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# Contextual, Cognitive, and Adolescent Factors Associated with Parenting in Adolescence

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*In this study, we examined predictors of parenting during adolescence from three domains: the contextual (i.e., stress, support, marital satisfaction), social-cognitive (i.e., beliefs about adolescence), and child (difficulty). Fifty-three mothers and 38 fathers of 13–18 year olds were interviewed and rated on three dimensions of parenting—involvement, autonomy support, and structure. Parents completed questionnaires assessing predictor variables. Results indicated that, for mothers, higher numbers of recent stressful events were associated with less provision of structure and more control. For fathers, relations between views of adolescence and parenting were in evidence; while for both mothers and fathers strong relations between adolescent difficulty and parenting emerged. Relations between perceived difficulty of adolescent and parenting were more apparent in "conducive" than "nonconducive" contexts. The differential results for mothers and fathers are interpreted in terms of mothers' greater involvement and less role latitude than fathers. Parents' resources, experience, and expectations are considered in understanding why predictors might be associated with parenting variables.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Consistent with current interest in an ecological model and the effects of context on behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), there has been recent attention in the parenting literature to why parents parent the way they do or predictors of parenting (Belsky, 1984). No longer seen as coincident with personality or static, parenting is now conceptualized as a result of the interplay between characteristics of the parent, the child, and the family's circumstances.

While there has been some research on predictors of parenting, much of it focuses on infants and young children, and there has been less directed toward older children and adolescents. Parents and family systems interact differently with the adolescent than the younger child. Adolescence is a stressful period for parents and adolescents with increased conflict (Montemayor, 1982) and reorganization and realignment of family ties (Hill, 1980). Given the unique nature of this developmental period, it is not surprising that researchers have stressed the need for attention devoted specifically to factors that influence the parenting of adolescents (Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Feldman and Elliott, 1990).

Much of the research on predictors of parenting has fallen into one of three areas: aspects of the parents' *context*, which includes family circumstances such as levels of stress, support, and family resources (Belsky, 1984); the *social-cognitive*, which includes parents' beliefs about development (Goodnow, 1984; Miller, 1988); and characteristics of the *child*, usually involving temperamental qualities such as difficulty. In this study, factors from each of these domains are examined in relation to parenting styles during adolescence.

Parenting does not exist in a vacuum and it makes intuitive sense that family circumstances, available resources, and relationships outside of that with the child would influence parenting. Parenting requires time and energy and factors that interfere with the ability to devote these resources should undermine parenting. Several studies, for example, have linked economic pressure with inconsistent and nonnurturant parenting (e.g., Elder *et al.*, 1985) and stressful family circumstances with disrupted parenting (Patterson *et al.*, 1989). With adolescents, Conger *et al.* (1992) demonstrated that stress may lead to problems in adult functioning that result in less involved and nurturant child rearing. Social support has been linked to positive parenting, including less restrictiveness and more nurturance (Crnic *et al.*, 1983; Weinraub and Wolf, 1983). Marital satisfaction and turmoil affect the parent–child relationship. For example, higher interspousal hostility has been linked to frequent use of punishment (Dielman *et al.*, 1977). Similarly, various researchers have shown that conflicts between parents

influence adolescents through disruptions in parenting (Fauber *et al.*, 1990; Simons *et al.*, 1990). Such studies support the importance of these contextual factors in understanding the determinants of parenting.

The social-cognitive perspective has only recently been applied to the study of parenting (Miller, 1988). From this perspective, parents' behaviors are seen as influenced by their own thoughts and beliefs about the child's development (Goodnow, 1984). For example, Goodnow (1984) and Sigel (1982) found that parents' ideas about how children learn were related to their behavior in a task situation. For parents of adolescents, beliefs about the period of adolescence may be especially important given the stereotypical portrayal of adolescents as troubled, in turmoil, and under the influence of hormones (Offer *et al.*, 1981). Recently, Buchanan *et al.* (1990) developed a conceptualization and measure of adults' beliefs about adolescence. Their work suggests that, while parents believe adolescence is difficult, they also believe adults can have an impact on them. Further, parents who believed the transition to adolescence would be more difficult before the transition described their own adolescents as more difficult *after* the transition, controlling for teachers' reports of adolescents' behavior (Miller *et al.*, 1987).

Parents' beliefs about adolescence may influence the way they interact with their own adolescents in several ways. First, parents who believe adolescence is difficult may expect such behaviors from their children and act to counteract them (Dix and Grusec, 1985; Parsons *et al.*, 1982) or interpret ambiguous behaviors as evidence for their beliefs and justifications for their actions (Eccles, 1992; Miller *et al.*, 1987). Parents' beliefs about adolescence may also be formed on the basis of their own children and thus may be related to parenting because the children pull for different behaviors from them, though this hypothesis has not been supported in other studies (Goodnow, 1988). Because in this study we include both general beliefs about adolescence, which are likely to be culturally transmitted (Goodnow, 1984), and beliefs about their own adolescents' difficulty, the differential relations of these variables to parenting can provide information about this issue.

A third area, not unrelated to the first two, includes characteristics of the adolescents themselves. Several theorists have stressed the idea that children create their own contexts (Bell, 1968) and that parents use their children's behavior as a regulator of their own actions, tailoring parenting efforts to them (Maccoby *et al.*, 1984). Baumrind (1971) suggested that temperamental characteristics (or early parenting) may result in a child who is more or less open to parenting practices. Adolescents perceived as more difficult to socialize may receive more control (Eccles, 1992; Ryan and Grolnick, 1986). This control is likely to be responded to negatively and

to result in interactions with parents that are less satisfying and more aversive, causing parents to withdraw from such interactions.

Within the literature on child characteristics, one controversial question is how to measure child difficulty. Research has shown, for example, that parent ratings reflect characteristics not only of the child but of the parent (e.g., Forehand *et al.*, 1986). In this study, we take the view that most relevant to parenting are parents' perceptions of their adolescents' behavior since this is the data they use to regulate their parenting behavior. Thus, difficulty is measured through mothers' and fathers' ratings.

Parenting subsumes a myriad of issues, including attitudes of parents as well as behaviors. One limitation of much of the literature on predictors of parenting is the lack of a theoretical framework such that hypotheses about how specific factors relate to specific aspects of parenting could be made. In this study, we use a motivational conceptualization of parenting that includes three dimensions: autonomy support to control, involvement, and structure (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989; Grolnick *et al.*, 1991).

The first dimension, support for autonomy, is an important one in adolescence as adolescents push for a more active role in the family (Steinberg, 1990). How parents negotiate this need may be a crucial determinant of adolescent functioning. Psychological autonomy provided by parents, a variable relevant to autonomy support, has been linked to adolescents' school grades (Steinberg *et al.*, 1989), and adolescents' participation in decision making is associated with intrinsic motivation and self-esteem (Eccles, 1992; Flanagan, 1989). In this study, autonomy support to control is defined as the degree to which parents encourage children to initiate and make their own choices rather than apply pressure and inducements to control the children's behavior. Autonomy support, defined in this way, was positively associated with children's self-regulation, and school performance and negatively associated with behavior problems (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989).

The second dimension, positive involvement, typically includes parents' interest in the child's activities, spending time with children, and showing love and affection (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Positive involvement is closely related to variables such as acceptance and warmth, which have been associated with positive child outcomes across many samples and ages (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). In this study, involvement is defined as the degree to which parents are interested in, knowledgeable about, and spend time relating to their children concerning activities and experiences such as with schoolwork and friends. Involvement, defined in this way, has been found to be positively associated with children's achievement and negatively correlated with problem behavior (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989).

The final dimension, structure, we define as the extent to which parents provide clear and consistent guidelines, expectations, and rules for child behaviors, without respect to the style in which they are promoted (Grolnick and Ryan, 1989). This variable is closely related to monitoring, which has been found to be negatively associated with drug use, symptomatology (Small, 1988), and school and conduct problems (Patterson and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984), and demandingness, which is positively associated with variables linked to impulse control and social responsibility (Steinberg *et al.*, 1989).

In this study, these three dimensions of parenting—autonomy support, involvement, and structure—were assessed using an interview and rating procedure adapted from that used by Grolnick and Ryan (1989) with elementary age children. The procedure was modified by including domains appropriate to adolescents such as dating and curfew. The advantages of using an interview/rating procedure are several. First, the procedure does not rely solely on self-report questionnaires. In addition, the interview allowed for an assessment of practices across various areas (Youniss and Smollar, 1985). However, since actual behavior of parents was not observed in this study, our parenting variables have a subjective and possibly attitudinal component.

Based on the work of Conger and others (e.g., Conger *et al.*, 1992), we predict that, since stressful events require parents' resources, they will undermine parent involvement and structure. Social support, on the other hand, should increase parental resources and be positively associated with involvement and structure. Further, given the established relations between stressful circumstances and harsh parenting (e.g., Simons *et al.*, 1991), it was expected that parents who are high in stress, low in social support, and low in marital satisfaction would be more controlling with their adolescents. Given the greater importance of marital relative to other social relationships for parenting (Belsky, 1984), relations between marital satisfaction and parenting were expected to be stronger than those for social support.

The ways in which contextual variables relate to parenting in mothers vs. fathers is also of interest given the somewhat different roles mothers and fathers play in the family (Youniss and Smollar, 1985). Mothers are more responsible for the day-to-day activities of adolescents and experience more conflict with them (Montemayor, 1982). Given the greater daily involvement of mothers, it is conceivable that stress and support will be more likely to be associated with parenting for mothers relative to fathers. Further, since mothers are most likely to monitor adolescents' behavior (Youniss and Smollar, 1985), we predict stronger relations between predictor variables and structure for mothers than for fathers.

We predict relations between views of adolescence and autonomy support. If adolescence is seen as a time of great turmoil, the parent might be expected to behave in a controlling manner to "reign in" the adolescent. Given their lower levels of experience with adolescents, fathers' ways of parenting may be more likely to be influenced by their stereotyped views of adolescence (Buchanan *et al.*, 1990).

Finally, we predict relations between adolescent difficulty and all three aspects of parenting for both mothers and fathers. Parents who believe their own adolescent is difficult should engage with them less, resulting in less structure and involvement, and should provide excess control. We expect these relations to be stronger than those between stereotyped beliefs and parenting dimensions (Miller *et al.*, 1987).

In addition to these hypotheses, we were interested in looking at possible transactions among categories of variables. For example, do parents tend to modify their behavior on the basis of their own adolescent more in a "good" context relative to a "bad" context? Such questions are consistent with the idea that parents' ideas and actions may not be straightforwardly related since other issues may mediate these relations (Goodnow, 1988).

## METHODS

### Subjects

Subjects were 53 mothers and 38 fathers from 54 two-parent families including at least one adolescent between the ages of 13 and 18 (in 37 families mothers and fathers participated, in 16 only mother, and in 1 only father). For each family, if there was more than one adolescent in our age range, one was randomly chosen to be the focus of the interview. The target adolescents included 23 boys and 31 girls and were the following ages; 6 thirteen-year-olds, 17 fourteen-year-olds, and 9 fifteen-, 10 sixteen-, 9 seventeen-, and 3 eighteen-year-olds. Families were recruited by sending letters to parents in four schools in a suburban school district and by asking participating families to suggest names of parents in the area with adolescents. Families received $20.00 for participating. Families were distributed across Hollingshead's (1975) categories with 14 (26%) falling into Social Class I, 21 (39%) in II, 17 (31%) in III, and 1 (2%) in each of Classes IV and V. Mean years of education were 13.8 (SD = 2.5) and 14.4 (SD = 2.7) for mothers and fathers, respectively. The mean number of children in the families was 2.5 (SD = 1.1).

## Parent Interview

Parents were interviewed separately in their homes by a two-member team consisting of an interviewer and observer. The interviews were audiotaped for later rating. The structured interview was an adaptation of that used by Grolnick and Ryan (1989) for adolescents. It consisted of a set of open-ended questions for each of five areas; school, friends, dating, curfew, and chores. For each area, the parent was asked how he or she motivates the child, whether he or she has any rules or expectations, and how he or she responds to positive or negative behaviors (e.g., good or poor performance on report card). For each area, the parent was asked to describe the most recent conflict or disagreement he or she had with the adolescent and was asked to relate how it was handled and resolved. Following Youniss and Smollar (1985), it was reasoned that conflicts represent violations of relationship norms and procedures used to resolve these violations reveal the parent's values and behaviors. In addition to the domain-specific questions, the parent was asked to describe the amount of contact he or she has with the adolescent on a typical weekday and weekend, including who is present and what they are doing. The parent also provided a general description of the child and his or her educational and occupational aspirations for the child.

## Interview Ratings

Both interviewer and rater independently rated each parent on eight 5-point scales comprising the three dimensions of parenting. For autonomy support, there were three component scales that reflect values, practices, and decision making, relevant to autonomy (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). Values autonomy concerns the extent to which the parent expresses a value for autonomy and sees its promotion as a goal vs. places preeminent value on obedience and conformity. Autonomy-supportive techniques assesses the degree to which parents use controlling, power-assertive motivational and disciplinary techniques, such as rewards and threats, vs. tend to rely on more autonomy supportive methods such as reasoning and limit setting. Nondirectiveness concerns the extent to which the parent imposes his or her own agenda on the child and allows for few choices vs. includes the child in decision making. For involvement there were also three scales that include aspects of the construct identified by Maccoby and Martin (1983). Knowledge included the parent's awareness of psychological and behavioral characteristics of the child's life. For example, some parents knew the child's preferred friends or school subjects while others did not. Time spent was the amount of time the parent spent with the child in a given week. Included

in this scale were spontaneous and planned activities, time alone with the adolescent, and time with the adolescent and others, though time alone and planned activities were weighted most highly. Finally, affect was rated as the parent's positive vs. negative content and tone in relation to the adolescent during the interview. Finally, there were two component scales for structure. Information concerned whether there were clear rules and expectations for adolescents' behavior. Consistency was rated as the degree to which rules and expectations were consistently applied or promoted.

Reliability for the interview scales was computed using intraclass correlations (Shrout and Fleiss, 1979). For mothers, correlations for seven of the eight scales were in the .8 range. The reliability for the nondirectiveness scale was somewhat lower, .70. For fathers, reliabilities ranged from .70 (autonomy supportive techniques) to .94 (time spent).

Summary scores for each dimension for each parent were computed by averaging the component dimensions. Cronbach's alphas were for mothers and fathers, respectively, autonomy support = .89 and .79 and involvement = .82 and .81. Correlations between the two component dimensions of structure were .69 and .74 for mothers and fathers, respectively.

## Predictor Variables

Following the interview, parents were given a stamped, addressed envelope containing questionnaires concerning stress, support, marital satisfaction, and beliefs about adolescence. Parents were instructed to complete the questionnaires and return them in the envelope.

## Contextual Measures

*Life Experiences Survey* (Sarason *et al.*, 1978). This is a 54-item inventory of positive and negative life events. Respondents in this study identified which of these events have occurred recently (in the last 3 months). Total number of negative and positive events were calculated for each respondent. Sarason *et al.* (1978) report test–retest reliabilities of .53 for positive events and .88 for negative events. Negative life events have been found to be positively correlated with anxiety and personal maladjustment. Both negative and positive events were negatively correlated with college students' grade point averages and were unrelated to measures of social desirability.

*Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors* (Barrera *et al.*, 1981). This 40-item scale assesses the frequency with which respondents are the recipients of supportive actions. Both tangible forms of assistance, such as the provision of goods and services, as well as intangible forms, such as guidance, are in-

cluded. Subjects rated the frequency of each item (e.g., someone "pitched in to help you do something that needed to get done") during the preceding month using a 5-point scale. The authors report high internal consistency (alphas greater than .90) and test–retest reliability ($r$ = .88) and significant relations with other indices of social support including network size.

*Dyadic Adjustment Scale* (Spanier, 1976). This 32-item questionnaire assesses perceptions of marital satisfaction. Items measure agreement between spouses on important issues, satisfaction with demonstrated levels of affection and sexual relations, degree of harmony in the relationship, and the amount of activity shared by spouses. Spanier (1976) reports high reliability (alpha = .96) for the total scale.

### Social-Cognitive Measures

Beliefs about adolescence were measured by the 9-item questionnaire developed by Buchanan *et al.* (1990) for early adolescents. Since the full range of adolescence was covered in this study, items were modified to read adolescents (instead of early adolescents). The questionnaire contains two factors. The first includes five items and assesses the degree to which parents believe adolescence is a difficult stage (e.g., "Adolescence is a difficult time of life for children and their parents"). The second, which contains four items, assesses the degree to which they believe adults can influence adolescents (e.g., "Adolescents are so influenced by their friends that what adults say or do matters very little"). Parents rated their agreement vs. disagreement with each item on 7-point scales. Alphas (Buchanan *et al.*, 1990) were .70 for the difficult stage and .58 for adults can influence subscales.

### Adolescent Difficulty

Parents' reports of the difficulty of their own adolescents were measured by four items developed by Eccles *et al.* (1990) to measure parents' perceptions of the current difficulty of their adolescent children. Parents rate how often statements about their adolescents are true (e.g., "my child is even tempered and not moody"). Cronbach's alphas for the mother and father completed scales were .58 and .69, respectively.

### Other

In addition to questionnaires about predictor variables, parents completed the revised version of the Child Report of Parent Behavior Inventory

(CRPBI), a widely used self-report measure of parents' parenting practices. The scale contains 108 items on three subscales: acceptance, psychological control, and firm control. Alphas for these subscales are reported to be above .80 (Schwarz *et al.*, 1985). This scale was included so that its relations with interview ratings could be evaluated. The three subscales, acceptance, psychological control, and firm control were, respectively, expected to be moderately correlated with involvement, autonomy support, and structure.

## RESULTS

### Parent, Age, and Gender Differences in Interview Ratings

In order to examine possible parent, child age, or child gender differences in parents' scores on the three dimensions, repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with one within factor (parent) and two between factors (child gender and child age divided into three groups—early [13–14], middle [15–16], and late [17–18]) were performed for each dimension. The sample of 37 parents in which both mother and father participated was utilized. While age was included because of possible relations of parenting with increased autonomy and pubertal development (Steinberg, 1990), the number of subjects in each age group was small and this may have precluded an adequate test of relations between age and parenting. For involvement, there were no significant gender, age, or gender by age interactions. However, there was a significant parent by gender interaction ($F[1,35] = 8.12$, $p < .007$), indicating that mothers were more involved with their female relative to their male adolescents ($t = 2.20$, $p < .03$) while fathers did not differentiate by gender. There were no other gender or gender by parent effects, but there was a significant parent effect for autonomy support ($F[1,35] = 4.22$, $p < .05$), with fathers more autonomy supportive than mothers. There were also two nonsignificant trends, with mothers more involved ($F[1,35] = 2.30$, $p < .14$) and higher in provision of structure ($F[1,35] = 2.57$, $p < .12$) relative to fathers. Table I presents means and standard deviations of interview dimensions for mothers and fathers.

Correlations among interview rated dimensions were next computed. The full sample of mothers ($N = 53$) was utilized in this and all subsequent analyses given that there were no differences between mothers in this larger sample and that of mothers whose husbands participated ($N = 37$) on any predictor or parenting variable. Results indicate significant relations between involvement and autonomy support for mothers ($r = .52$, $p < .001$) and fathers ($r = .55$, $p < .001$). For fathers, there was also a positive relation between involvement and structure ($r = .50$, $p < .01$), though this

Table I. Means and Standard Deviations (in Parentheses) of Interview Dimensions Across and Within Gender

| | Full Sample | Boys | Girls |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mother involvement | 3.28 (.88) | 2.97 (.99) | 3.51 (.73) |
| Mother autonomy support | 2.76 (.98) | 2.71 (.95) | 2.80 (1.02) |
| Mother structure | 3.39 (1.04) | 3.17 (1.16) | 3.57 (.93) |
| Father involvement | 3.00 (.98) | 3.12 (1.03) | 2.90 (.95) |
| Father autonomy support | 2.96 (.80) | 2.82 (.84) | 3.06 (.77) |
| Father structure | 3.24 (1.00) | 3.37 (1.09) | 3.12 (.92) |

association was absent for mothers. Finally, for mothers, autonomy support was negatively related to structure ($r = -.33, p < .05$), while there was no significant relation for fathers. Given the nonorthogonality of the dimensions, analyses relating predictors to parenting examine the three dimensions simultaneously.

Given that the interview has not previously been used with parents of adolescents, we explored the relations between interview-rated dimensions and parents' self-report scores on the CRPBI. For mothers, involvement was positively associated with acceptance ($r = .42, p < .01$) and uncorrelated with the other CRPBI subscales. Autonomy support was negatively related to psychological control ($r = -.30, p < .05$), as expected, and positively related to structure ($r = .30, p < .05$). Finally, structure was positively related to firm control ($r = .57, p < .001$) and positively though less strongly related to psychological control ($r = .30, p < .05$).

For fathers, involvement was strongly associated with acceptance ($r = .67, p < .001$) and negatively correlated with psychological control ($r = -.38, p < .05$). Autonomy support was negatively correlated with psychological control as expected ($r = -.52, p < .01$), but also related to both acceptance ($r = .54, p < .01$) and firm control ($r = -.42, p < .05$). Finally, structure was related significantly only to firm control, as predicted ($r = .38, p < .05$).

## Relations Between Demographic Variables and Interview Dimensions

There were no significant relations between interview dimensions and number of children in the family, but there were significant relations between SES and paternal dimensions. Higher SES fathers tended to be more involved ($r = .57, p < .001$) and to provide more structure ($r = .41, p < .01$). There were no significant relations between SES and dimensions for mothers, but there was a trend for higher SES mothers to be more involved ($r = .24, p < .10$).

**Table II.** Relations Among Predictor Variables–Mothers

| | Negative Events | Positive Events | Social Support | Marital Satisfaction | Adolescent Difficulty | Adolescent Efficacy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contextual factors | | | | | | |
| Negative life events | – | | | | | |
| Positive life events | .15 | – | | | | |
| Social support | .14 | .28[a] | – | | | |
| Marital satisfaction | −.27[a] | .23 | .15 | – | | |
| Social-cognitive factors | | | | | | |
| Adolescence—Difficulty | .09 | .09 | −.07 | −.10 | – | |
| Adolescence—Efficacy | .01 | .19 | .43[c] | −.05 | .06 | – |
| Child difficulty | −.06 | .17 | −.03 | .34[b] | −.21 | −.24 |

[a] $p < .10$.
[b] $p < .05$.
[c] $p < .01$.

## Relations among Predictor Variables

There were few significant relations among predictor variables (see Table II). Mothers reporting more social support described adults as able to be more efficacious with adolescents. Surprisingly, mothers reporting greater marital satisfaction tended to see their adolescents as *more* difficult. For fathers (see Table III), there was a strong positive correlation between reports of positive and negative life events. Unlike for mothers, fathers who saw their adolescents as more difficult tended to see adults as less efficacious.

**Table III.** Relations Among Predictor Variables–Fathers

| | Negative Events | Positive Events | Social Support | Marital Satisfaction | Adolescent Difficulty | Adolescent Efficacy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contextual factors | | | | | | |
| Negative life events | – | | | | | |
| Positive life events | .51[c] | – | | | | |
| Social support | .01 | −.22 | – | | | |
| Marital satisfaction | −.35[a] | −.31 | .15 | – | | |
| Social-cognitive factors | | | | | | |
| Adolescence—Difficulty | −.12 | −.35[a] | .28 | .29 | – | |
| Adolescence—Efficacy | .06 | −.19 | −.04 | −.05 | .03 | – |
| Child difficulty | −.31 | −.13 | −.00 | .23 | −.13 | −.49[c] |

[a] $p < .10$.
[b] $p < .05$.
[c] $p < .01$.

## Relations Between Predictors and Parenting Dimensions

In order to examine relations between predictors and parenting dimensions, a series of multiple regressions were performed for mothers and fathers. Because the three parenting dimensions were correlated, regressions examined the three together. Thus, "backwards" simultaneous regressions (i.e., the predictor variables were regressed onto the set of three dimensions) were conducted. Because results might differ by child age and gender, preliminary regressions were conducted with SES, the three parenting dimensions, child gender (or age), and the interactions between each dimension and child gender (or age) as independent variables. There were no significant interactions between parenting dimensions and either age or gender in these analyses, though, especially for child age, the number of subjects precluded a reliable test of these interactions. The final set of analyses thus entered SES, gender, child age, and the three parenting dimensions.

The results, depicted in Table IV, indicated that for mothers, two of the predictor variables—negative and positive life events—were associated with parenting dimensions. As predicted, controlling for SES, mothers who experienced more negative events provided less structure for their adolescents relative to those experiencing fewer events and tended to be more controlling. There was also a negative relation between number of positive events and structure. There were no significant relations for social-cognitive variables but there were two for perceptions of child difficulty. Mothers who rated their adolescents as more difficult tended to be less involved and more controlling than those seeing their adolescents as easier. There were also two marginal effects of gender and age, indicating that mothers perceived themselves to be more effective with girls and older adolescents. Further, mothers with older adolescents reported more negative life events.

For fathers (see Table V), a different pattern emerged. While there were no relations between stress variables and parenting dimensions, there was one significant relation for social support, indicating that fathers reporting higher levels of social support tended toward higher levels of involvement. In addition, unlike for mothers, there were significant relations between both social-cognitive variables and parenting. Specifically, the more difficult fathers believed adolescence to be, the more controlling they were with their own adolescents. Similarly, the more efficacious they felt adults could be, the more involved they were. Fathers who saw their own adolescents as more difficult tended to be less involved than those seeing them as easier. Finally, contrary to mothers, fathers perceived themselves to be more efficacious with sons than with daughters.

**Table IV.** Multiple Regression Analyses Regressing Predictor Variables onto SES, Gender, Child Age, and the Three Parenting Dimensions: Mothers

| | Socioeconomic Status | | Gender | | Child Age | | Involvement | | Autonomy Support | | Structure | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Predictors | *F* | Beta | *F* | Beta | *F* | Beta | *F* | Beta | *F* | Beta | *F* | Beta | $R^2$ |
| Negative life events | 1.32 | .03 | .45 | .57 | 15.13[d] | .96 | .10 | .05 | 4.15[b] | –.42 | 1 3.60[d] | –.95 | .47 |
| Positive life events | 2.56 | –.03 | .74 | –.44 | .43 | –.11 | 3.57[a] | –.16 | .80 | –.12 | 8.16[c] | –.70 | .32 |
| Social support | .28 | .03 | .55 | –.12 | .92 | –.01 | .00 | –.01 | .57 | .11 | .33 | –.06 | .07 |
| Marital satisfaction | .34 | –.01 | .01 | –.06 | 1.11 | –.35 | 2.10 | –.96 | .14 | .16 | 1.67 | .51 | .14 |
| Adolescence—Difficulty | 1.70 | .01 | .04 | –.06 | 1.05 | –.11 | .07 | –.12 | .30 | .10 | .08 | –.06 | .09 |
| Adolescence—Efficacy | .14 | –.00 | 3.55[a] | –.55 | 3.26[b] | –.17 | .12 | –.05 | 2.76 | .16 | 2.27 | –.19 | .26 |
| Child difficulty | .48 | .00 | .00 | –.00 | .01 | –.03 | 10.13[c] | –.53 | 3.83[b] | –.23 | 2.34 | .11 | .30 |

[a] $p < .10$.
[b] $p < .05$.
[c] $p < .01$.
[d] $p < .001$.

**Table V.** Multiple Regression Analyses Regressing Predictor Variables onto SES, Gender, Child Age, and the Three Parenting Dimensions: Fathers

| | Socioeconomic Status | | Gender | | Child Age | | Involvement | | Autonomy Support | | Structure | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Predictors | *F* | Beta | *F* | Beta | *F* | Beta | *F* | Beta | *F* | Beta | *F* | Beta | $R^2$ |
| Negative life events | 5.37[b] | −.10 | .43 | −.59 | .22 | .16 | .58 | .37 | .00 | −.07 | .00 | −.03 | .29 |
| Positive life events | .59 | .02 | .05 | −.13 | .46 | −.15 | .15 | .09 | .03 | −.04 | .88 | −.34 | .12 |
| Social support | 3.03 | −.65 | .11 | .01 | .35 | .02 | 4.50[b] | .34 | 1.40 | −.24 | 3.04 | −.10 | .33 |
| Marital satisfaction | 3.22[a] | .08 | .56 | .28 | .11 | −.11 | .97 | .25 | 2.72 | −.15 | .01 | −.05 | .37 |
| Adolescence—Difficulty | 1.31 | .01 | .13 | −.12 | 1.20 | .12 | 1.09 | .57 | 5.00[b] | −.72 | .73 | −.18 | .29 |
| Adolescence—Efficacy | 1.84 | −.02 | 4.65[b] | .59 | .00 | −.00 | 10.48[c] | .74 | .69 | −.27 | 2.55 | .29 | .53 |
| Child difficulty | 1.97 | .01 | 2.47 | −.27 | 3.63[a] | −.11 | 6.49[b] | −.33 | .05 | .03 | .42 | .05 | .47 |

[a] $p < .10$.
[b] $p < .05$.
[c] $p < .01$.

**Table VI.** Partial Correlations (Controlling for Gender, Age, and the Other Two Parenting Dimensions) for All Significant Regresion Results for Mothers and Fathers

| | Mothers | Fathers | $Z^a$ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Negative life events Autonomy support | -.41 | -.16 | -2.54[c] |
| Negative life events Structure | -.40 | .03 | -4.09[d] |
| Positive life events Structure | -.49 | -.23 | -2.82[c] |
| Social support Involvement | -.00 | .53 | -5.36[d] |
| Adolescence—Difficulty Autonomy support | -.11 | -.56 | 4.72[d] |
| Adolescence—Efficacy Involvement | -.00 | .54 | 5.45[d] |
| Child difficulty Involvement | -.37 | -.50 | 1.45 |
| Child difficulty Autonomy support | -.37 | -.14 | -2.27[b] |

[a]Differences between partial correlations were computed using the formula suggested by Cohen and Cohen (1975).
[b]$p < .05$.
[c]$p < .01$.
[d]$p < .001$.

A further set of analyses was conducted given the "buffering hypothesis" of social support. This hypothesis suggests that the effects of social support will only be apparent at higher levels of stress and thus predicts an interaction between stress and support. A series of ANOVAs were conducted with high and low stress and high and low support as factors and the parent dimensions as outcomes. There were no significant interactions between stress and support uncovered in these analyses.

In summary, the results suggest relations between contextual variables as predicted: for mothers relations between stressful life events and parenting, specifically autonomy support and structure, and for fathers between social support and involvement. There were no significant relations between social-cognitive variables for mothers but some predicted relations held for fathers. There were relations uncovered for perceived child difficulty for both mothers and fathers. As predicted, there were significant associations between contextual variables and structure for mothers but not for fathers. While the patterns of significant results differed for mothers and fathers, it is important to determine whether the relations between variables also differed. In order to determine this, partial correlations (correlations between predictor variables and parenting dimensions controlling for SES, gender, child age, and the other two parenting dimensions) were

**Table VII.** Correlations between Mothers' Perceptions of Adolescent Difficulty and Parenting Under Different Contextual Conditions

| | Involvement | Autonomy support | Structure |
|---|---|---|---|
| Life Events | | | |
| Low | −.51[a] | −.47[a] | .32 |
| High | −.31 | −.19 | .12 |
| Social support | | | |
| Low | −.31 | −.20 | .19 |
| High | −.53[a] | −.57[a] | .25 |
| Marital satisfaction | | | |
| Low | −.31 | −.22 | .14 |
| High | −.54[a] | −.53[a] | .28 |

[a] $p < .01$.

calculated for all significant regression effects. $Z$ tests for differences between partial correlations (Cohen and Cohen, 1975) indicated stronger relations between life events and parenting for mothers, and stronger relations for social support, and stereotyped views of adolescence for fathers. (see Table VI.)

### Transactions between Context and Perceptions of Adolescents

In order to determine whether relations between child difficulty and parenting were different in "conducive" (i.e., low stress, high support, high marital satisfaction) and "nonconducive" (i.e., high stress, low support, low marital satisfaction) contexts, correlations between difficulty and parenting were computed within these groups. First, median splits on negative life events, social support, and marital satisfaction were conducted. Next, correlations between child difficulty and parenting within the high and low groups were computed (analyses were conducted for mothers only since the number of fathers did not allow for these analyses). Results (see Table VII) indicated links between perceived difficulty and parenting in the conducive contexts but not the nonconducive contexts. Thus, within supportive environments parenting appears to be more regulated by characteristics of the adolescent than in nonsupportive environments.

## DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined relations between contextual, social cognitive, and adolescent factors and three parenting dimensions. We expected

that stress, support, and marital satisfaction would be associated with parenting and that these relations would be stronger for mothers than fathers. Further, we predicted that parents who perceived adolescence as difficult would be more controlling and this relation would be strongest for fathers. Finally, we expected that parents who viewed their adolescents as difficult would be less involved, more controlling, and would provide more structure than those seeing their adolescents as easier and that these relations would be more pervasive than those for stereotyped views of adolescence. This study provided some support for the hypotheses.

Specifically, as predicted, controlling for SES, child gender, and age, stressful events were associated with less provision of structure for mothers. Developing rules and guidelines and consistently enforcing them requires time and energy from adults. These results suggest that stressful events may usurp resources and interfere with such activities. Interestingly, relations between stress and structure were in evidence for both negative and positive events, supporting the interpretation that mothers' preoccupation with issues in their own lives, whether positive or negative, may interfere with their being fully responsive to and available for the needs of their child.

For negative events, there was also a negative relation with maternal autonomy support. Thus, though negative and positive events have similar effects on provision of structure, negative events are also associated with greater control. It may be that when parents are pressured by events in their own lives they bring this pressure to their relationships with their adolescents. Thus, there may be two components to the effects of stressful events: a competing resources one and, as well, for negative events a psychological one.

As expected, relations between stress and structure uncovered for mothers were not in evidence for fathers. Our findings and those of others (e.g., Almeida and Galambos, 1990; Youniss and Smollar, 1985) suggest that fathers are less involved with their adolescents than mothers and are less responsible for providing guidance on a day-to-day basis. Thus, day-to-day stresses may not interfere as much for fathers as for mothers. In particular, these issues do not seem to relate to fathers' provision of structure, perhaps because they do not tend to take a monitoring role.

While there were no effects of stress for fathers, there was one effect for social support and this relation was, unexpectedly, stronger for fathers than mothers. Fathers who reported receiving more assistance were rated as more involved with their adolescents. Given that high levels of involvement may not be in the traditional role for many fathers, they may need extra support to "go the extra mile." For mothers, there were no relations with social support. Although this finding seems inconsistent with the lit-

erature, most of the work stressing the importance of social support has been with new mothers and high-risk samples. Given the demands of parenting a young child, tangible and emotional outlets are crucial. By adolescence, however, child care and other tangible forms of support may be less imperative for the mothers' well-being and therefore may not effect the style of parenting. In addition, this sample is largely middle class and included only two-parent families. Support has been found to be more important for parenting in single- as opposed to two-parent families (Taylor *et al.*, 1993).

It was surprising that there were no predicted relations between parenting and marital satisfaction. This is likely due to the generally high level of marital satisfaction in our sample. Interestingly, some of the subscales of the Dyadic Adjustment scale were negatively correlated with parenting. For example, mothers reporting higher levels of consensus in the marriage were rated as less involved. Again, these findings support the competing demands hypothesis whereby activities with spouse may compete with time with the adolescent.

As predicted, there were a greater number of significant relations between social-cognitive variables and parenting for fathers. Specifically, the more fathers saw adolescence as a difficult time, the more controlling they were. Fathers who see adolescence as difficult may feel they need to "reign" in their adolescents. Further, the more fathers believed adults could be efficacious with adolescents, the more involved they were likely to be with their own adolescents. The greater importance of fathers' attitudes is consistent with findings of McGillicuddy-DeLisi (1982) in which parents' constructivist beliefs were more highly correlated with behavior for fathers than for mothers. She reasons that mothers have more experience with their own children and thus their general attitudes about children do not affect them as much as fathers who have less other information to rely upon. We also suggest that fathers have greater latitude in their roles with their children than mothers. If fathers feel that they will not be efficacious with adolescents, they may take the more traditional role of less involvement. However, mothers are expected to take responsibility for the adolescent regardless of their attitudes.

As expected, perceptions of adolescent difficulty predict both maternal and paternal parenting. Such results likely indicate a bidirectional process in which adolescents who are difficult pull for more control. In addition, such adolescents may make shared time and activities less pleasurable and thus parents may not choose to engage with them (or adolescents may refuse to engage with parents). On the other hand, parents who are more controlling and less involved may contribute to problems in their adoles-

cents. Most likely, there is a circular process in which parents contribute to and respond to characteristics of their children.

Interestingly, analyses indicate that the context may affect this bidirectional process. When parenting occurs within a supportive context, parents may adapt their behavior to characteristics of the adolescent. However, in a less supportive context, parenting may be regulated more by contingencies in the environment and parents' own needs than characteristics of the adolescent. Such results highlight the debilitating effects of stress on parenting and the moderating effect of context on relations between beliefs and action.

A number of limitations of this study merit consideration. First, we did not observe parents interacting with their adolescents and thus parenting is viewed to some extent through the parents' eyes. Second, the sample, though heterogeneous, was relatively advantaged and thus the results cannot be generalized to a more disadvantaged sample. In addition, the families all contained two parents. Finally, given that our parenting dimensions were not exhaustive, contextual, social-cognitive, and child variables might likely effect other aspects of parent–adolescent relationships. This study does make it clear, though, that the area of predictors of parenting needs specific attention during the period of adolescence.

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