



Parental style, parental practices, and socialization outcomes: An investigation of their linkages in the consumer socialization context



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to generate insights into the mechanisms through which parental style influences adolescent consumer socialization. Toward this end, it examines two alternative conceptual frameworks: (1) The mediation model which posits two key dimensions of parental style (responsiveness and demandingness) as antecedent variables affecting adolescent consumer socialization directly and indirectly through parental socialization practices and (2) the moderation model which posits each parental style dimension as a moderator of the link between parental socialization practices and adolescent socialization outcomes. The influences of maternal and paternal parental styles on adolescent socialization outcomes are investigated separately and compared. Results provide stronger support for the mediation model. They also show that mothers' parental style and practices are more influential than fathers' in shaping adolescents' consumer socialization outcomes.

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1. Introduction

Parents as key agents of socialization play a critical role in children's/adolescents' acquisition of consumer skills, attitudes, and knowledge. The wide array of consumer socialization outcomes that parents influence include children's decision-making style, marketplace and transaction knowledge, attitude toward advertising, materialism, consumption autonomy, influence and participation in the family purchase process (Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Carlson, Grossbart, & Stuenkel, 1992; Flouri, 2003; John, 1999; Rose, 1999; Rose, Boush, & Shoham, 2002). A majority of past research on parental influence on consumer socialization has focused on the linkages between key attributes of parenting and the above socialization outcome variables. Parental style, along with family communication pattern, has emerged prominently as one of these parenting attributes (Bao, Fern, & Sheng, 2007; Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Carlson & Tanner, 2006; Rose, 1999).

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In the broader field of parenting and child development, although past research has provided substantial support for the significant role parental style plays in shaping children's developmental outcomes, a group of researchers led by [Darling and Steinberg \(1993\)](#) have long suggested that to better understand the socialization process, it would be helpful to distinguish between parental styles and parental practices (Also see [Bean, Bush, McKenry, & Wilson, 2003](#); [Brenner & Fox, 1999](#)).

According to [Darling and Steinberg \(1993\)](#), parental style is defined as “a constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and create an emotional climate in which the parents' behaviors are expressed” whereas parental practices are “specific, goal-directed behaviors through which parents perform their parental duties” (p. 493). Parents engage in parental practices with the purpose of attaining specific socialization goals, and in this sense, parental practices tend to have immediate impact on a child's life. On the other hand, Darling and Steinberg view the role of parental style as a moderator of the link between parental practices and child outcomes, hence having an indirect effect on child outcomes.

While the conceptual framework advanced by Darling and Steinberg is cogent, it is also conceivable that parental style may directly influence parental practices, which may in turn influence child socialization outcomes. Some researchers ([Chao, 2000](#); [Fletcher, Walls, Cook, Madison, & Bridges, 2008](#)) have argued that parental practices comprising parents' actual behaviors are a way in which parents express their parenting style. In fact, research conducted in the area of consumer socialization more than two decades ago by [Carlson and Grossbart \(1988\)](#) and [Crosby and Grossbart \(1984\)](#) demonstrated the importance of parental style as a basis for explaining differences in parents' consumer socialization practices. In addition to the potential impact parental style may have on parental practices, past research has produced a large volume of evidence that parental style also directly affects children's socialization outcomes (e.g., [Bao et al., 2007](#); [Baumrind, 1991](#); [Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991](#)). Thus, the manner in which the three components of the socialization process – parental style, parental practice, and child outcome – are linked together may be more complex than commonly presumed. Consequently, the theoretical distinction between parental style and practices entails a need for empirical work to ascertain the relationship between them as well as their impact on child outcomes. Despite, there has been little research to date that examines the linkage between these two parenting variables and their respective roles in child development. This is particularly the case in the area of consumer socialization.

A review of past studies in parental style reveals another issue of concern. Most of these studies focus on the parental style of mothers and very few examine how fathers' parental style influences child outcomes. As a result, there is little knowledge regarding the extent to which mothers and fathers show a similar type of parenting and whether mothers' and fathers' parental styles or parental practices have similar effects on child outcomes. The few studies that examine both fathers' and mothers' parental styles suggest that mothers and fathers are likely to play unique roles in the socialization of their children ([Laible & Carlo, 2004](#); [Sim, 2003](#)). Past consumer socialization research on the associations between parental style and child outcomes is similarly based largely on mothers' self-reports of their parental styles and focuses mainly on the effects of mothers' parental style on child outcomes. Consequently, there is a conspicuous absence of research findings that shed light on the role of fathers' parental style or parental practices.

This study addresses these gaps in the consumer socialization literature. Its primary objective is to investigate the manners in which parental style influences adolescent consumer socialization outcomes. Specifically, it proposes and tests two alternative conceptual frameworks that specify differing patterns of relationships among parental style, parental practices, and consumer socialization outcomes. The first conceptual framework – the mediation model – mirrors the more traditional view regarding the role of parental style in adolescent socialization and posits that parental style influences consumer socialization outcomes both directly and indirectly through parental practices, i.e., a partial mediation by parental practices of the effects of parental style on socialization outcomes. In the second framework – the moderation model, which is based on [Darling and Steinberg's \(1993\)](#) theorization, parental style is posited as a moderator of the relationship between parental practices and consumer socialization outcomes. Another objective of this study involves investigations into mother–father differences in parental style and parental practices as well as in the pattern of relationships among parental style, parental practices, and consumer socialization outcomes.

2. Literature review

2.1. Mediation model

2.1.1. The link between parental style and adolescent outcomes

Parental style is typically conceived as having two underlying dimensions – demandingness and responsiveness ([Maccoby & Martin, 1983](#)). Demandingness which emphasizes parental control and supervision refers to “the claim parents make on children to become integrated into the family as a whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys” ([Baumrind, 1991, p.61](#)). Demanding parents are likely to place strict regulations and standards on their children's behaviors and be more apt to monitor them and enforce compliance through firm and consistent discipline ([Barber, 1996](#); [Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, Batenhorst, & Wilkinson, 2007](#)). There is in general supportive evidence that links demandingness (also labeled behavior control) to fewer externalizing problems, such as antisocial behavior and conduct disorders, among adolescents ([Barber & Olsen, 1997](#); [Eigenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006](#); [Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2001](#)). Parental monitoring is also considered a form of parental behavior control ([Pettit](#)

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