The Indulgent Parenting Style and Developmental Outcomes in South European and Latin American Countries

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Parenting Styles, Parenting Practices and Their Relation to the Child's Psychosocial Adjustment: The Two-Dimensional Model of Parental Socialization

During the last decades research has demonstrated the influence of parenting socialization on the psychosocial adjustment of their children (Becoña et al. 2012; Fontaine et al. 1994; Gavazzi 2011; Levine and Munsch 2010; Maccoby and Martin 1983). Traditionally, the relationships between parental styles and children's adjustment have been studied following the two-dimensional model of parental socialization (e.g., Maccoby and Martin 1983), in which the dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness, also called acceptance/involvement and strictness/imposition (Lamborn et al. 1991; Steinberg et al. 1994), were theoretically orthogonal (Darling and Steinberg 1993; Maccoby and Martin 1983). Earlier scholars used other labels such as acceptance (Symonds 1939), assurance (Baldwin 1955), warmth (Becker 1964; Sears et al. 1957) or love (Schaefer 1959), that have similar meanings to acceptance/involvement. Labels such as domination, hostility, inflexibility, control or restriction were used in earlier research with similar meanings to strictness/imposition (Baldwin 1955; Becker 1964; Schaefer 1959; Sears et al. 1957; Symonds 1939). As Steinberg noted, "responsiveness was often operationalized using measures of parental warmth and acceptance, while demandingness came to be defined with respect to parental firmness" (Steinberg 2005, p. 71). These two key

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parenting dimensions reflect two distinctive and unrelated (i.e., orthogonal) consistent patterns of parenting behavior in the socialization process (Darling and Steinberg 1993; García et al. 1994). Scholars have stressed the importance of combining the two major dimensions of this parental socialization model in order to analyse accurately their relationships to children's psychosocial adjustment (see Lamborn et al. 1991; Maccoby and Martin 1983; Steinberg et al. 1994). Thus, from the confluence of these two cardinal dimensions, four seminal parenting styles have been defined: *Authoritative*: high levels of acceptance/involvement and strictness/imposition; *Indulgent*: high levels of acceptance/involvement but low levels of strictness/imposition; *Authoritarian*: low levels of acceptance/involvement but high levels of strictness/imposition; and *Neglectful*: low levels of acceptance/involvement and strictness/imposition (Lamborn et al. 1991; Maccoby and Martin 1983; Steinberg et al. 1994; Steinberg 2005).

Parenting styles, the parental practices that characterized each style, and their relations to children's psychosocial adjustment, has been traditionally one of the most central approaches in the study of parent-child relationships (Darling and Steinberg 1993; Lamborn et al. 1991; Maccoby and Martin 1983). In fact, parenting styles remain a standard in developmental psychology curricula (Berns 2011; Gavazzi 2011; Levine and Munsch 2010; Sigelman and Rider 2012; Weiten et al. 2012; White and Schnurr 2012). The parenting styles approach, which includes global long-time parenting characteristics, allows us to integrate and organized specific parenting practices better. Parenting styles were developed initially as a heuristic device to describe the parenting background. To the extent that this background was accurately captured by measures of parenting styles, analyses using this wider perspective construct had clearly more advantages in analyzing parents' influence on children's psychosocial adjustment than analyses based on specific and isolated parenting practices (Darling and Steinberg 1993; Maccoby and Martin 1983; Symonds 1939).

Measuring Parenting Styles Across Cultures

Scholars have used very different instruments to measure parenting styles constructs. One of the instruments more widely used in South European and Latin American countries, the Parental Socialization Scale ESPA29 (Musitu and García 2001) was specifically developed to measure socialization styles from a contextual (Darling and Steinberg 1993) and situational (Smetana 1995) perspective. In this instrument, children report the frequency of several parental practices (father's and mother's practices are asked about separately in different situations). Twenty-nine situations are assessed: 13 of them refer to adolescents' compliance situations (e.g., "If I respect the schedules set at home") and 16 refer to adolescents' noncompliance situations (e.g., "If I don't study or I don't want to do my homework from school"). In each of the 13 compliance situations, children had to rate the parenting practices of warmth ("he/she shows affection") and indifference ("he/she seems indifferent"). In each of

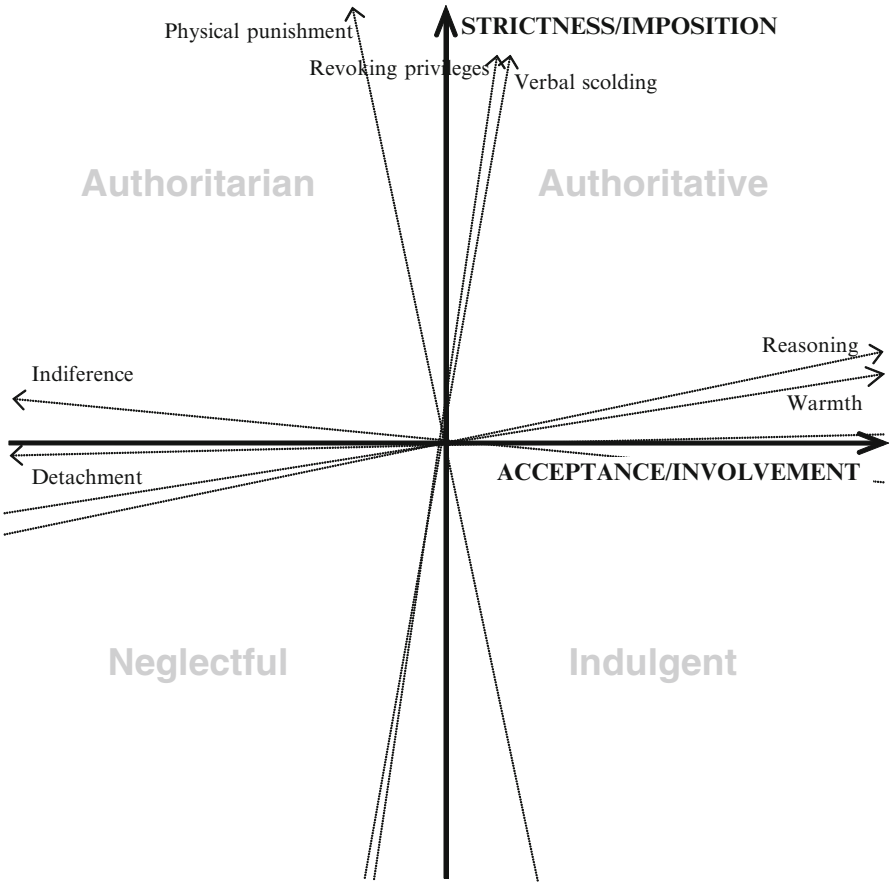

Fig. 1 Representation in a bidimensional space of correlations between parenting practices and the two socialization dimensions from the ESPA29 (Musitu and García 2001)

the 16 noncompliance situations, they had to rate the parenting practices on reasoning ("he/she talks to me"), detachment ("it's the same to him/her"), verbal scolding ("he/she scolds me"), physical punishment ("he/she spanks me"), and revoking privileges ("he/she takes something away from me"). In total, there are 212 responses from the child, 106 given for each parent. The score for the acceptance/involvement scale is obtained by averaging the responses to the subscales of warmth, reasoning, indifference and detachment for the mother and father (the subscales of the last two practices are inverted as they are inversely related to the dimension). The score for the strictness/imposition scale is calculated by averaging the responses to the subscales of revoking privileges, verbal scolding, and physical punishment for the mother and father. Higher scores represent a greater sense of acceptance/involvement and strictness/imposition (see Fig. 1).

To conduct their analyses, researchers usually merged adolescents' ratings of fathers' and mothers' parenting practices in a family score (e.g., Lamborn et al. 1991; Steinberg et al. 1994). With the ESPA29 questionnaire, researchers used the family score rather than fathers' and mothers' scores separately, because the normed study (Musitu and García 2001), as well as later studies using the ESPA29 questionnaire with Spanish samples, reported high correlations between fathers' and mothers' parenting practices and styles (Martínez et al. 2011, 2012). Although the ESPA29 scales were normed separately by parent sex and adolescent sex and age, the studies with Spanish and Brazilian samples of ESPA29 confirmed that the factorial structure was invariant between parent sexes, adolescent ages, and adolescent sexes. Finally, through the two dimensions of parental conduct, parents can be classified into the four parental socialization typologies (authoritative, indulgent, authoritarian, or neglectful) by dichotomizing (Lamborn et al. 1991; Steinberg et al. 1994) the scores for the family (or mother and father separately) of the acceptance/involvement and strictness/imposition dimensions either at the tertile (García and Gracia 2009; Musitu and García 2004) or at the median (Chao 2001; Kremers et al. 2003; García and Gracia 2010). As can be seen in Fig. 1, empirical studies report that the two parenting dimensions (acceptance/involvement and strictness/imposition) were practically orthogonal (i.e., mutually independent) and the distribution of the four parenting style homogeneous (Gracia et al. 2012).

Another well-known parenting style measure used is the Authoritative Parenting Measure (APM, Lamborn et al. 1991; Steinberg et al. 1992). This instrument measures three parenting dimensions: acceptance/involvement, psychological autonomy granting, and behavioral control. These scales reflect the three major dimensions of authoritative parenting, similar to those proposed by Baumrind (1991), and have been applied in different studies to form the two-dimensional model (e.g., Chao 2001; Kremers et al. 2003; Lamborn et al. 1991; Steinberg et al. 1994). The involvement/acceptance scale contains nine items and looks at the degree to which adolescents perceive their parents as responsive, caring, and involved (e.g. "I can count on my parents to help me out if I have some kind of problem"). The psychological autonomy granting scale contains nine items which assess the degree to which parents use non-coercive and democratic discipline, allowing for an adolescent's expression of their individuality (e.g., reverse scored, "My parents say that you shouldn't argue with adults"). The strictness/supervision scale contains six items and measures the degree to which parents regulate and monitor adolescent behavior and whereabouts (e.g., "How much do your parents try to know…where you go out at night/ Where you are most afternoons after school?"). Another two items indicated how late the teenager was allowed out on school nights and Friday/Saturday nights, the answers being 1 (*I am not allowed out*), 2 (*before 8:00*), 3 (*8:00 to 8:59*), to 6 (*11:00 or later*), and 7 (*as late as I want*).

Another widely used parental socialization measure is the S(hort)-EMBU. The S(hort)-EMBU is a 23-item reliable and factorial valid equivalent (Arrindell et al. 1999) of the original 81-item EMBU (Perris et al. 1980). It measures Rejection ("My parents criticized me and told me how lazy and useless I was in front of others"), Emotional Warmth ("I felt that warmth and tenderness existed between me and my

parents"), and (Over)-Protection ("When I came home, I then had to account for what I had been doing, to my parents"). The short version of the EMBU has been demonstrated to be valid and reliable in several countries and languages (Spanish version: Arrindell et al. 2005).

In socialization studies, a specific measure of psychological control is commonly used: the Psychological Control Scale – Youth Self-Report (PCS-YSR), adapted by Barber (1996) from the Schaefer (1965) original Child's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (CRPBI). This scale was constructed to measure parental controlling behavior that intrudes into the psychological and emotional development of the child through use of parenting practices such as guilt induction, withdrawal of love, or shaming (Barber 1996). The questionnaire consisted of 8 items. There was a father version, "My father always tries to change my feelings and thoughts", and another for the mother, "My mother often interrupts me".

Studies conducted in Spain (Gracia et al. 2007, 2010) have analyzed the relationships between the ESPA29 dimensions and the parenting dimensions measured by the above parenting questionnaires: Authoritative Parenting Measure, S(hort)-EMBU, and Psychological Control Scale. As can be seen in Fig. 2, the relations between the parenting dimensions of these three questionnaires indicated a positive relationship between the three measures of acceptance/involvement (the common acceptance/involvement dimensions from the ESPA29 and the APM, and the Emotional Warmth dimension of S-EMBU). The behavioral/control scale of the APM is a parenting practice associated with the authoritative style (a positive relation with strictness/imposition and acceptance involvement), and does not appear to be a distinct measure of parenting strictness/imposition. The Over-protection dimension of the S-EMBU is also related to the strictness/imposition dimension of the ESPA29. Psychological control and rejection are both similar measures, both related with low levels of acceptance/involvement and high levels of strictness/imposition, which are characteristic of the authoritarian parenting style. Interestingly, psychological autonomy granting is positively related to acceptance/involvement, but negatively related to strictness/imposition, just in the opposite end of the rejection and psychological control. This is a clear difference when compared to other results reported in research conducted with American samples (see Silk et al. 2003, p. 122), and this relationship indicates that in Spain high psychological autonomy granting is clearly related to indulgent parenting.

Finally, another widely used parenting measure in cross-cultural research has been the Warmth/Affection Scale (WAS, Rohner et al. 1978). Adolescents respond to the two versions of the WAS, one assessing perceptions of their fathers (or primary male caregivers), and one assessing perceptions of their mothers (or primary female caregivers). The WAS has been used in approximately 300 studies within the United States and internationally in the past two decades (see Rohner and Khaleque 2003), including Spain (e.g., Lila et al. 2007; Lila and Gracia 2005). The WAS scale is a reliable measure of the extent to which adolescents perceive their parents as loving, responsive, and involved. Some sample items are, "Tries to help me when I am scared or upset," and "Talks to me about our plans and listens to what I have to say". Parental strictness/imposition has been measured using the Parental Control Scale

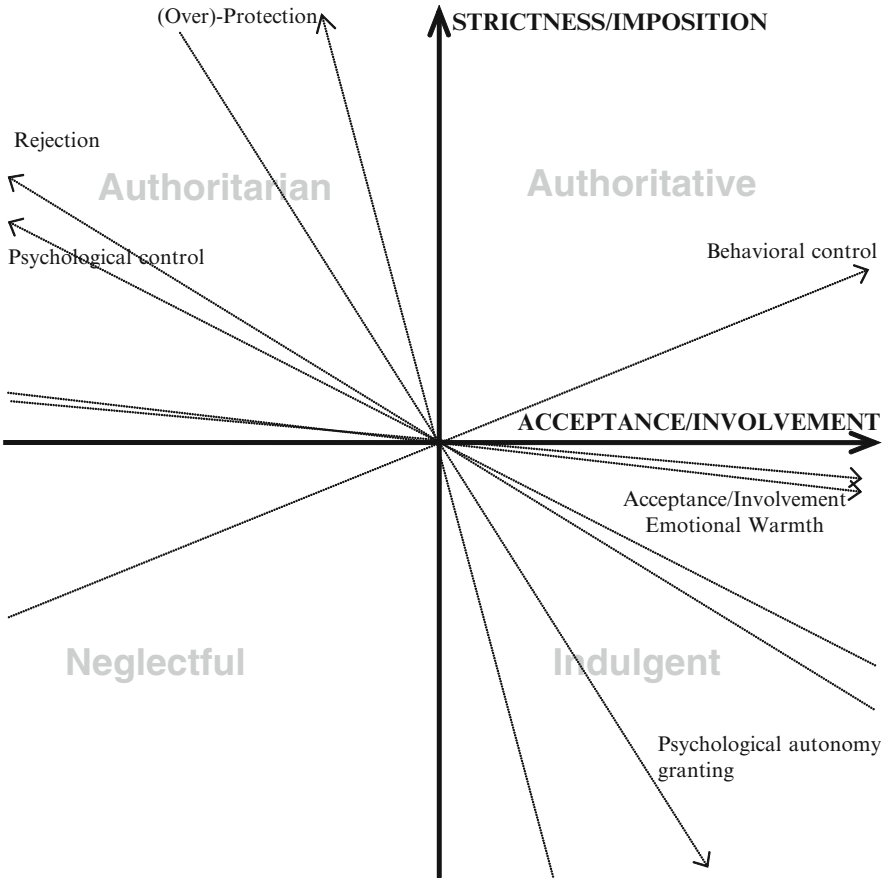

Fig. 2 Representation in a bidimensional space of correlations between the Acceptance/Involvement and Strictness/Imposition dimensions from the ESPA29, and parenting measures from the S(hort)-EMBU (Emotional Warmth, Rejection, and (Over)-Protection), the Psychological Control, and the Authoritative Parenting Measure (Acceptance/Involvement, Psychological Autonomy Granting, and Behavioral Control)

(PCS, Rohner 1989; Rohner and Khaleque 2003). Adolescents responded to both the mother and the father versions of the PCS. The PCS scale has been used across five culturally distinct populations (Rohner and Khaleque 2003). The PCS scale assesses the extent to which an adolescent perceives strict parental control of his/her behavior. Some sample items are, "Tells me exactly what time to be home when I go out," and "Gives me certain jobs to do and will not let me do anything else until they are done". Both parenting indexes measured family parenting behavior (Lamborn et al. 1991; Steinberg et al. 1994) so that higher scores represent a greater sense of parental warmth and parental strictness (Rohner and Khaleque 2003). Also, as can be observed in Fig. 3, empirical studies indicated that the two parenting dimensions (Warmth/Affection and Parental Control) are practically orthogonal and

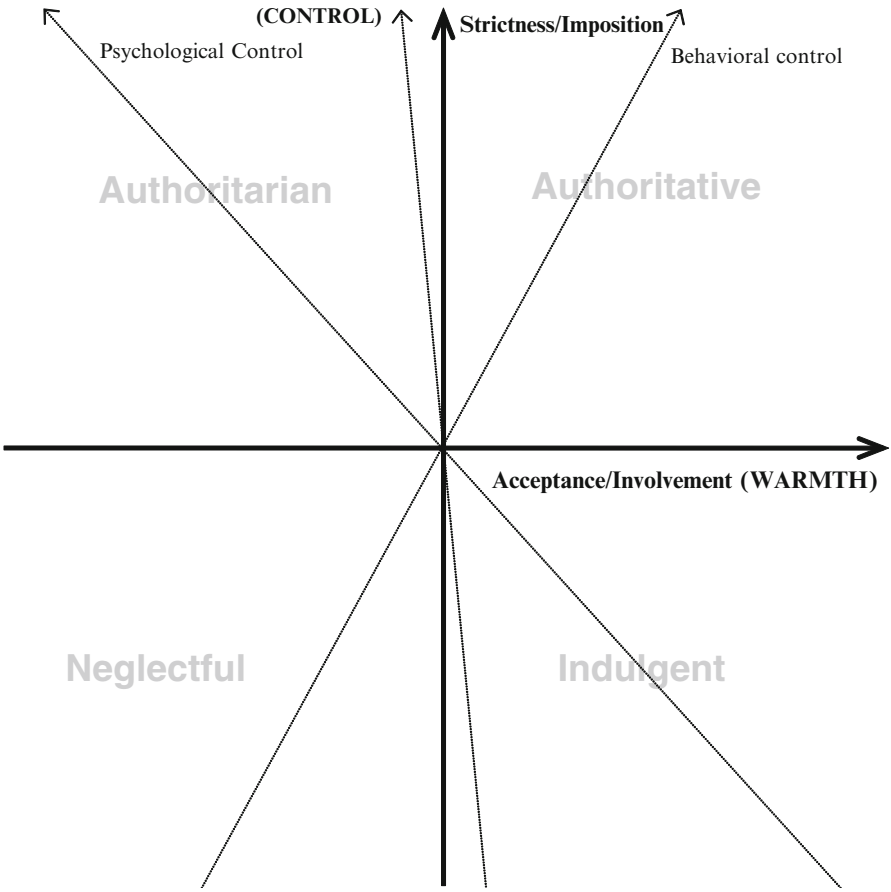

Fig. 3 Representation in a bidimensional space of correlations between the Warmth dimension and other parenting practices (Delgado et al. 2007: Behavioral Control and Psychological Control; García and Gracia 2009: Control)

the distribution of the four parenting style practically homogeneous. The Spanish adaptation of the psychological control measure is negatively related to the acceptance/involvement dimension and positively related to the strictness/imposition, and that the Spanish adaptation of the behavioral control is positively related to acceptance/involvement and to strictness/imposition (Delgado et al. 2007).

Parenting Styles and Demographic Variations

The main aim of parenting studies is to establish which parenting style is associated with optimum children's and adolescents' outcomes. Scholars compare, for example, mean scores on key adolescent developmental outcomes from different parenting styles; studies analyzing differences between adolescents in many outcomes such as

drug use, self-esteem, sexism prejudices, depression, education, conduct problems, religiousness, or fruit consuming.[1]

Although some empirical studies have described differences in the degree to which some parenting practices were used, varying, for example, between fathers and mothers (Kazemi et al. 2010; Martínez et al. 2011, 2012), as well as depending on children's age and sex (Aunola et al. 2000; Barton and Kirtley 2012; Gracia et al. 2012; López-Jáuregui and Oliden 2009), empirical research has demonstrated that these differences did not challenge the perceived parenting style for sons and daughters, for different ages, or for mothers and fathers (Amato and Fowler 2002; García and Gracia 2009, 2010; Steinberg et al. 1994; Turkel and Tezer 2008).

Parenting Styles and Optimum Children's and Adolescents' Outcomes

Regarding relationships between parenting styles and children's psychosocial adjustment, since the early studies carried out by Baumrind (1967, 1971) with middle-class American families showed clearly that the authoritative parenting style was related to children's better psychosocial adjustment. Furthermore, research conducted in Anglo-Saxon contexts continues to support the idea that the authoritative style is the optimum parenting style. For example, children from authoritative families obtained better academic performance, better psychological competence, better use of adaptive strategies, and fewer behavior problems and drug use, when compared to other parenting styles (Aunola et al. 2000; Bahr and Hoffmann 2010; Cohen and Rice 1997; Montgomery et al. 2008; Spera 2005; Steinberg et al. 1989). Consistent with these results, several studies concluded that, while the authoritative was the optimal parenting style, the neglectful style was associated with poorer psychosocial adjustment of children (Aunola et al. 2000; Montgomery et al. 2008). Children from indulgent and authoritarian families were in an intermediate position, between the best adjustment from authoritative parents and the worst one from neglectful families (Lamborn et al. 1991; Radziszewska et al. 1996).

Cultural and Ethnic Differences Challenging the Optimum Parenting Style

Empirical research has repeatedly demonstrated that cultural and ethnic differences challenge the ideal parenting style. In the scientific literature studies carried out in the US with minority ethnic groups and in different countries which questioned the

[1] See studies by Alonso-Geta 2012; Alsheikh et al. 2010; Bastaits et al. 2012; Benchaya et al. 2011; Cerdá et al. 2010; De la Torre et al. 2011; Espino 2013; Garaigordobil and Aliri 2012; Gracia et al. 2010; Kovacs and Piko 2010; Kremers et al. 2003; Liem et al. 2010; Puskar et al. 2010.

idea that the authoritative parenting style was always associated with the best psychosocial adjustment. They suggested that the authoritarian style (characterized by low levels of acceptance/involvement and high levels of strictness/imposition) was also an adequate parenting style (Darling and Steinberg 1993; Steinberg et al. 1992, 1994). For example, Chao (2001) found that Chinese American adolescents from authoritarian families obtained better scores in academic achievement than adolescents from authoritative families, although that is not necessarily an indication of better parenting. Dwairy and Achoui (2006) found that the authoritarian style was not associated with mental health problems in Arab societies (Dwairy and Menshar 2006; Dwairy et al. 2006a, b, c).

On the other hand, results from studies in other cultural contexts also supported the idea that the authoritative style was not always associated with the best results in children and adolescents. The parenting style characterized by high levels of acceptance/involvement and low levels of strictness/imposition, the indulgent style, was related to better psychosocial adjustment of adolescents or, at least indistinguishable from the authoritative style (Philippines: Hindin 2005; Germany: Wolfradt et al. 2003; Italy: Marchetti 1997; Mexico: Villalobos et al. 2004; Brazil: Martínez and García 2008; Martínez et al. 2007; Spain: Alonso-Geta 2012; De la Torre et al. 2011; García and Gracia 2009, 2010). These studies found that adolescents from indulgent families had the same or better scores than adolescents from authoritative families on various aspects of psychosocial adjustment. For example, research on adolescents in Brazil found that those who scored highest on self-esteem measures were those from indulgent families (Martínez and García 2008; Martínez et al. 2007). In Spain, García and Gracia (2010) found that adolescents whose parents were indulgent obtained better scores in different indicators of psychological adjustment, such as emotional stability and positive worldview, than those from authoritative families.

These discrepancies in the results seem to show the influence of culture on the relationship between parental socialization and psychosocial adjustment in adolescence, suggesting that the relationship between parenting styles and adolescent adjustment and wellbeing varies depending on the cultural context (Chao 1994; Dwairy and Achoui 2006; García and Gracia 2009, 2010; Kazemi et al. 2010). Therefore, the optimal parenting style will depend on the cultural environment in which parent-child relationships would normally develop (Berns 2011; Gavazzi 2011; Sigelman and Rider 2012; Weiten et al. 2012; White and Schnurr 2012). In studies carried on collectivist cultures like Asian and Arab societies, children perceive the individual self as part of the family self. In these societies, for parents and children the relationship between generations is expected to be vertical and hierarchical, assuming strictness and imposition as a parental responsibility. Authoritarian practices have a positive impact because in those contexts strict discipline is perceived as beneficial for the children, and its absence would be regarded as a lack of supervision and care (Dwairy et al. 2006c; Grusec et al. 1997; Martínez and García 2008). On the other hand, studies in Spain and Brazil suggest that in horizontal collectivist cultures, as South American countries or South European countries, the self is conceptualized as part of a larger group (the family), but that group is organized on an egalitarian, rather than a hierarchical basis (García and Gracia

2009, 2010; Martínez and García 2007, 2008; White and Schnurr 2012). In the horizontal collectivist cultures the egalitarian relations are emphasized and more attention is placed on the use of affection, acceptance, and involvement in children' socialization. Furthermore, in these cultures strictness and firm control in the socialization practices, seems to be perceived in a negative way (García and Gracia 2009; Martínez and García 2008; Rudy and Grusec 2001).

Indulgent Parenting and South European and Latin American Countries

Emergent research using the two-dimensional four-typology model of parental socialization (Maccoby and Martin 1983) with South European and Latin American adolescents, have found that the indulgent style, characterized by high levels of acceptance/involvement and low levels of strictness/imposition, was related to better psychosocial adjustment or, at the least it is indistinguishable from authoritative parenting (Alonso-Geta 2012; García and Gracia 2009, 2010; Garaigordobil and Aliri 2012; Gracia et al. 2010, 2012; Martínez and García 2007, 2008). In general the results of these studies suggest that adolescents from indulgent families scored better than those from authoritative families on the outcomes analyzed. Although a large number of studies in Anglo-Saxon contexts suggested that the authoritative style, characterized by high levels of acceptance/involvement and strictness/imposition, was always associated with better psychosocial adjustment of children, results from these new studies support the idea that the indulgent style is the optimum parenting style in South European and Latin American countries (Aunola et al. 2000; Bahr and Hoffmann 2010; Lamborn et al. 1991; Montgomery et al. 2008).

These results confirm previous research in other cultural contexts in which adolescents from indulgent families obtained equal, or even better scores in the different indicators of psychosocial adjustment than adolescents from authoritative families (Kazemi et al. 2010; García and Gracia 2009, 2010). Hence, the results from these emergent studies add to empirical research that questioned the idea that the authoritative style is always related to the best psychosocial adjustment of adolescents (Lamborn et al. 1991; Maccoby and Martin 1983; Steinberg et al. 1989). Indulgent parents communicate well with their children, they often use reasoning rather than other disciplinary strategies to get their compliance, and they encourage dialogue to reach an agreement with their children. In this, indulgent parents are similar to authoritative parents. However, indulgent parents tend not to use coercion or imposition when their children misbehave. Indulgent parents also behave in a more symmetrical way with their children than authoritative parents. They act with their children as if they were mature people able to regulate their behavior for themselves, and reason with their children about the consequences that have their negative behaviors. The indulgent parent prototype is one that behaves in an affectionate manner, accepting their children's impulses, desires, and actions. They like to share the home decision making with their children, explaining the family rules. They let children regulate their activities as much as possible, helping them with

explanations and reasoning, avoiding the use of any coercive control or imposition. They do not force their children to blindly obey guidelines just because the parents are the authority figures.

The indulgent and authoritative parental socialization styles are both characterized by high levels of acceptance/involvement. However, these new results add to the research support the importance of using practices such as parental warmth and bidirectional communication (Alonso-Geta 2012; García and Gracia 2009, 2010; de la Torre et al. 2011). Nevertheless, only high levels of parental strictness characterize the authoritative style. Although the strictness dimension is considered an important component in some cultures, even more than warmth (Chao 1994, 2001), or along with warmth (Steinberg et al. 1994; Baumrind 1971), these studies found no relationship between high strictness/imposition and better psychosocial adjustment of South European and Latin American adolescents. A possible explanation may be that in the South European and Latin American cultures, considered as horizontal collectivist, even if the children are very connected with their families, the relationship among different generations is expected to be more egalitarian than in vertical collectivist cultures (such as the Asian or Arabic) or individualistic (North American). In this sense, the use of strictness, punishment, imposition and control in South European and Latin American cultures, is perceived by children as meddling and coercive, and not as a component of care and responsibility (Dwairy et al. 2006c; García and Gracia 2009, 2010; Martínez and García 2007, 2008; White and Schnurr 2012). In the South European and Latin American cultures, considering the four parental styles, adolescents from indulgent families, characterized by high acceptance/involvement and low strictness/imposition, always had better outcomes than adolescents from authoritative families. So this suggests that high levels of parental strictness are not related to better adjustment of adolescents in the South European and Latin American cultures. Moreover, adolescents from authoritarian families (characterized by low acceptance/involvement and high strictness/imposition) and those from neglectful families (characterized by low acceptance/involvement and strictness/imposition) obtained the lowest scores in outcomes. These results also confirm previous research that concluded that authoritarian and neglectful parental styles were associated with worse psychosocial adjustment in adolescents (Lamborn et al. 1991; Martínez and García 2007). The indulgent style, characterized by high acceptance/involvement and low strictness/imposition, is the optimum parental style for the South European and Latin American adolescents, and that this relationship is shaped by the cultural context where that socialization takes place.

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