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Role-modeling and conversations about giving in the socialization of adolescent charitable giving and volunteering



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This study investigated the relationship between the monetary giving and volunteering behavior of adolescents and the role-modeling and conversations about giving provided by their parents. The participants are a large nationally-representative sample of 12–18 year-olds from the *Panel Study of Income Dynamics' Child Development Supplement* ($n = 1244$). Adolescents reported whether they gave money and whether they volunteered. In a separate interview parents reported whether they talked to their adolescent about giving. In a third interview, parents reported whether they gave money and volunteered. The results show that both role-modeling and conversations about giving are strongly related to adolescents' giving and volunteering. Knowing that both role-modeling and conversation are strongly related to adolescents' giving and volunteering suggests an often overlooked way for practitioners and policy-makers to nurture giving and volunteering among adults: start earlier, during adolescence, by guiding parents in their role-modeling of, and conversations about, charitable giving and volunteering.

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Educators, community leaders, and policy-makers expend considerable effort to encourage adults to perform two particular prosocial behaviors – giving money to charities that help people and giving time in voluntary service. Adult giving and volunteering are most likely part of an ongoing pattern of behavior that began much earlier in development, and both theory and laboratory-based experimental work suggest that role-modeling and conversations about prosocial behavior will affect the development of prosocial behavior (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Yet we know very little about the effectiveness of parental efforts to encourage these behaviors in nationally-representative population studies that describe U.S. adolescents in their natural settings. This represents a significant gap in our understanding. As Eisenberg and Mussen (1989, p. 156) point out:

“It cannot be assumed that procedures that prove to be effective in laboratory studies (such as modeling; see chapters 6 and 7) will necessarily have a significant and lasting impact on behavior when introduced in a natural setting such as

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the home or school.... Thus, it is important to test in natural settings the effectiveness of those procedures that promote prosocial behavior in the laboratory.”

There are no nationally-representative studies of the effectiveness of parents' role-modeling of charitable giving, and although previous research has found evidence of an association between parental modeling of volunteering and adolescents' volunteering (McLellan & Youniss, 2003), including a nationally-representative study (U.S. Department of Education, 1997), these studies could not control for conversations the parent may be having with the adolescent about prosocial behavior. In short, to our knowledge no previous study has estimated the strengths of role-modeling and conversations about prosocial behavior as separate influences on adolescents' giving and volunteering. Furthermore, no study has previously estimated role-model and conversation associations while simultaneously controlling for parenting dimensions—including parental warmth/support and behavioral control—that theoretically are influences on prosocial behavior (Chase-Lansdale, Wakschlag, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995). Finally, little is known about whether the effectiveness of modeling, conversation, and parenting dimensions differs by the sex of the adolescent (however see Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, Batenhorst, & Wilkinson, 2007).

Without this knowledge it is difficult to convince practitioners and policy-makers to shift some of their effort toward the encouragement of parents in their role-modeling and talking about giving and volunteering, thereby nurturing the giving and volunteering of tomorrow's adults. Moreover, it is not known whether any advice to parents should be tailored differently depending on the sex of the adolescent. To address these gaps, the present research estimates the relative strengths of role-modeling and conversations about prosocial behavior as separate influences on adolescents' charitable giving and volunteering using a large nationally-representative sample. These effects are estimated while simultaneously assessing the association of parental warmth and support and parental behavioral control.

Parenting, socialization, and prosocial behavior

Parenting and prosocial behavior

Theory suggests parenting is related to prosocial behavior. Baumrind (1971) distinguished three broad patterns of parenting based on levels of warmth/support and control. Authoritative parents are warm and provide appropriate rules and guidance. Authoritarian parents are less warm and tend to be directive in their control. Indulgent parents may be warm but provide few limits on their children. Maccoby and Martin (1983) built on this framework and identified four typologies of parents: Authoritative (high warmth and guidance-based control), authoritarian (low warmth, highly directive control), indulgent or permissive (high warmth, low control), and neglectful (little warmth or control). Authoritative parenting is thought to be an effective style for the development of prosocial behavior because it encourages empathy via modeling empathy, warmth, and respect for individuals, along with expectations of age-appropriate personal responsibility that include behaving prosocially toward others (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995). Authoritative parents use reason-based explanations for their disciplinary practices, and this in turn promotes perspective taking and empathy in the child (Hoffman, 2000; Knafo & Plomin, 2006). The processes of respecting one's offspring as an individual and granting increasing autonomy as the adolescent takes responsibility in turn promote the development of a strong identity that includes treating others with warmth and respect (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995; Wuthnow, 1995). As such, authoritative parenting promotes both prosocial behavior in the near term as well as internalization of the value of prosocial behavior in the long term (Hastings, Utendale, & Sullivan 2007).

While authoritative parenting is most closely associated with the development of prosocial behavior and, due to lack of either warmth or structure, neglectful parenting can be safely assumed to be least likely to promote prosocial behavior, it is less clear how systematically the other two parenting styles relate. As Hastings et al. (2007, pp. 643–644) argue, authoritarian parenting may make a child less prosocial by “modeling a lack of concern for the needs of others” and eliciting the child's rejection of socialization attempts, but can be associated with prosocial behavior depending upon the disposition of the child and context of the socialization. Similarly, permissive behavior may be related to prosocial behavior due to modeling warmth, but the lack of enforced behavioral standards may inhibit long-term internalization of this as a norm. In short, authoritative parenting is most likely to lead to internalized, independent prosocial behavior, neglectful parenting least likely to foster the development of such behavior, but the other two styles may or may not lead to prosocial behavior depending on the child and the context.

Supporting evidence has been found associating authoritative parenting to adolescent social responsibility (Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999) and prosocial behavior (Baumrind, 1991; Knafo & Plomin, 2006; Padilla-Walker, Carlo, Christensen, & Yorgason, 2012). Other research examined the dimensions of these typologies—warmth and control—and their association with adolescent behavior. These dimensions are associated with empathy and perspective taking (e.g., Laible & Carlo, 2004; Soenens, Duriez, Vansteenkiste, & Goossens, 2007), children's internalization of prosocial values (Hardy, Padilla-Walker, & Carlo, 2008; also see Hardy, Bhattacharjee, Reed, & Aquino, 2010), and prosocial behavior (Carlo, Mestre, Samper, Tur, & Armenta, 2011).

While warmth and control—either as separate constructs or in parenting typologies—both may relate to a variety of child outcomes including prosocial behavior, recent research has indicated that different forms of control have unique effects on children. Psychological control—the use of manipulation, guilt, coercion, and contingent love, for example—is an important construct that needs to be examined apart from behavioral control (Barber, 1996). Psychological control is related to lower

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