Mothers' and Fathers' Parenting Styles and Associations with Toddlers'

Externalizing, Internalizing, and Adaptive Behaviors

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Abstract

The two primary objectives of the present study were to (a) investigate mothers' and fathers' reports of their own as well as their partner's parenting styles, and (b) assess how mothers' and fathers' parenting styles uniquely and jointly predicted toddlers' externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors. Fifty-nine mothers and fathers independently completed the *Parenting Styles and Dimension Questionnaire* (PDSQ; Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001) and the *Behavior Assessment Scale for Children-2* (BASC-2; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). Parents' self-reports of their parenting styles were positively correlated with each other for all three parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive). Comparisons between parents' reports of their partner's styles with that of the partner's self-reports were positively and moderately correlated for all three parenting styles. Findings revealed mothers' and fathers' self-reported parenting styles explained 44% of the variance in youngsters' externalizing behaviors. In particular, permissive parenting by mothers and authoritarian parenting by fathers uniquely and significantly predicted toddlers' externalizing behaviors, while authoritative paternal parenting was predictive of adaptive behaviors.

Keywords: parenting styles, toddlers, externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors

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Children's exposure to socialization begins within the family, mainly through direct parent-child interaction (Fabes, Gaertner, & Popp, 2005). While the majority of early childhood parenting studies have focused on just one parent's contribution to socialization (i.e., mothers), most researchers acknowledge that this is a limited approach (Isley, O'Neil, & Parke, 1996; McHale et al., 2002). The importance of early child-parent relationships has been emphasized in many prominent theories such as attachment (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991), social interaction (Fisher, Ellis, & Chamberlain, 1999), and family systems theories (Hinde, 1989; Parke, 2002; Parke & Buriel, 2006). In studying relationships, perceptions of behavior offer both practical and theoretical insights (Furman, 1984). Family researchers advocate for the examination of self and other perceptions, and while they may present a biased perspective, it is argued that these perceptions are valid because they shape the quality of social interactions (Engfer, 1988; Erel & Burman, 1995; Minuchin, 1988).

Parent-child research has overwhelmingly focused on maternal patterns of parenting and has not adequately considered paternal contributions (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). Moreover, our main assumptions about the associations of parenting styles with young children's behavioral outcomes are largely derived from mother-child relationships. Yet, according to theories of socialization and empirical evidence, fathers play an important role in children's development (Parke & Buriel, 2006). Criticisms are raised about using mothers as both a proxy for how fathers individually, and as part of the parenting subsystem, approach issues related to child-rearing (Simons & Conger, 2007); this one-sided representation of mothering as equaling parenting is a serious limitation (Bornstein & Sawyer,

2005). However, even studies that have included both parents often combine their parenting styles to create a single or composite measure (e.g., Gray & Steinberg, 1999). Thus, researchers have missed an opportunity to detail the unique and combined contributions that both parents make to their young children's development. In the present study, we were interested in examining (1) cohabitating mothers' and fathers' perceptions of their own parenting styles and behaviors, and (2) the relationship between parenting behaviors (mothers and fathers) and toddlers' externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors, which provide an early assessment of their behaviors in these domains. Once established in early childhood, emotional/behavioral patterns remain stable over time and are resistant to change (Eron, 1990; Walker et al., 1999). Further, there is evidence suggesting a long-term predictive link between early childhood behaviors and problems in middle childhood and adolescence (Bornstein, Hahn, & Haynes, 2010; Howes & Phillipsen, 1998).

Parent and Child Relationships

        Parenting styles and child behaviors. In the child development literature, Baumrind's (1967, 1971) early conceptualization of the dimensions of parenting style (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) continues to be widely employed in explaining individual differences in parenting practices (Parke, 2002; Parke & Buriel, 2006; Winsler, Madigan, & Aquilino, 2005). Following from Baumrind's original perspective of parenting styles, it is generally accepted that there are two main parenting dimensions – parental acceptance/responsiveness and demandingness/control (Grolnick, 2003; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). When these two orthogonal dimensions are jointly considered, four main parenting styles emerge: (a) authoritative (warm, responsive/restrictive, demanding), (b) permissive (warm, responsive/permissive, undemanding), (c) authoritarian (rejecting, unresponsive/restrictive,

demanding), and (d) uninvolved (rejecting, unresponsive/permissive, undemanding). The fourth

style (uninvolved) has been observed relatively infrequently in young populations compared to

the three other styles, but has mainly been reported in studies of adolescents (Baumrind, 1991;

Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). Thus, most measures of parenting styles (for

young children) have typically included an assessment of the first three styles. These three

parenting styles have been confirmed with both mother and father data (Baumrind, 1971;

Baumrind, Larzelere, & Owens, 2010). As such, in the current study, we focus on mothers' and

fathers' authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles.

Based on Baumrind's (1967, 1971) seminal research, the different parenting styles have

been associated with a variety of child outcomes. For example, strong support for associations

between an authoritative parenting style (flexible, democratic style with clear boundaries) and a

range of later positive child outcomes has been documented, such as more effective social skills

and school success (Baumrind, 1991; Baumrind et al., 2010; Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Weiss &

Schwartz, 1996). In addition, permissive and authoritarian styles are associated with less positive

child outcomes such as internalizing, externalizing, and attention problems (e.g., Aunola &

Nurmi, 2005; Baldry & Farrington, 1998; Booth-LaForce & Oxford, 2008; Gadeyne,

Ghesquiere, & Onghena, 2004; Kaufmann et al., 2000; Lagacé-Séguin & d'Entremont, 2006;

Milevsky, Schlecter, Netter, & Keehn, 2007).

Including both mothers and fathers. Conceptually as well as practically, one reason for

taking a broader approach to studying parenting is that multiple, significant adults may be

involved in socializing children. Based on North American statistics, father involvement in

primary care activities has increased in recent decades (Marshall, 2006; Pleck, 1997; Yeung,

Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001). Furthermore, fathers' roles in the form of more active

involvement have changed as a result of social and historical context shifts (Cabrera et al., 2000). In the present study, the inclusion of fathers is not about determining whose role is more important, but rather to investigate how both parents contribute to children's development.

A review of the few studies that have compared mothers' and fathers' parenting reveals inconsistent findings. Differences across parenting studies may exist for several reasons, most probably disparities are due to methodological variations of age, gender, and measures of social behaviors examined. Typically these studies can be categorized as documenting similarities (Davidov & Grusec, 2006), reporting greater maternal influence (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005; Brook, Zheng, Whiteman, & Brook, 2001) or indicating that fathers' parenting behavior was differentially related to children's behaviors in comparison to mothers (Casas et al., 2006; Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004; Verhoeven, Junger, van Aken, Dekovic, & van Aken, 2010). Taking this idea one step further, Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, and Evans (2006) studied the parenting styles of Caribbean immigrants and links to the academic and social behaviors of their kindergarten-aged children. In this sample, fathers' authoritarian parenting style was negatively correlated with children's academic skills (receptive and vocabulary skills) above that of mothers' contributions. As well, fathers' authoritative parenting was positively correlated with children's social behaviors. In contrast, mothers' authoritarian style negatively predicted their children's social behaviors (e.g., social skills, self-confidence, persistence). Roopnarine et al. argued that fathers' parenting styles had relative predictive ability above mothers' contributions, thus emphasizing the importance of considering the influence of both parents on children's development. It is important to note that there may also be differential role expectations of mothers and fathers from varying cultural backgrounds (Roopnarine et al.)

Compatibility of Parenting Styles

Recent research challenges the implicit assumption that fathers' parenting styles are similar to mothers' styles. Winsler et al. (2005) investigated mothers' and fathers' perceived similarities and differences in parenting styles in a predominantly Caucasian sample and revealed some interesting results vis-à-vis mothers' and fathers' self and partner ratings. Mothers reported being more authoritative in comparison to their partners, but did not perceive differences between themselves and their husbands on the dimensions of permissiveness or authoritarianism. In contrast, fathers reported their partners to be more authoritative and permissive than themselves, but also less authoritarian. Furthermore, Winsler et al. assessed the accuracy of the perceptions of spouses' styles and found that parents were accurate in reporting on their spouses' level of authoritarianism and permissiveness, but not their level of authoritativeness. In another study that examined the parenting styles of both parents, Gamble, Ramakumar, and Diaz (2007) investigated the congruency across parenting dimensions in Mexican-American mothers and fathers. Gamble et al. (2007) found a positive correlation between mothers' and fathers' self-reported parenting styles on the authoritative parenting dimension. However, the mothers' and fathers' reports for permissive and authoritarian style were not significantly correlated. In sum, these patterns indicate the importance of determining both mothers' and fathers' self-reported parenting styles and their assessment of their spouse's style.

Obtaining self-reports from both mothers and fathers allows us to assess both insider relationship information (target parent's perceptions of parenting) and participant observer relationship information (perceptions of their partner's parenting) (Furman, Jones, Buhrmester, & Adler, 1989; Olson, 1977). Collecting both self and partner parenting data permits us to test for congruency between mothers' and fathers' parenting styles. Congruency of perceptions within families has been explained by the notion of spillover, namely since mother-child

relations occur alongside father-child relations, they are bound to be influenced by the other (Engfer, 1988). Furthermore, collecting information from both parents has been argued to be a methodological strength by allowing multiple relationship perspectives to be considered (Olson, 1977).

In sum, a significant portion of parenting research has relied on the use of parent-self reports, and the majority of these studies have utilized only one parent's ratings. As well as presenting only the view of mothers, relying on one reporter raises issues related to shared method variance. Unfortunately, a limited but slowly growing body of research has focused on fathers' parenting styles, and as a result, little is known about how mothers' and fathers' parenting styles are correlated with their partners' styles. Finally, how are mothers' and fathers' parenting styles similarly or differentially predictive of their children's externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors, particularly in reference to parenting toddlers, as described below? This question forms the basis of the current study and investigation of these issues will further our understanding of family dynamics and how the parenting system contributes to child outcomes.

Parenting Toddlers

Developmental researchers recognize the unique challenges and milestones associated with particular stages of development. For instance, the transition from infancy into the early childhood period, known as toddlerhood, is an especially demanding time for children's development and parenting. This is partly evident because parents begin to be challenged by their children's growth in autonomy seeking, and in response, may start to question and critically evaluate their own parenting practices. As toddlers become more assertive and require greater age-appropriate autonomy, the focus on parenting styles increases. Pope-Edwards and Liu (2002)

list parental support, structure, and guidance as essential elements of parenting toddlers, all key

features of an authoritative parenting style. There are several developmental outcomes of the

toddler period that are guided by parental socialization. Specifically, during toddlerhood,

children explore and begin to master (a) autonomy and independence, (b) self-reflection, (c)

emotion regulation, (d) the emergence of empathy, (e) gender identity, and (f) being connected to

others (Pope Edwards & Liu). All of these developmental tasks are facilitated in some way

through parenting.

In the early years of social-emotional development, child behaviors may be generally

classified as (a) externalizing (e.g., aggression, attention problems, hyperactivity), (b)

internalizing (e.g., depression, withdrawal, anxiety, somatization), and (c) adaptive (e.g., social

skills, adaptability) behaviors (Baillargeon et al., 2007). Examples of specific externalizing type

behaviors exhibited by toddlers are arguing when refused a desire, poor self-control, not being

able to wait their turn, and breaking others' toys. While internalizing-type behaviors exhibited by

toddlers may take the form of anxiety (e.g., worrying, being fearful), distress (e.g., cannot be

soothed), timidity-shyness (e.g., clingy, shy with adults), and sadness. Adaptive or prosocial

behaviors typical of toddlers are cooperation, the ability to comply with adult rules, and the

spontaneous ability to help and share (Bronson, 2000). The extreme presence or absence of

typical behaviors tends to be problematic and also if these patterns of behavior interfere with

day-to-day functioning. A significant percentage of toddlers and preschoolers (estimates

typically range from approximately 10% to 15%) experience emotional and behavioral

difficulties (Campbell, 1995); behaviors noted in early childhood found to be predictive of later

functioning (DelCarmen-Wiggins & Carter, 2001; Mesman & Koot, 2001). Furthermore, while

there are a handful of early childhood studies that have included both mothers and fathers (e.g.,

Gamble et al., 2007; Roopnarine et al., 2006), none to date have simultaneously examined externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to add to the parenting literature by including both parents of toddlers and to investigate how both mothers' and fathers' parenting styles (uniquely and jointly) are predictive of their toddlers' externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors, in particular those related to autonomy, independence, and emotional regulation.

The Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to assess how both mothers' and fathers' parenting styles uniquely and jointly predict toddler-aged children's externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors. The first objective was to examine the degree of parental similarity-dissimilarity across parenting styles (one's own versus one's partner's style). That is, we assessed (a) the congruence between parents' styles, (b) the correlations between parents' perceptions of their own parenting style and their ratings of their partner's parenting styles, and (c) the accuracy of mothers' and fathers' perceptions of their partners' parenting style. Based on Winsler et al. (2005), we predicted that (a) parents' styles would be moderately correlated, (b) same-reporter ratings would be positively correlated, and (c) cross-reporter ratings would be moderately correlated. Our second objective was to assess how mothers' and fathers' independent and combined parenting styles contributed to children's behaviors. Generally, in what way are parents' styles related to reports of their children's behaviors, and in particular which parenting styles (mothers and fathers) are most predictive of externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors in toddlers? For both mothers and fathers, we predicted that the authoritative parenting dimension would be positively correlated with adaptability, while less effective parenting styles (i.e., permissiveness and authoritarianism) would be positively

correlated with externalizing and internalizing behaviors in toddlers.

Method

Participants

Fifty-nine families (59 mothers, 59 fathers) participated. The children had a mean age of 32.75 months (SD = 5.78 mos.) and 50.8% (n = 30) of the sample was female. The ethnicity of the children, as identified via a demographic intake form completed by parents, was 86.4% Caucasian, 8.5% mixed ethnicity, 3.4% Asian-Canadian, and 1.7% East Indian-Canadian. At the time of the study, all parents were married or cohabitating. Parents were recruited from a large Western-Canadian urban centre and volunteered based on responding to advertisements in community newspapers, flyers posted in childcare centres, or through word-of-mouth. Families self-selected to join the study and contacted the researchers directly. Sixty families volunteered to participate, with one family dropping out because of a move. Parents were provided with an information letter explaining the study and their time commitment, as well as a consent form. Both parents had to agree to participate. They independently completed questionnaire packages, which were left in sealed envelopes and picked up by research assistants at participants' homes. Once both mother and father questionnaires were completed and picked up, families received a $25 bookstore gift card. Three categories used by Statistics Canada to identify income revealed that 68.9% of the sample reported a total household income of over $70,000 Canadian, 26.7% reported a household income of between $35,000 and $69,000, and 2.2% had a household income of under $35,000 per annum. The majority of mothers had college/university training (51.1%), with 33.3% having graduate or professional training, 8.9% with some college/university courses, 4.4% with high school diploma equivalency, and 2.2% with trade/technology training. As for fathers, 22.2% had graduate degrees, 53.3% university degrees, 4.4% had some

college/university experience, 11.1% trade/technology training, and 8.9% high school

equivalency.

Procedure

Each parent was provided with a questionnaire package in sealed envelopes that included

an individualized set of instructions to complete at home and mail back to the researchers. Both

mothers and fathers completed the *Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire* (PSDQ;

Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001) that taps Baumrind's (1971) three main styles of

parenting. Each parent also completed the *Behavior Assessment Scale for Children-2* (BASC-2;

Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004) to assess toddlers' adaptive and problematic (e.g., internalizing,

externalizing) behaviors.

Measures

Parenting styles. An abbreviated 32-item version of the Parenting Styles and

Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson et al., 2001) was completed independently by both

mothers and fathers. It assesses the three main styles of parenting dimensions (i.e., authoritative,

authoritarian, and permissive). The questionnaire is designed to measure self- and spouse-

reported practices for parents of preadolescent children using a 5-point Likert scale response

format ranging from never (1) to always (5). For example, "[He punishes] [I punish] by taking

privileges (toys, activities) away from our child with little if any explanation; and [He allows] [I

allow] our child to give input into family rules." The short versions of the PSDQ were developed

using Structural Equation Modeling on 1,900 mothers and fathers of preschool and school-aged

children (Robinson et al., 2001). The PSDQ is comprised of three subscales – the authoritative

subscale (15 items), the authoritarian subscale (12 items), and the permissive subscale (five

items). Scores were computed for each subscale by calculating the mean of all items per

subscale. The authors reported internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach *alphas*) for mothers'

and fathers' reports to be .86 (authoritative), .82 (authoritarian), and .64 (permissiveness). In the

present study, reliabilities for mother self-reports were .84, .74, .63 for authoritative,

authoritarian, and permissive subscales respectively. Mothers' reports of partner's style for

authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive subscales were .85, .67, .73, respectively. For fathers,

reliabilities were .83, .69, .72 for the authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive subscales,

respectively. Fathers' reports of partner's style for authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive

subscales were .82, .62, .75, respectively.

The low *alpha* for maternal self-reports of permissive parenting practices (.63) was in

line with the *alpha* reported by the authors for this subscale (.64). The three other low *alphas*

(.62 - .67) were all for the authoritarian subscale (i.e., mothers' reports of partner, fathers' self-

reports, and fathers' report of the partner). This pattern suggests that the scale items that focus on

harsh parenting practices may have sometimes pulled for socially desirable or inconsistent

parental responses. Given the nature of these punitive practices (e.g., spanking, threats,

slapping), it is not surprising that participants' responses varied, particularly in these educated

families.

Problem and adaptive child behaviors. Each parent also completed the Parent Rating

Scale –Preschool (PRS-Preschool) on the Behavior Assessment Scale for Children-2 (BASC-2;

Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004) to measure both adaptive and problem child behaviors exhibited

in the community and home setting. The PRS-Preschool consists of 134 phrases

describing positive and negative behaviors (e.g., "Adjusts easily to new surroundings"). For each

statement, the parent or caregiver indicated how often the child displayed each of

these behaviors, answering: never, sometimes, often, or almost always. The BASC-2 is a

standardized, norm-referenced measure of social behaviors and was designed to facilitate the

differential diagnosis and educational classification of a variety of emotional and

behavioural disorders. The BASC-2 Manual (Reynolds & Kamphaus) provides detailed

standardization data, based on general norm samples of over 13,000 cases. Behaviors are

classified into adaptive (e.g., activities of daily living, adaptability, functional communication,

social skills) or clinical (e.g., anxiety, attention problems, aggression, atypicality, depression,

somatization, withdrawal). Scores are converted into *T-scores* (i.e., standard scores with $M = 50$,

$SD = 10$). As reported by the authors, the reliability *alpha* coefficients of composite scales for the

2- to 3-year-old age group were: externalizing problems (.87), internalizing problems (.85), and

adaptive skills (.93). In the present sample, coefficient alpha reliabilities for mothers' BASC-2

ratings were $\alpha = .75$ for externalizing, $\alpha = .81$ for internalizing, and $\alpha = .75$ for adaptive

behaviors. For fathers' BASC-2 reports, the reliabilities were $\alpha = .84$ for externalizing, $\alpha = .85$

for internalizing, and $\alpha = .76$ for adaptive behaviors. We also ran the Cronbach alphas on the

combined mother and father BASC-2 scores and the alphas were: .80 (Externalizing), .83

(Internalizing), and .77 (Adaptive). In the present study, mothers and fathers BASC-2 score

ratings were moderately to highly correlated (rs = .30 to .60) and, therefore, were collapsed to

create three overall BASC-2 composite and scale scores for the regression analyses.

Results

The results are presented in three parts: (a) descriptive statistics, (b) an assessment of

congruency between parent ratings of their own parenting styles, and (c) unique and joint

contributions of mothers' and fathers' parenting styles and child behavior outcomes.

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and ranges of the parenting style and BASC-2 variables are reported in Table 1. A wide range of variability in the three types of parenting styles was apparent, as well as on the three BASC-2 scores. Scores above 65 (1.5 *SD* above the mean) on the BASC-2 internalizing and externalizing subscales fall into the at-risk clinical range and are indicative of problem behaviors. The range of scores indicated that the sample was fairly typical and generally within the normal (and not clinical) range.

Congruency between Mothers' and Fathers' Parenting Styles

The purpose of these analyses was to address the three questions outlined in objective one regarding the degree of similarity-dissimilarity across parenting styles. Pearson correlations were conducted between mothers' and fathers' reports of parenting styles between self and partner. First, we examined the degree of congruence in parenting styles between partners. The correlations between mothers' and fathers' parenting styles were positively and significantly correlated for authoritative ($r = .39$), authoritarian ($r = .32$), and permissive practices ($r = .33$). According to Cohen's (1988) magnitude for effect calculations, a correlation is considered moderate if it is between .30 and .50. Second, we examined the correlations between parents' self-reported parenting styles and their ratings of their partner's style (see Table 2). Parents' ratings of self and partner were highly correlated (all above $r = .65$) for all three parenting dimensions: (a) authoritative dimension (mothers' report of fathers' style and mothers' self-report, and also fathers' report of mothers' style and fathers' self-reports) (b) authoritarian dimension (mothers' report of fathers' style and mothers' self-reports and also fathers' report of mothers' style and fathers' self-reports), and (c) permissive dimension (mothers' report of fathers' style and mothers' self-reports, and also fathers' report of mothers' style and fathers' self-reports). Third, we investigated the correlations between parents' report of their partners'

style with that of partner's self-report. Mothers' reports of fathers' authoritative and authoritarian styles were moderately (rs = .47 and .50), significantly, and positively correlated with fathers' reports, but were not significantly associated with permissiveness. Fathers' reports of mothers' authoritativeness, authoritarian, and permissive styles were all moderately to strongly (rs = .34 to .55), positively, and significantly correlated with mothers' own reports.

Parenting Styles and Children's Behaviors

The purpose of these analyses was to address our final question, namely how both mothers' and fathers' parenting styles uniquely and jointly predicted children's externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors. In an attempt to address single source bias, we ran Pearson correlations between parenting styles (as reported by self, mom for mom, and dad for dad) and children's behaviors as assessed by parenting partner (see Table 3). Only correlations between fathers' self-reported parenting and child outcomes as assessed by mothers were significant. Briefly, children's externalizing behaviors were negatively and moderately associated with fathers' authoritative style and positively associated with fathers' authoritarian style. Internalizing behaviors were positively correlated (small r) with fathers' authoritarian style, while adaptive behaviors were positively, moderately associated with fathers' authoritative style. Next, we then conducted simultaneous multiple regression analyses to determine the independent and combined contributions of both mothers' and father's parenting styles in predicting children's (a) externalizing, (b) internalizing, and (c) adaptive behaviors (Keith, 2006). Mothers' and fathers' self-reported parenting styles explained 44% of the variance in youngsters' externalizing behaviors, $F(6,49) = 6.52$, $p < .001$. Permissive parenting for mothers was significantly and uniquely predictive of children's externalizing behaviors, $\beta = .36$, $t(49) = 3.04$, $p < .01$, accounting for 32% of the variance, as did authoritative parenting by fathers, $\beta = -.35$,

$t(49) = -2.84$, $p < .01$ (30% of variance), and authoritarian parenting by fathers, $\beta = .31$, $t(49) = 2.71$, $p < .01$ (29% of variance). The overall multiple regression investigating parenting styles on internalizing child behaviors was not significant, $R^2 = .172$, $F(6, 49) = 1.69$, *ns*. Finally, the overall regression coefficient was significant when examining the influence of parenting styles on adaptive behaviors, $R^2 = .22$, $F(6,49) = 2.35$, $p < .05$. Authoritative parenting by fathers significantly and uniquely predicted children's adaptive behaviors, $\beta = .38$, $t(49) = 2.64$, $p < .01$, accounting for 33% of the variance.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to assess the shared and unique contributions of mothers' and fathers' parenting styles to toddlers' externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behavioral outcomes. We began by examining parental similarity-dissimilarity across parenting styles. Second, we specifically tested for mothers' and fathers' independent and combined parenting style's contributions to children's externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors. The current study offers new information on self and partner perceptions of parenting as assessed by both mothers and fathers of young children and the relationship between different parenting styles as reported by mothers and fathers, and children's behaviors.

Perceptions of Parenting

Overall, there was congruency between maternal and paternal parenting styles. Parents who rated themselves as authoritative in their parenting were partnered with someone who rated himself or herself similarly high on authoritativeness. The correlations were significant, but lower for parental self-reported permissiveness and authoritarianism, the two less favorable parenting styles. As with previous parenting studies with young children, considerable variability between partners was found (Cowan, Powell, & Cowan, 1998; Gamble et al., 2007;

Winsler et al., 2005). The relatively low correlations between parents' self-reports suggest that

conclusions regarding general parenting practices based on sole family member reports should be

avoided. As discussed in the introduction, the majority of parenting research has based findings

and conclusions on mothers' parenting behaviors alone. We reported significant, but modest

correlations between mothers' and fathers' self-reported parenting styles, which is in line with

the small literature that has included both mothers and fathers. Our findings support the position

that it is vital to include multiple informants when multiple caregivers are present in the family

structure (Minuchin, 1988; Parke & Buriel, 2006). In fact, only including one parent's point of

view provides an incomplete or potentially biased perspective of family and child functioning.

     Next, we examined parents' self-reported parenting and ratings of their partner's styles.

Here we found significantly high correlations suggesting that individuals see similarities in their

own personal parenting styles and that of their partner's parenting. This stable view, or constancy

in perceptions by the same family reporter, may be a product of homeostatic features that are part

of larger family systems functioning (Minuchin, 1988). Again, this information is important

when making decisions about how to collect information about parenting. With the current

sample, for the most part, parents rated themselves and their partners quite similarly, indicating a

low level of discord in perceptions of parenting styles.

     Our final set of correlational analyses revealed that parents who rated themselves as

highly authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive had partners who rated them highly as well,

except for mothers' ratings of fathers' permissiveness, suggesting there could be greater

variability in the interpretations of this ineffective parenting style. These correlations were

stronger than self-reported parenting style correlations (mothers' self-rating and fathers' self-

ratings), possibly suggesting that parents may have variations in their styles, yet are still able to

assess their partners' style accurately. Feinberg (2003) outlined childrearing agreement as one of four components of coparenting and the investigation of consistency versus inconsistency in parenting styles warrants further study. Consistency in parenting has long been argued as an essential element of family harmony and consequently as important for positive child outcomes (Caldera & Lindsey, 2006; Cox, Paley, & Harter, 2001). One methodological implication for future studies may be that in cases where only one parent's participation is feasible, that he/she complete questions about their partner's styles in addition to self-reports. When it is not possible to include all co-parenting adults in future studies, a better representation of findings should be adhered to, that is, we would recommend that parenting by mothers or fathers be individually represented as such, rather than being referred to as global or overall parenting.

Mothers' and Fathers' Parenting Styles and Children's Behaviors

Our examination of parenting styles and child outcomes was divided into two parts. First, to address the issue of single-source bias in reporting, correlations were conducted between parenting styles and reports of the other partner regarding child outcomes. Here we found a different pattern of correlations for fathers and mothers. For fathers, as expected based on previous research, one of the least favorable parenting styles (authoritarian) was associated with both externalizing and internalizing child behaviors. Alternately, authoritative parenting reported by fathers was correlated with more adaptive child behaviors, and fewer externalizing behaviors. Fathers who report using more warmth, reasoning, and autonomy support in their parenting may encourage adaptive-type behaviors in their children, and fewer externalizing behaviors. Authoritarian parenting as reported by fathers, which may include physical coercion, verbal hostility, and lack of reasoning with children, was positively associated with both externalizing and internalizing problems in youngsters. The correlations were modest, yet suggest early

connections between parenting and child behaviors. Interestingly, none of the father-reported child outcomes were related to mother-reported parenting styles. One possible explanation of these findings may be that mothers could be more in-tune or familiar with children's everyday behaviors, perhaps because they spend more time with their children than fathers (Parke & Buriel, 2006). These differential patterns of findings also highlight the importance of obtaining multiple perspectives of the same behaviors, as each reporter has unique perceptions to offer (Olson, 1977). Contrary to what was expected, the permissive parenting style was not related to any of the child outcome behaviors. One plausible reason for this finding may be that the permissive scale had the fewest number of items of the three parenting scales and was not sensitive enough to assess this dimension. It is also possible that permissive parenting (i.e., not following through with rules, spoiling, lack of discipline) with toddlers has fewer immediate ramifications/consequences on child behavior in this developmental period. When examining the association with adaptive child behaviors, only authoritative parenting by fathers was significantly correlated to positive behaviors in children. As presented in the Introduction, the toddlerhood period is marked by autonomy growth and exploration, emotional regulation, and empathy development (Bronson, 2000; Pope Edwards & Liu, 2002). Elements of authoritative parenting reported by fathers align closely with the kind of parenting that provides support, structure (e.g., clear and flexible boundaries), and guidance necessary in fostering adaptive age-appropriate behaviors (Bronson, 2000).

Second, we examined the combined and unique contributions of mothers' and fathers' parenting styles on child outcomes (using the combined parent behavior scores). Interestingly, consistent with traditional parental styles (Baumrind, 1991), we found permissive parenting by mothers and authoritarian parenting by fathers to be uniquely predictive of children's

externalizing behaviors for the current sample. These two styles, while in a sense opposites (high warmth/low control versus low warmth/high control), tend to both be associated with externalizing behaviors in toddlers. The common element is that both are ineffective styles, perhaps due to the dominance of either warmth or control in each dimension. As well, more authoritative parenting by fathers was associated with adaptive behaviors in toddlers, and predictive of fewer externalizing problems. To recap, the authoritative parenting style is comprised of constructive regulating, autonomy granting, and warm and supporting behaviors that are associated with positive child outcomes (Baumrind et al., 2010; Davidov & Grusec, 2006). Toddlerhood is a period when children are beginning to exercise their independence and autonomy from adult direction and authoritative approaches to parenting appear to be optimal in supporting these behaviors in children. Overall, our findings suggest that mothers and fathers share similarities in parenting, yet they also have distinctive experiences with their children. We found support for the positive relationship between authoritative parenting by fathers and adaptive child behaviors, and argue again that it seems important to assess individual parenting practices (i.e., work on setting appropriate levels of control and parameters and increasing responsiveness) in order to understand better young children's early behaviors. Early childhood educators or practitioners working with children presenting with difficult behaviors should consider obtaining information from both parents about their individual parenting styles with their child.

Limitations and Conclusion

The present study examined both intraparental and interparental consistency in parenting styles, but it has some limitations. First, the sample was rather homogeneous (predominantly Caucasian, middle SES, well-educated). Second, by focusing on mothers and fathers, we did not

consider the child's agency in understanding children's behaviors (Kuczynski, 2003). While we believe that the analysis of both mothers' and fathers' parenting styles contributes to our understanding of children's early development, children also have a part to play in the way their parents "parent," in addition to being an agent in their own development. In fact, Verhoeven et al. (2010) found strong child effects on parenting, and therefore parents should be made aware of the ways in which children contribute to the give and take of the parent-child relationship. Another limitation of the present study is that all the toddlers scored within the normal range of externalizing, internalizing, and adaptive behaviors on the BASC-2. Thus, the present findings provide information about typical family dynamics and not clinical populations. Finally, while obtaining parents' perspective of their parenting practices provides highly valuable information, this type of self-report data in family studies would be enhanced by observational methods that capture the mutual interactions that are central to parent-child relations. A multi-method approach to gathering information about parenting can have practical applications for parent educators and clinicians wanting to use concrete examples with parents with whom they work.

Despite the study's limitations, the findings do suggest a continued need to incorporate measures of both mothers' and fathers' parenting in assessing the dynamics in two-parent families. From a clinical perspective, obtaining individual parent information would appropriately inform intervention strategies that may be adapted to fit the needs of each family accordingly. Informing and educating parents about why using ineffective parenting styles such as being overly permissive (e.g., giving into child's demands), or being overly demanding (e.g., having unrealistic expectations of child) are related to higher levels of overt problem behaviors is one important implication of the current findings. In addition to parenting styles and congruency in parenting (agreement and disagreement of childrearing practices), future research can focus on

additional subcomponents of coparenting such as the division of child care, the level of

coparental role support, and the collaborative management of family interactions (Feinberg,

2003; McHale et al., 2002) and each of their connections with individual child characteristics, in

particular, youngsters' behavior problems and adaptive behaviors. Furthermore, future parenting

studies would benefit from including more ethnically diverse families as well as a broader range

of SES representation to further our understanding of family dynamics in a wider range of

families and add to the extant but small literature. A key element of success in working with

families is for parents to have insight into the existing patterns of interactions and make changes

to ineffective approaches or continue using strategies that are adaptive in promoting optimal

child development. In conclusion, understanding that parents' reports of their own parenting

styles are linked both positively and detrimentally to their children's development provides

critical guidance for researchers, practitioners, and ultimately parents themselves.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Parenting Styles and Child Behaviors

	Mean (Range)	SD
BASC scores		
Externalizing T-score	47.03	14.83
	(12.00-78.50)	
Internalizing T-score	49.50	6.54
	(37.00-63.00)	
Adaptive T-score	50.84	8.56
	(23.00-69.00)	
Parenting Style		
Authoritative Mom	4.02	.43
	(2.94-5.00)	
Authoritative Dad	3.78	.47
	(2.80-5.00)	
Authoritarian Mom	1.51	.33
	(.83-2.50)	
Authoritarian Dad	1.66	.35
	(1.00-2.58)	
Permissive Mom	2.03	.51
	(1.00-3.80)	
Permissive Dad	2.12	.62
	(1.00-3.40)	

Table 2

Correlations among Mothers' and Fathers' (self and partner) Parenting Styles

Parenting Styles	Mothers' Report of Partner's Style	Fathers' Report of Partner's Style
Mothers' Self-Reports		
Authoritative	.73[*]	.55[*]
Authoritarian	.65[*]	.44[*]
Permissive	.72[*]	.34[*]
Fathers' Self-Reports		
Authoritative	.47[*]	.73[*]
Authoritarian	.50[*]	.80[*]
Permissive	.18	.83[*]

Note. [*]$p < .01$

Table 3

Pearson Correlations between Parenting styles (as reported by each parent) and Externalizing,

Internalizing, and Adaptive Child Behaviors (as reported by parenting partners)

	Authoritative (Dad)	Authoritarian (Dad)	Permissive (Dad)
Externalizing (reported by Mom)	-.46[*]	.34[*]	.02
Internalizing (reported by Mom)	-.06	.29[*]	.05
Adaptive (reported by Mom)	.34[*]	-.17	-.06
	Authoritative (Mom)	Authoritarian (Mom)	Permissive (Mom)
Externalizing (reported by Dad)	-.08	.14	.06
Internalizing (reported by Dad)	-.23	.16	-.11
Adaptive (reported by Dad)	.07	.08	.10

[*] p < .05.