

# Mothers' parenting practices and adolescents' learning from their mistakes in class: The mediating role of adolescent's self-disclosure

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## Abstract

This study examined 126 students' (14–16 years of age; 66 females) perceptions of self-disclosure to their mothers with respect to their mistakes in class activities. Specifically, we hypothesized that self-disclosure would predict adolescents' ability to learn from mistakes they made in classroom tasks. In addition, we hypothesized that perceived mothers' love withdrawal would correlate negatively with adolescents' self-disclosure, whereas perceived autonomy support would correlate positively with self-disclosure. Further, we hypothesized that the effect of mothers' parenting practices on adolescents' ability to learn from their mistakes would be mediated by adolescents' self-disclosure of their school experiences. Results, using SEM analyses, showed the importance of mothers' autonomy support for adolescents' self-disclosure and learning from their mistakes in classroom tasks.

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## 1. Introduction

The important role of the parent–child relationship in children's adaptation to school has been emphasized by many researchers (Cawan, Cowan, Ablow, Johnson, & Measelle, 2005; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991; Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982; Thompson, 2004). Research has mainly focused on parental practices such as warmth, responsiveness, involvement (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; MacCoby & Martin, 1983; Mattanah, 2001; Puustinen, Lyyra, Metsapelto, & Pulkkinen, 2008), structure (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997), and autonomy support (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002; Grolnick et al., 1991; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005).

In the last few years, research on parenting has emphasized the role of parental knowledge of adolescents' whereabouts

and the role of adolescents' voluntary self-disclosure for externalizing problem behaviors (Fletcher, Steinberg, & Williams-Wheeler, 2004; Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyckx, & Goossens, 2006; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). While emphasizing the importance of children's self-disclosure and parental knowledge, researchers rejected the notion of parental direct control of adolescents' behavior as an effective proactive strategy for parents, because adolescents spend a large portion of their time in places where parents are not present; thus, children's behavior cannot be directly controlled by parents (Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Wells & Rankin, 1988). In line with this argument, Stattin and Kerr (2000) found that adolescents' voluntary self-disclosure was a stronger predictor of parental knowledge and of adolescents' deviant behavior than were parents' active attempts to supervise their children's behavior. Based on this finding, one may claim that parents' behavior is of a secondary importance in explaining the links between parenting and children's deviant behavior.

In a recent study, Soenens et al. (2006) argued that it is premature to conclude that parents have relatively little impact

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on the development of problem behaviors, because parents may protect their children from antisocial behavior by creating a family climate that promotes children's disclosure. This argument was also raised by Fletcher et al. (2004) and by Stattin and Kerr (2000). In a well designed study, Soenens et al. (2006) demonstrated that adolescents' self-disclosure and parental knowledge serve as intervening variables in the associations between parental practices and adolescents' problem behaviors. This research replicated Stattin and Kerr's (2000) findings regarding the important role of children's self-disclosure in predicting parental knowledge.

Up to now, research has not yet explored the associations between self-disclosure and school engagement, despite these concepts' seeming relevance for adolescents' school adaptation, because the parent is not present at school and therefore cannot directly supervise the child's behavior. The present study aimed to shed some light on this association. Specifically, the present study focused on the mediating role of adolescents' self-disclosure concerning their school experiences, in the link between mothers' parenting practices and adolescents' ability to learn from the mistakes they make during classroom activities.

### *1.1. Family climate and promotion of adolescents' self-disclosure*

In line with Kerr and Stattin's (2000) argument that the relational part of parenting may be particularly predictive of adolescents' self-disclosure, Soenens et al. (2006) focused on the links between psychological control and responsiveness to children's self-disclosure. Soenens et al. (2006) found that parental responsiveness and parental structure were positively associated with adolescents' self-disclosure; likewise, through the mediation of adolescents' self-disclosure, these parental indices were associated with fewer problem behaviors. On the other hand, parents' psychological control was found to be negatively related to adolescents' self-disclosure. Thus, the research demonstrated that adolescents' self-disclosure can be predicted by parenting practices.

Soenens et al. (2006) argued that children's self-disclosure is promoted by warm, accepting, and empathic (i.e., responsive) parenting, whereas intrusive parenting such as psychological control that refers to manipulative parenting practices (e.g., guilt induction, shaming, and love withdrawal; Barber, 1996; Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005) inhibits self-disclosure. Thus, the results supported the hypothesis that children of psychologically controlling parents, who expect their parents to respond intrusively when confronted with antisocial behavior, would try to avoid such negative reactions by refraining from voluntary self-disclosure.

Unlike the former studies that focused on adolescents' externalizing problem behaviors, the present study focused on adolescents' academic engagement. We were specifically interested in adolescents' self-disclosure concerning their school experiences and in a positive (adaptive) outcome of that ability to share one's difficulties at school with one's parents, namely, the adolescent's ability to learn from his/her mistakes

in class activities. Hence, following Soenens et al. (2006), we predicted that love withdrawal (one component of psychological control) in relation to the child's failures and lack of investment in school would inhibit the child's self-disclosure, whereas autonomy supportive parenting would promote it.

Assor, Roth, and Deci (2004) found that parental conditional regard, which involves love withdrawal together with its mirror image (i.e., provision of love contingent on children's behavior), predicts children's sense of disapproval by parents, which, in turn, predicts children's resentment toward parents. In a subsequent study, Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, and Deci (2007) demonstrated that resentment toward parents is predicted primarily by love withdrawal even when controlling for contingent love provision. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that adolescents who expect their parents to react to academic failures by withdrawing their love (which was shown to be associated with rejection and disapproval) might refrain from disclosure of difficulties at school.

In contrast, we hypothesized that parents' autonomy support may predict adolescents' self-disclosure of school experience. Autonomy supportive parenting has been found to predict positive school outcomes such as academic competence, autonomous motivation, self-regulation, and achievement (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Grolnick et al., 1991; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005; Vansteenkiste, Zhou, Lens, & Soenens, 2005). Within self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), autonomy support is defined as an encouragement of integrated internalization, self-initiation, and the promotion of volitional functioning (Roth & Deci, 2008; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005) by taking the child's perspective, validating his or her feelings and thoughts, encouraging choice, and providing meaningful rationale and relevance (Assor et al., 2002; Roth, 2008; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005; for a review, see Grolnick et al., 1997). Although autonomy supportive parenting was found to be related to parental warmth and acceptance, it also showed a unique effect above and beyond parental warmth in relation to children's internalization and behavior (Roth, 2008; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, et al., 2007; Roth, Assor, Niemiec, et al., 2007). It seems that in relation to adolescents' self-disclosure, the most relevant autonomy supportive behaviors are those in which parents attempt to take the child's perspective and validate his or her feelings. Therefore, the present research focused on these two dimensions of autonomy support.

### *1.2. Self-disclosure and ability to learn from mistakes in class*

Current theory and research in motivation indicate that, although repeated academic failures are clearly undesirable, a temporary failure that results in effective coping is often an important experience that enhances children's motivation, learning, and emotional development (Alfi, Katz, & Assor, 2004). The main obstacles to adaptive coping with temporary failures are likely to be negative feelings that these situations may elicit (Alfi et al., 2004).

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