Parental Autonomy Support: The Moderating Effects of Self-Construal

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Introduction

- Parental autonomy support relates to depression.
- Self-construal or one's understanding of the self as either independent (seperate from others) or interdependent (members of their family and community central to their identity) has been shown to moderate the effects of autonomy support on child outcomes .
- This study uses a diverse age sample and a differentiated measure of autonomy support to explore self-construal as a factor that influences how autonomy support affects depression.

Hypotheses

- H1: Autonomy support components (decision making/choice and perspective taking/open exchange) will be related to depression such that higher autonomy support will be associated with lower depression.
- H2: The relation between decision making/choice and child depression will be moderated by child's self-construal such that for participants with independent self-construals, there will be a stronger negative relationship between decision making/choice and child depression.
- H3: Self-construal will not moderate the effect of perspective taking/open exchange on child depression.

Methods

- 85 participants (35.3% male, 64.7% female)
  - 44 college aged students (M=20.42, SD=1.72)
  - 41 school aged students (M=12.29, SD=1.47)
- Participants were recruited from the WSU subject pool or via snowball sampling, and compensated with research credits or a $25 Amazon gift card

- Participants completed the following questionnaires.
  - Parental autonomy support measure (Grolnick & Wellborn, 1988)
  - Child Depression Inventory shortened version (Kovacs, 1992)
  - Parent–Child Self-Construal Scale (Pomerantz, Qin, Wang, & Chen, 2009)

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of all variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Means (Standard Deviations) and Correlations Among Parenting, Self-Construal and Outcomes

	M (SD)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Child age	16.60 (4.38)	1.0	.40**	-.48**	-.21+	.25*	-.09	.21+
2. Child gender	1.65 (.48)		1.0	-.24*	-.24*	-.09	-.11	.29*
3. Maternal education	4.14 (1.55)			1.0	.11	-.14	.06	-.13
4. Autonomy support (AS) perspective taking/open	13.57 (3.36)				1.0	.65**	.64**	-.58**
5. AS decision making/choice	21.51 (17.89)					1.0	.41**	-.37**
6. Self-construal	75.81 (17.89)						1.0	-.35**
7. Depression	15.69 (2.94)							1.0

Note. +p<.10. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.

- **Model 1: Effects of Decision Making/Choice**
  Controlling for maternal education, child age, and child gender, higher provision of decision making/choice was associated with lower levels of depression (t =-4.00, p < .001).
- **Model 2: Effects of Perspective Taking/Open Exchange**
  Controlling for maternal education, child age, and child gender, use of perspective taking/open exchange was associated with lower depression (t = -5.15, p <.001).
- **Model 3: Unique Effects of Autonomy Support Indexes**
  When including both decision making/choice and perspective taking/open exchange in a regression model, for children's depression, there was a unique effect of perspective taking/open exchange, with higher levels of perspective taking associated with lower levels of depression (t =-2.96, p <.01).

- **Model 4: Effects of Self-Construal and Self-Construal by Autonomy Support**
  For depression, there was an interaction between self-construal and decision/making choice.

Figure 1. Probing the significant decision-making/choice X self-construal interaction

Decision Making X Self-Construal in Predicting Depression

Low Decision Making   High Decision Making
Low Self-Construal   High Self-Construal

- Decision making appears to be a risk factor for depression for children with interdependent self-construals (but not related to depression for children with independent self-construal).

Discussion

- Adolescents' self-construals appeared to influence how autonomy support was related to child depression.
- This study helps us to better understand individual difference variables that moderate the effects of parenting on depression and in doing so informs our recommendations to parents looking to mitigate risk for depression among their offspring.

Self-Reference Effect in Childhood

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Introduction

- Self-reference effect (SRE) is a spontaneous and efficient way to process new information
  - Information connected to the self is the easiest to remember
- Benefits may extend to close others
  - Overlaps in self and close other representations
- Use of self and others in memory may reflect sense of autonomy and self-construal
- Limited information is known about the self-reference effect in children

Hypotheses

- H1: Self-referenced information will lead to more accurate memory performance when compared to other-referenced information

- H2: The pattern of memory in children will be similar to that seen in adults

Participants

- Participants included 40 children between the ages of 10 and 14

- The average age of participants was 12.28

- 59% were males and 41% were females

- 74.4% of participants were European American

- Of the 40 children, 89.7% had parents who were married

Methods

- At encoding, participants viewed photos of items in one of 4 conditions:
  - Do *you* like this item
  - Does *your mom* like this item?
  - Does the *researcher* like this item?
  - Would this item fit in a *shoe box*?

Does the researcher like this item?
Press 1 for YES
Press 2 for NO

Sample item

- After a 5 minute delay, participants were asked about their memory for items using a source memory task

Did you see this item before?
1 = Self
2 = Mother
3 = Researcher
4 = Shoebox
5 = New

Source Memory

- Following the study, participants completed a demographic form and questionnaires relating to themself, their family, thoughts/feelings of school

Results

- An ANOVA revealed a significant difference between all of the conditions
  - $F(4, 160)=18.51$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=.32$

- Paired Sample T-tests revealed that self and close other are not significantly different, but self and close other are significantly different from unknown other and control

Correct Recognition Across Conditions
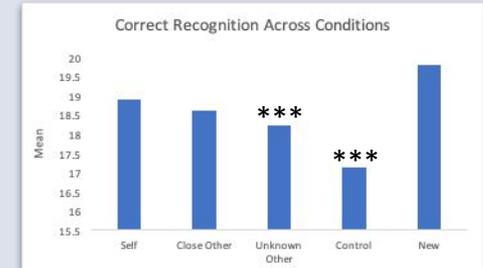
***Significantly different from self and close other, $p<.01$

Discussion

- Participants' memory related to self and close others was the strongest

- Recognition patterns in children are similar to those seen in adults

- Memory recognition for the self and close others was different than recognition for the unknown and control

- As expected, memory for the new condition was near perfect