

EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF ADOLESCENT PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTING IN FREE TIME AND GENDER ON ADOLESCENT MOTIVATION IN FREE TIME

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Abstract.—This study examined how gender and perceptions of parenting related to adolescent motivation during free-time. The sample consisted of 377 ninth-graders from high schools in eastern Massachusetts. Significant gender differences were found for rules enacted, with females reporting more rules in place than males. When examining the relationship between parenting practices and motivation, differences were observed in motivation states based on the provision of specific parent practices by gender. Intrinsic motivation was higher for boys when they reported parents enacting more rules, while more rules undermined girls' intrinsic motivation. External motivation was lower for girls when they reported more parental involvement, while boys were unaffected by this variable. Regardless of gender, amotivation was higher when youth reported parents providing low resource support and few rules. The discussion focuses on how boys and girls respond differently to specific parenting practices and what this means to adult leaders working with youth.

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Parents are widely regarded as the most influential figures in the leisure socialization process of children and adolescents (Collins et al. 2000, Hutchinson et al. 2003). Parental influence is not simply a product of parents' involvement and actions in free time, but often a combination of action and inaction (Caldwell & Darling 1999). Parents can control access to peers, resources, and time to structure behavior, and maintain involvement and support autonomy by demonstrating interest, articulating expectations, and allowing youth to manage situations (Hutchinson et al. 2003). These parenting practices often impact developmental outcomes

from free-time experiences, which can be significant as youth make the transition to adulthood (Hutchinson et al. 2003, Outley & Floyd 2002, Rich 2003). The current study examines how parenting practices are associated with different free-time motivation types reported by adolescents and how these vary by gender.

1.1 Conceptual Framework

A key developmental outcome of adolescence is learning how to internalize behaviors that are not immediately intrinsic or internally motivating (Ryan & Deci 2000). Intrinsic motivation refers to behavior performed for the inherent qualities of an activity or behavior, while internal motivation refers to motivation based on qualities of an activity that reflect personal interests, beliefs, or values. Self-determination theory (SDT) identifies internalization as a process by which extrinsically motivated activities are regulated to the self through the support of the basic psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan 1985, Ryan & Deci 2000). Internalization depends on the degree to which these three needs are supported, and variations of internalization are referred to as forms of regulation.

Ryan and Deci (2000) identify three internally regulated forms of motivation: 1) introjected (i.e., doing a task to conform to personally relevant social norms), 2) identified (i.e., doing a task to fulfill one's self-image), and 3) integrated (i.e., doing a task because it is fully ascribed to one's values and needs). While these forms of motivation have internal appeal, they are extrinsic in nature because they are motivated by an internally relevant outcome, whereas intrinsic motivation is typified by engagement based on an activity's inherent qualities. Internally motivated activities are thought to prepare adolescents for the roles and responsibilities of adulthood through tasks that develop self-direction, self-expression, and motivated involvement (Larson & Kleiber 1993). Furthermore, activities that are internalized may eventually become intrinsic in their appeal as desirable qualities of the activity become more apparent (Ryan & Deci 2000). As internalization needs are supported, youth

are more likely to experience intrinsic and internalized motivation states, whereas a lack of support could lead to external motivation, and worse, amotivation (Ryan & Deci 2000).

External motivation is usually associated with behavior engagement for rewards or to avoid negative consequences. Many activities are initially started for some type of reward, and continued because they offer individuals opportunities for relatedness, competence, and if fully integrated, autonomy (Ryan & Deci 2000). However, activities that are done solely for external rewards lack the power to positively influence development and long term engagement—experiential qualities associated with intrinsically motivated behaviors (Deci & Ryan 1985). Amotivation or action without intent is even worse because the individual attributes all action to external sources. Amotivation is marked by perceptions of incompetence, lack of control, and nonintentional action (Ryan & Deci 2000). Amotivation is generally viewed as developmentally disruptive because it undermines involvement and intrinsic interest in activities that have the potential to offer choice, autonomous action, and long-term engagement—qualities of leisure that aid in the transition to adulthood (Watts et al. 2005).

For years, SDT research has sought to understand the causes of human behavior and the conditions that optimize human development, performance, and well being (Ryan & Deci 2000). Specifically, this research focused on the social-contextual conditions that facilitate the processes of self-regulation and internal motivation. By examining classroom climate, healthcare settings, and work environments, Ryan and Deci have noted similar features present in the bio-social environment that allow for behavior to be internally motivated. Integrating this research, Grolnick et al. (1997) outlined a conceptual model of parent involvement that promotes self-determined behavior. Grolnick et al. identified three central social-contextual dimensions associated with parenting that facilitate internalization. These dimensions are:

1) *Autonomy Support*—the provision of opportunities by parents to facilitate responsibility and encourage independent action in youth.

2) *Interpersonal Involvement*—promoting relatedness through and investment of time and resources in a child's interests, and maintaining an environment that assures connectedness.

3) *Structure*—promoting competence by carefully monitoring and providing guidelines and constraints on behavior.

Using Grolnick et al.'s dimensions of parenting as a conceptual framework, Hutchinson et al. (2003) examined the practices parents used to structure, regulate, and support adolescent free-time use. Hutchinson et al. found that structuring practices were represented by instances where parents communicated expectations, provided rationale for these expectations, explained consequences, and provided feedback to adolescents on how and with whom they spent free time. Structure from parents also included practices to assure involvement in activities that they deemed important or developmentally appropriate. Lastly, parents used activities to control what and with whom their adolescent spent free time, and redirected adolescents from spending large amounts of time in less desirable, unstructured activities. Parents viewed their structuring practices as ways that they could ensure engagement in safe and acceptable behaviors and limit failure in the lives of their children. Hutchinson et al. found that parent autonomy support and interpersonal involvement practices supported relatedness and autonomy support, and was often relationship-based.

Parents related to adolescents by making time to talk about and share activities with adolescents, and being aware of their adolescent's interests and providing resources to support those interests. Parents supported autonomy by giving their adolescents opportunities for self-directed behavior, and facilitated adolescent choice by allowing the youth to make decisions about activities and friends in the free-time context (Hutchinson et al. 2003). Parents also encouraged self-management of these activities and allowed adolescents to structure and plan activities to encourage responsibility.

2.0 STUDY OBJECTIVE

The significance of Hutchinson et al.'s (2003) study is that it frames the self-determination literature to leisure and free-time contexts, and links support for relatedness,

competence and autonomy within specific practices parents use to manage their adolescents' free time. This framework allows for applying Grolnick et al.'s model to examine how specific parenting practices account for differences in adolescent motivation during free time. Given this orientation, the purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of perceptions of parenting on adolescent motivation. The study sought to address the following research question: How do specific perceived parenting practices relate to adolescent motivation, and does this differ by gender?

Gender differences were examined because of differences associated with leisure socialization of boys and girls (Shaw 1994). Boys and girls are often guided toward different forms of leisure, and this pattern may entail differences in rules and monitoring practices used by parents to manage adolescent free time. Furthermore, research suggests that boys and girls respond differently to similar parenting practices. For example, Mboya (1995) suggested that boys and girls respond differently to parent interpersonal involvement. Girls reported higher feelings of competence with higher levels of social interaction and connection to parents, while boys are not impacted positively or negatively with similar levels of parental involvement.

3.0 METHODS

The sample was derived from three suburban high schools in eastern Massachusetts. The study sample consisted of 377 youth from a larger sample of 407 questionnaires from students in ninth grade. Questionnaires were omitted from analysis if the student indicated that they did not live with his/her mother. Exclusion based on absence of the child's biological mother from home was based on the analysis strategy, which was to use perceptions of mother's parenting practices for the perceptions of parenting variable. This approach has been used in previous studies, and it is intended to yield a referent source from which to gauge parenting practices (See Grolnick et al. 2002). Approximately 58 percent were female and 88 percent were European-American. Youth ranged in age from 13-15 years with a mean of 14.2 years. Data were collected within a two-week period during the fall

semester of 2003 at each school, and administered with the assistance of teachers in each high school. Prior to data collection at each school, teachers were trained to administer the instrument by the study research team.

An adapted version (to reflect free time) of the College Students' Perceptions of Parents Scale (POPs) (Robbins 1994) was used to measure parent autonomy support and involvement (PASI), while parent structuring (PS) measures were adapted from Hutchinson et al.'s (2002) investigation of monitoring and structure practice study. In all, 31 items (16 PASI, 15 PS) were developed in consultation with Hutchinson and her colleagues, and these items reflect practices identified through their study of free-time parenting practices (Hutchinson et al. 20003). PASI items were measured on a 7-point scale with responses ranging from 1=not at all true to 7=very true. PS items were measured on a 5-point scale with responses ranging from 1=almost never to 5= almost always.

The POPs items were entered into separate principal component factor analyses with varimax rotation to reduce the data into specific parenting practice categories. Items were accepted into specific factors if factor loadings were above .40 and did not crossload onto other factors. The result of these analyses yielded six different areas of parenting practices. PASI consisted of resource support, involved and shared time, and adolescent control. Table 1 provides descriptive and scale statistics for the specific PASI subscales. PS items measured practices around rules, direct monitoring, and guidance and setting expectations. Table 2 provides descriptive and scale statistics for the specific PS subscales.

Motivation was measured using the Free Time Motivation Scale for Adolescents (FTMS-A) (see Baldwin & Caldwell 2003), which assesses five types of motivation: intrinsic, identified, introjected, external, and amotivated. For the purposes of this study, the scale was simplified to include internalized motivation (included intrinsic and identified motivation), externalized motivation (external motivation), and amotivation (α ranged from .71-.77).

Table 1.—Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation for Perceptions of Parent Autonomy Support and Involvement (n=377)

Factor and Items	1	2	3
Factor 1: Resource Support			
Encourages me to take responsibility for planning and organizing things I do in my free time.	.749		
Provides the resources necessary for me to do the things he or she thinks are good for me in my free time.	.744		
Helps me take responsibility for planning and organizing the things I do in my free time.	.688		
Encourages me to explore and try out different free time activities.	.679		
Provides the resources I need to help me develop the skills I need to do my free time activities.	.672		
Spends a lot of his or her time supporting my free time activities (e.g., driving me to places, etc.)	.539		
Factor 2: Involved and Shared Time			
Share common interest in our free time.		.833	
Enjoy spending free time with my parent during my free time.		.790	
Enjoy doing things together in our free time.		.770	
Factor 3: Adolescent Control			
Gives me the right amount of freedom to do what I like in my free time.			.797
Allows me to decide what I like in my free time.			.687
Never considers things from my point of view when it comes to my free time activities. (R)			.629
Eigenvalue	8.075	1.193	1.060
% of Common Variance	50.471	7.459	6.627
Cumulative Variance	50.471	57.930	64.557
Alpha	.89	.88	.84

Table 2.—Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation for Perceptions of Parent Structure (n=377)

Factor and Items	1	2	3
Factor 1: Rules			
If I have been out very late at night, I am required to tell her where I was and with whom.	.772		
I need to have permission to stay out late on a weekday evening.	.757		
I need to ask permission before I can decide with my friends what I will do.	.726		
Lets me choose my activities as long as I finish what she asks me to do.	.610		
Factor 2: Direct Monitoring			
Monitors when I come home from free time activities.		.777	
Supervises the parties I have at home.		.694	
Finds out if other parents are present at the parties I go to.		.692	
Monitors how I spend free time.		.661	
Sets a time when I am expected to be home.		.656	
Factor 3: Guidance and Setting Expectations			
Encourages me to be involved with activities that she feels are important.			.758
Sometimes 'pushes' me to do things that she thinks will help me in the future.			.733
Clearly states activities which she approves and does not approve to me.			.700
Eigenvalue	5.785	1.380	1.055
% of Common Variance	41.319	9.856	7.537
Cumulative Variance	41.319	51.175	58.712
Alpha	.83	.83	.70

Table 3.—‘T’-Tests for Differences Between Males and Females on Study Measures

Measure	Total (n=377)		Males (n=155)		Females (n=222)		t	p.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Internal Motivation	3.974	.565	3.963	.579	3.981	.557	-.303	n.s.
External Motivation	1.956	.703	1.991	.695	1.931	.709	.824	n.s.
Amotivation	2.221	.817	2.200	.799	2.237	.830	-.434	n.s.
Resource Support	5.209	1.380	5.167	1.274	5.239	1.451	-.499	n.s.
Involved and Shared Time	4.638	1.700	4.561	1.624	4.692	1.747	-.737	n.s.
Adolescent Control	5.488	1.317	5.460	1.207	5.508	1.392	-.343	n.s.
Rules	4.114	0.871	3.966	0.907	4.217	0.832	-2.782	.006
Direct Monitoring	3.567	1.082	3.460	1.069	3.645	1.087	-1.633	n.s.
Guidance and Setting Expectations	3.236	1.016	3.259	1.014	3.220	1.014	.368	n.s.

Table 4.—Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Forms of Adolescent Motivation (n=377)

Variable	r	R ² Δ	B	SE B
DV Internal Motivation (R ² = .227)			2.413	.189
Sex	.016	.000	.740**	.252
Resource Support	.441***	.194***	.161***	.021
Rules	.308***	.013*	.181***	.046
Sex by Rules Interaction	.060	.020**	-.185**	.062
DV External Motivation (R ² = .132)			1.973	.225
Sex	-.042	.002	.612**	.204
Involved and Shared Time	-.060	.001	.100**	.036
Adolescent Control	-.274***	.087***	-.171***	.034
Guidance and Setting Expectations	.159***	.014*	.091*	.037
Sex by Involved and Shared Time Interaction	-.119**	.028**	-.144**	.042
DV Amotivation (R ² = .142)			3.279	.155
Resource Support	-.343***	.117***	-.153	.032
Rules	-.302***	.025**	-.168	.051

Note: * p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001

4.0 RESULTS

Prior to examining the study research question, independent sample t-tests were performed to examine mean differences between boys and girls on all study measures. A statistically significant difference between genders was found when examining perceptions of parents on the rules they enacted in free time, with females reporting the presence of more rules in free time. No significant differences between boys and girls were found for all other study measures. Table 3 reports the results of the t-test analyses.

Hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the effects of parenting practices and gender on adolescent motivation. Three different models were tested with the dependent variable varying based on the

type of motivation (i.e., internal, external, amotivation). Independent variables were entered as blocks into the regression model with gender entered first, followed by the six POPs variables, and then the interaction terms for gender and the specific POPs variables. Independent variables were removed from blocks if they did not significantly contribute to the variance associated with the dependent variables to yield the most parsimonious regression models. Table 4 shows the results of the multiple regression analyses for each motivation variable.

Internal motivation was predicted by parent resource support and a sex by rules interaction. A significant interaction term demonstrates a significant gender difference based on the provision of rules by parents. Internal motivation was higher for boys when they

reported parents enacting more rules, while more rules undermined internal motivation in girls. Overall, internal motivation was higher for adolescents when they reported high levels of resource support from parents.

External motivation was predicted by a sex by involvement and shared time interaction, adolescent control, and parent guidance and setting expectations. Gender differences in this model were related to the level of involvement and shared time between child and parent. Females reported lower levels of extrinsic motivation when parent involvement and shared time was reported high, whereas parent involvement and shared time had no significant bearing on the reported level of external motivation in boys. Regardless of gender, external motivation was lower for adolescents when adolescent control was higher and parent guidance and setting expectations were low.

Amotivation was negatively predicted by resource support and rules from parents. Unlike internal motivation and external motivation, the prediction of amotivation did not vary by gender. Findings suggest that amotivation was at its peak when parents were reported as not providing resources or rules around free-time use. Specifically, amotivation thrived in parenting environments where parents were uninvolved in their child's free time.

5.0 DISCUSSION

Prior to a discussion of the results, the study limitations should be considered and related to the validity of the study's findings. First, the study used data from a cross-sectional survey of ninth-grade students to test relationships that are probably best measured longitudinally. Relying on this single point in time does not adequately reflect the developmental processes at work. These relationships are often reciprocal and influence each other over time, rather than linear paths of influence that operate in isolation (Sharp et al. in press). Furthermore, a mono-operation bias may be at work as the study relies exclusively on data from one source as opposed to multiple forms of data that can be triangulated to verify study observations (Babbie 1986). Another limitation is related to the use of the perceptions of mother's parenting practices. Boys and girls may

differ on how they respond to one parent as opposed to another. Lastly, the sample was a fairly homogeneous convenience sample that might not adequately reflect the experiences of youth from different ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.

One of the most significant contributions of this study is that it categorized parenting behavior into specific types of practices instead of a parenting style, which is commonly used within the literature. The value in these categories is that it provides a level of specificity not found in other studies and applies it to leisure and free time. The study provided interesting findings with regard to how boys and girls experience differences in motivation based on the provision of specific parenting practices.

The provision of rules was related to different levels of internal motivation in girls and boys. For boys, internal motivation was enhanced by the presence of more rules and resource support, while girls experienced high levels of internal motivation when rules were minimized and resource support was high. Compounding this effect is the finding that girls reported higher levels of rules from parents in free time than boys. While there is no mean difference in internal motivation scores, the perceptions of parent's rules enacted in free time for girls had a U-shaped distribution while boys' scores were more reflective of a normal distribution, suggesting that girls could be categorized into a high rules and low rules group. Girls in the high-rules group are those reporting lower levels of intrinsic motivation and higher levels of amotivation, which is a serious concern for this sub-group. Lower instances of internal motivation coupled with higher instances of amotivation can be developmentally disruptive, and keep this group of girls from being involved in structured activities and other opportunities that offer youth the experience of initiative and prolonged engagement (Larson 2000, Ryan & Deci 2000).

The differential effect of parent rules in free time between boys and girls is difficult to interpret. The literature focuses on the impact of too much control and its effect of boredom and rebellion for adolescent boys and girls

alike (Caldwell & Darling 1999). However, this refers specifically to control and not rules in free time. One possible explanation for why more rules benefit boys and are detrimental to girls is related to differences in maturity between the sexes.

Overall, girls mature physically and psychologically faster than boys, and these two indicators of maturity influence subjective maturity (Galambos et al. 1999). Subjective maturity is not always indicative of actual maturity, and may cause problems if youth desire to be mature, but are not. Such adolescents enter a phase of pseudomaturity most often linked with poor stage-development fit (Galambos et al. 2003). However, for those who are mature, the prospect of having to answer to rules might undermine interests and internal motivation because the practices parents enact are not in-line with their child's stage in development. For the same reason, boys might be benefiting from parent rules because these rules protect them from getting in trouble and enhance feelings of competence. The findings underscore the importance of implementing developmentally appropriate approaches when leading and managing youth, and how delicate the balance between being engaged and being disengaged is for youth of this age.

Another possible explanation for why boys and girls are differentially affected by parent rules is related to differences in leisure socialization practices in girls and boys (Shaw 1994). While both sexes acknowledge the existence of specific rules around free-time behavior, girls that perceive more and different rules may feel that they are being oppressed by a parenting environment that is engendering behavior not desirable to girls (Shaw 1994). Ryan & Deci (2000) note that feeling constrained often undermines intrinsic motivation and increases feelings of amotivation, which would explain why girls in the high-rules group would report lower levels of intrinsic motivation. Parents and professionals should take care to understand what youth value and if leadership and parenting practices are enforcing undesirable engendered roles in free time and leisure experiences.

Girls and boys also differed on the effect of parent involvement and shared time on external motivation. In this study, girls reported lower levels of external motivation when parent involvement and shared time was high, and higher levels of external motivation when parent involvement and shared time was low. Parent involvement and shared time had no significant effect on external motivation for boys. This finding supports the widely-acknowledged gender differences between boys and girls in developing a sense of self (Henderson 2005). According to Henderson (2005) boys tend to be task-oriented and allow experiences to drive their sense of self, whereas girls tend to develop their sense of self within the context of relationships. It is quite plausible that girls in this study felt more connected to their mothers, and this connection facilitated regulation through introjection or identification, which are internally regulated, as opposed to externally regulated motivation that seeks rewards or avoids punishment.

Finally, this study supports the idea that amotivation thrives in environments where adults are uninvolved and seemingly uncaring. High levels of amotivation were associated with a lack of resource support and rules in free time, suggesting that children from homes where parents take little interest or provide little direction are most at-risk for action based on amotivation. This generally negative environment does not allow for the compulsion to act. Amotivation results from feelings of incompetence, lack of control, and unintentional action (Ryan & Deci 2000). Uninvolved and uncaring parents and adults can seriously impact an adolescent's ability to develop into a healthy adult when these environments exist. Ryan and Deci noted that amotivation is a serious detriment to personal well being. Studies have shown that highly amotivated youth were less likely to be involved in structured activities and demonstrate initiative, which are theorized to significantly impact adolescents as they become adults (Hutchinson et al. 2002, Watts 2004). Professionals who work with families, and particularly youth, should be attuned to practices that lead to this motivational disposition.

7.0 CITATIONS

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