what certain authors have written

19. I can't see why I go to college and frankly, I couldn't care less.

20. For the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult academic activities.

21. To show myself that I am an intelligent person.

22. In order to have a better salary later on.

23. Because my studies allow me to continue to learn about many things that interest me.

24. Because I believe that a few additional years of education will improve my competence as a worker.

25. For the "high" feeling that I experience while reading about various interesting subjects.

26. I don't know; I can't understand what I am doing in school.

27. Because college allows me to experience a personal satisfaction in my quest for excellence in my studies.

28. Because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies.