



Predicting parenting practices from maternal and adolescent sons' personality

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ABSTRACT

We investigated interrelations among maternal and adolescent personality, and parenting practices that have been implicated in the development of disruptive behavior problems. Participants were 174 mothers and their sons age 11–16 years. Mothers and adolescents each reported on their own personalities and maternal parenting practices. Significant correlations were found between parenting practices and both maternal and adolescent personality. Personality scales assessing Positive Temperament domain traits predicted positive—but not negative—parenting; Negative Temperament domain traits and mothers' Disinhibition-related traits did the reverse, and sons' Disinhibition-related traits predicted both positive and negative parenting. Both maternal and adolescent personality significantly predicted all parenting practices. Adolescent personality moderated relations between maternal personality and three parenting dimensions: Positive Parenting, Poor Monitoring/Supervision, and Corporal Punishment.

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1. Introduction

Risk factors associated with problematic adolescent behaviors are best conceptualized as risk factors for negative developmental trajectories; that is, they are dynamic, rather than static, in nature (Lipsey & Derzon, 1998). When risk factors exceed the parenting skill to overcome or compensate for them, a negative externalizing trajectory may ensue. Ineffective parenting is one of the most well-established factors associated with negative developmental outcomes, including disruptive behavior problems (e.g., Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991), so it is important to increase understanding of factors that contribute to ineffective parenting. The current study aims to do so by examining the predictive power of maternal and adolescent sons' personality, and their interaction, on parenting practices. Understanding relations among parenting and parent–child interactional tendencies is critical given that adolescents may evoke parenting behavior depending upon their own and their parent's personality.

There are substantial clinical, theoretical, and empirical literatures linking specific parenting practices with disruptive behaviors in childhood and adolescence (Dadds, Maujean, & Fraser, 2003; Frick, Christian, & Wootton, 1999). For example, both Patterson's (1982), Patterson's (2002) Coercive-Process Model and Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) "General Theory" maintain that poor parenting practices are the proximal mechanism for the development of disruptive behaviors. In a test of the former, Snyder and Patterson (1995) found that mothers of aggressive (vs. non-aggressive) boys

were more likely to provide negative reinforcement to their sons' aggressive behavior.

Low levels of parental monitoring have been shown to be associated with increased levels of aggression, delinquency, theft, and conflict with authorities; in addition, parental use of both excessively severe and Inconsistent Discipline is associated with youth aggressive behavior (Capaldi & Patterson, 1996; Gorman-Smith, Tolan, & Henry, 1999). For example, Strassberg, Dodge, Pettit, and Bates (1994) found that adolescents exposed to violent discipline (e.g., hitting) were significantly more likely to display aggressive behaviors than those who were spanked, who, in turn, displayed more aggressive behaviors than those who were not spanked. Research also has demonstrated that psychologically (vs. behaviorally) controlling parenting is associated with youth physical aggression, above and beyond other risk factors, such as gender and separation from caregiver (Joussemet et al., 2008). On the other hand, extant research indicates that regardless of ethnic and socioeconomic status, positive parental involvement buffers risk for disruptive and aggressive behaviors in childhood and adolescence (e.g., Patterson, 1982). Similarly, the provision of structure (e.g., limits) is associated with healthy child and adolescent development (Joussemet et al., 2008).

In addition to data confirming the important role of parenting in the development of disruptive behaviors in adolescence, there is growing attention to the role of parenting in the context of other influences on child and adolescent behavior (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000). For example, transactional models in which parent and child characteristics are mutually influential have been proposed to explain the use of specific parenting practices (Belsky, 1984; Maccoby, 1992). In his process

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model of parenting, Belsky (1984; Belsky & Jaffee, 2006) asserts that parenting is multiply determined by not only parents' personality, but also by child characteristics, most notably child personality. Subsequent research has supported a direct link between parenting practices and both parent (e.g., Belsky, Crnic, & Woodworth, 1995; Kochanska, Clark, & Goldman, 1997; Prinzie et al., 2004) and child personality (e.g., Bates, Pettit, & Dodge, 1995; Sanson & Rothbart, 1995). However, few studies have examined both in concert (for exceptions, see Clark, Kochanska, & Ready, 2000; Karreman, van Tuijl, van Aken, & Dekovic, 2008).

Whereas a large body of literature has shown associations between and among both parental and child psychopathology and parenting (e.g., Belsky & Barends, 2002; Pardini, 2008), much less research has examined relations between normal variation in personality and parenting practices. Those that have, however, find consistent relations between them. Specifically, extraversion (E), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), openness (to experience; O), and low neuroticism (N) are associated with positive parenting behaviors such as displaying affection and encouraging independence (Losoya, Callor, Rowe, & Goldsmith, 1997), self-reported nurturance (Metsapelto & Pulkkinen, 2003), and sensitivity observed 1 year later (Smith et al., 2007), whereas N, and low A, C, and O are associated with less adaptive parenting such as less sensitive, effective, and stimulating observed parenting (Belsky et al., 1995), more power-assertiveness and less responsive parenting (Kochanska et al., 1997), and negative, controlling, and restrictive parenting (Losoya et al., 1997).

Youth personality characteristics also have been shown to be associated with parenting practices. Studies consistently show that difficulty or negative affect is related to less optimal parenting (Bates et al., 1995; Sanson & Rothbart, 1995), including longitudinally (e.g., Lengua & Kovacs, 2005). For example, Eisenberg and colleagues (1999) found that children's self-regulation at 6–8 years of age predicted fewer parental punitive reactions to children's emotions 2 years later, controlling for earlier child self-regulation.

Whereas parenting has been shown to be associated with both parental and child personality, much less is known about how these influences in concert contribute to explaining parenting practices. In one of the few studies to examine this question, Clark and colleagues (2000) examined the degree to which maternal personality, alone and in interaction with child emotionality, prospectively predicted aspects of parenting relevant to childhood socialization. They found that mothers who scored high on either N or E when their children were 8–10 months old used a more controlling or forceful, "power-assertion" style when disciplining their children 5 months later. The interaction of maternal personality with child emotionality, also measured at 8–10 months, contributed significantly to the prediction of power-assertive parenting as well. These data provide evidence of the bidirectionality of parent–child relationships; that is, how parents respond to their children depends on both their own and their children's traits. Further, Trentacosta and Shaw (2008) found that toddler temperament contributed incrementally above maternal personality and other maternal psychological resources, to the prediction of rejecting parenting which, in turn, predicted early-adolescence antisocial behavior. Finally, in a sample of 36-month old toddlers and their parents, Karreman and colleagues (2008) found toddler's effortful control moderated the relation between parental personality and parenting. Specifically, fathers' N was positively associated with fathers' observed positive control and fathers' E was positively associated with fathers' observed negative control, but only when children had a low level of effortful control.

Consistent with Belsky's (1984) process model of parenting, these studies highlight the importance of considering the mutual influence of both parental and child personality/temperament, as well as their combined contribution, to parenting practices. How-

ever, it is important to note that most existing research is on infant and/or young child samples. Additionally, there is a notable paucity of research examining the relative and interactive contributions of parental and child personality on specific parenting practices and those few studies that do examine this utilize samples of toddlers. No study to date has examined the interactive contributions of maternal and child personality on parenting in an adolescent sample. This is surprising given the substantial literature that links ineffective parenting to problematic behaviors in adolescence. The current study attempts to fill this void. Specifically, we examine the predictive power of maternal and adolescent personality, and their interaction, on parenting practices known to be associated with disruptive behavior problems. This investigation is unique not only in its use of an adolescent sample, but also in its use of both adolescent and parent report of parenting practices.

The extant literature does not include any investigations of this nature in an adolescent sample; thus, our expectations were based on literature with younger samples. While we would expect differences in parenting practices based on the age of the child (Frick et al., 1999), we do not expect differences in *relations* among parent and child personality traits and various parenting practices. Therefore, consistent with Belsky (1984) and the extant literature, we expected that maternal personality traits related to negative emotionality (the tendency to be easily disturbed, anxious, nervous, or lack emotional stability) and disinhibition (vs. constraint; the tendency to act in an under- vs. overcontrolled manner), would be associated with less adaptive parenting practices. More adaptive parenting practices, on the other hand, were expected to be associated with maternal personality traits related to positive emotionality, the tendency to experience more positive emotions, be more outgoing, and energetic (Clark & Watson, 2008; Watson & Clark, 1993).

Additionally, we expected that adolescent personality would contribute incrementally to maternal personality in the explanation of parenting practices. That is, maternal and adolescent personality examined conjointly will provide for a more robust predictor of parenting practices than maternal personality alone. We also expected adolescent personality to interact with maternal personality in explaining parenting. Consistent with a traditional "goodness of fit" model of parenting (Thomas & Chess, 1977), we expected that adolescents with more difficult personality traits (e.g., higher levels of negative emotionality) would experience less adaptive parenting in the context of mothers with more difficult personality traits (e.g., higher levels of disinhibition). On the other hand, more positive parenting practices are expected to be employed by mothers with more adaptive personality traits (e.g., higher levels of positive emotionality) who have sons with more adaptive personality traits. Finally, while maternal personality traits related to positive emotionality are expected to be associated with more adaptive parenting practices, we expect this to be attenuated in the context of sons with more difficult personality traits.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 174 mothers and their sons, aged 11–16 years (mean age = 13.64, SD = 1.35), who participated in the Iowa Youth Development Project (I-YDP), a larger study of developmental factors associated with social behaviors in male adolescents. On average, the families were White (87.4%) and relatively high in socioeconomic status based on education and income. Most mothers had completed college or post-graduate education (71.9%), and one-third (34.1%) had an annual family income above \$100,000 (ranging from under \$15,000). Most mothers were married

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