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ABSTRACT

Studies have indicated that parental authority may or may not modify adolescent self-esteem (SE). This study drew on 343 college students to determine the relationship of adolescents' self-esteem to three familial variables: (1) parental permissiveness; (2) authoritarianism; and (3) authoritativeness, and three cognitive variables: (1) high standards; (2) self-criticism; (3) and overgeneralization. For the cognitive factors, researchers found that nearly 42% of SE variance was linked to overgeneralization. This significant finding suggests that a person's tendency to overgeneralize failure in a specific domain to a more general sense of personal inadequacy has far more implications for SE than either maintaining high standards for one's personal performance or self-criticism. While the variables of parental authoritativeness and authoritarianism were predictive of SE, accounting for nearly 17% of the variance when excluding cognitive factors, the effects of these familial variables were overshadowed by the cognitive factors. This influence of cognitive variables on SE was particularly pronounced among female respondents. The inclusion of the cognitive domain in this study served to temper a potential overemphasis upon the role of parental authority in SE development. This report includes four tables which present statistical findings. Contains 27 references. (RJM)

Comparison of Familial and Cognitive Factors Associated With Male and Female Self-Esteem

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Abstract: *The relationship of adolescents' self-esteem to the familial variables of parental Permissiveness, Authoritarianism, and Authoritativeness and to the cognitive variables of High Standards, Self-Criticism, and Overgeneralization were investigated. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that (a) the effects of parental authority were strongly overshadowed by the cognitive variables (especially Overgeneralization), and (b) these effects were particularly pronounced for the female participants.*

Studies investigating the relationship of parental authority to adolescent self-esteem (SE) have suggested that: (a) strict parental disciplinary practices are inversely related to adolescents' SE (e.g., Bachman, 1982; Kawash, Kerr, & Clewes, 1984; Sears, 1970); (b) parental authority is unrelated to adolescents' SE (e.g., Gecas, 1971; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986); and (c) parental authority that is firm and demanding, but not overly punitive, is positively related to adolescents' SE (e.g., Coopersmith, 1967; Peterson, Southworth, & Peters, 1983). Using Baumrind's (1971) three prototypes of parental authority (i.e., Permissiveness,

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Authoritarianism, and Authoritativeness), Buri and his colleagues (e.g., Buri, 1989; Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, & Mueller, 1988) obtained results that have added considerable clarity to this research area. These researchers reported a strong inverse relationship between parental authoritarianism and adolescents' SE, a strong positive relationship between authoritativeness and SE, and no significant relationship between permissiveness and SE.

An approach to the study of SE that is distinctively different from that described above is the investigation of cognitive factors related to SE. It has been suggested by numerous cognitive authors (e.g., Beck, 1979; Burns, 1980; Ellis & Harper, 1975; Freeman & Dattilio, 1992; McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1981; McKay & Fanning, 1987) that distorted thought patterns both cause and perpetuate low SE. Three specific cognitive patterns that have been implicated in therapeutic settings are of interest here: (a) Are people who set *High Standards* for themselves more prone to low SE because of their inevitable inability to live up to those standards? (b) Do individuals who are more *Self-Critical* end up experiencing lower SE as a result of this criticism turned inward? and (c) Are people who *Overgeneralize* from failure in a specific circumstance to a general sense of failure more apt to experience low SE?

In the present study, assessments of parental Permissiveness, Authoritarianism, and Authoritativeness were made using Buri's (1991) Parental Authority Questionnaire; measures of participants' High Standards, Self-Criticism, and Overgeneralization were obtained using Carver and Ganellen's (1983) Attitudes Toward Self Scale; and subjects' SE scores were derived

from responses to Fitts' (1965) Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. The following exploratory questions were investigated: To what extent do the parental authority factors and the cognitive variables predict non-overlapping proportions of variance in adolescents' SE? In other words, is the effect of parental authority upon SE mediated by cognitive distortions (or vice versa)? Or do these two sets of factors account for distinct proportions of variance in SE? Are the cognitive variables equally effective in accounting for SE variance? Are the relationships of the parental authority variables and the cognitive variables to SE different for male and famale subjects?

Method

Participants

The participants were 343 college students from a coeducational, liberal arts university in the northern Midwest who agreed to participate in the study as part of an introductory psychology course requirement. The responses of 64 students were not included in the present analyses either because one of their parents had died or because their parents were divorced or separated. The responses of an additional 16 students were eliminated from the analyses because their response forms were inadequately completed. The remaining 153 women (mean age = 18.94 years) and 110 men (mean age = 19.62 years) completed several questionnaires.

Materials and Procedure

Each participant was asked to compiete five questionnaires that were presented in randomized order: (a) a mother's authority questionnaire, (b) a father's authority questionnaire, (c) the Attitudes Toward

Self Scale, (d) a SE scale, and (e) a demographic information sheet.

Each of the research participants was told that we were investigating factors that are believed to influence SE in adolescents. They were instructed that there were no right or wrong answers and that all of their responses were anonymous; therefore they were encouraged to respond to each item as honestly as possible. They were also instructed not to spend too much time on any one item since we were interested in their first reaction to each statement. They were also reminded of the importance of responding to every item on the questionnaires.

Parental authority. Distinctions proposed by Baumrind (1971) for three prototypes of parental authority (i.e., Permissiveness, Authoritarianism, and Authoritativeness) were employed by Buri (1991) to construct the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ). The PAQ consists of 10 permissive, 10 authoritarian, and 10 authoritative Likert-type items stated from the point of view of an individual appraising the authority exercised by his or her mother or father. Buri (1991) reported the following test-retest reliabilities (N = 61 over a two-week interval) and Cronbach alpha values (N = 185), respectively: .81 and .75 for Mothers' Permissiveness; .86 and .85 for Mothers' Authoritarianism; .78 and .82 for Mothers' Authoritativeness; .77 and .74 for Fathers' Permissiveness; .85 and .87 for Fathers' Authoritarianism; and .92 and .85 for Fathers' Authoritativeness.

Each participant completed two forms of the PAQ, one to evaluate the authority exercised by the mother and one to evaluate the authority of the father. Examples of items from the Permissiveness scale are:

"My mother/father has always felt that what children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want," and "As I was growing up my mother/father allowed me to decide most things for myself without a lot of direction from her/him." Examples of items from the Authoritarianism scale are: "As I was growing up my mother/father did not allow me to question any decision that she/he had made," and "My mother/father has always felt that more force should be used by parents in order to get their children to behave the way they are supposed to." Examples from the Authoritativeness scale are: "My mother/father has always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever I have felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable," and "My mother/father had clear standards of behavior for the children in our home as I was growing up, but she/he was willing to adjust those standards to the needs of the individual children in the family."

Attitudes Toward Self Scale. Carver and Ganellen (1983) presented the Attitudes Toward Self Scale (ATS). The ATS consists of 18 self-descriptive items to which participants are asked to respond on a 7-point scale ranging from *extremely untrue* of me (1) to *extremely true* of me (7). The ATS was constructed to measure individuals' tendencies to hold high expectations for themselves (High Standards), make harsh judgments of themselves (Self-Criticism), and overgeneralize their negative self-judgments (Overgeneralization). Carver, Ganellen, and Behar-Mitrani (1985) reported test-retest reliabilities (N = 33) over a six-week interval of .67 for High Standards, .44 for Self-Criticism, and .65

for Overgeneralization.

Sample High Standard items are: "It would be hard for anyone to do as well as I want myself to do," and "I am a perfectionist in setting my goals." The Self-Criticism factor is measured by items such as the following: "When I don't do as well as I hoped to, I often get upset at myself," and "When my behavior doesn't live up to my standards, I feel I have let myself or someone else down." The following sample items are from the Overgeneralization subscale: "How I feel about myself overall is easily influenced by a single mistake," and "Noticing one fault of mine makes me think more and more about other faults."

Global self-esteem. Each participant also completed the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS; Fitts, 1965), which consists of 100 self-descriptive statements to which subjects responded on a 5-point scale ranging from *completely false* of me (1) to *completely true* of me (5). The TSCS is a widely-used research tool for SE studies (Marsh & Richards, 1988; Mitchell, 1985; Roid & Fitts, 1988). The Total Positive SE Score was derived for each participant in the present study. As operationalized by Fitts,

> persons with high scores tend to like themselves, feel that they are persons of value and worth, have confidence in themselves, and act accordingly. People with low scores are doubtful about their own worth; see themselves as undesirable;... and have little faith or confidence in themselves (p. 2).

Fitts (1965) reported a test-retest reliability for the Total Positive SE Score of .92. An internal consistency estimate of .92 for

this Total Score was reported by Stanwyck and Garrison (1982). Also, Roid and Fitts (1988) reported a coefficient alpha value of .94 for this Total Score scale.

Demographic information. The participants also provided information concerning (a) their gender, (b) their age, (c) whether one of their parents had died, and (d) whether their parents were divorced or separated.

Results

The bivariate correlations of SE with each of the cognitive and parental authority variables for all the participants combined, for the male subjects, and for the female subjects are presented in Table 1. High Standards were inversely related to SE, but these findings were significant only for the female subjects (r = -.283, p < .01). Self-Criticism was inversely related to SE, but this relationship was significantly stronger (z = 2.88, p < .01) for the women (r = -.531, p < .001) than for the men (r = -.220, p < .01). The cognitive distortions of Overgeneralization were strongly correlated with SE in an inverse direction for both the men (r = -.591, p < .001) and the women (r = -.668, p < .001).

Hierarchical regression analyses of SE on the cognitive and the authority variables were completed. The hierarchical models yield F values, probability levels, and r^2s for each independent variable while controlling for the variance associated with previously entered variables. Since the theoretical goal of these regression analyses was the determination of non-overlapping proportions of variance in SE associ-

Table 1

Bivariate Correlations of SE with the Cognitive and Authority Variables for All Participants (combined N = 268), for Males (n = 110), and for Females (n = 158)

	All Participants	Males	Females
High Standards	-.156	-.020	-.283**
Self-Criticism	-.385***	-.220*	-.531***
Overgeneralization	-.647***	-.591***	-.668***
Mothers' Permissiveness	.102	-.047	.190*
Mothers' Authoritarianism	-.215*	-.176*	-.297**
Mothers' Authoritativeness	.340***	.337***	.354***
Fathers' Permissiveness	.161	.062	.194*
Fathers' Authoritarianism	-.251**	-.218*	-.284**
Fathers' Authoritativeness	.391***	.339***	.307**

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

ated with the cognitive factors versus the parental authority factors, all variables were entered into the regression models (regardless of the statistical significance of the respective bivariate correlations). In the initial hierarchical regressions, the cognitive factors were entered first (in order of the strength of the bivariate correlations found in Table 1), followed by the authority variables (again in order of the strength of the bivariate relationships). A summary of these hierarchical regression analyses is reported in Table 2. Together the cognitive

Table 2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for All Participants

	Dependent Variable = Self-Esteem		
Independent Variables	$F(1,253)$	p	Partial r^2
Overgeneralization	220.49	<.00001	.418
Self-Criticiem	10.73	<.001	.020
High Standards	2.64	*ns*	.005
Fathers' Authoritativeness	28.47	<.0001	.054
Mothers' Authoritativeness	7.89	<.01	.005
Fathers' Authoritarianism	0.04	*ns*	.000
Mothers' Authoritarianism	1.01	*ns*	.002
Fathers' Permissiveness	3.01	*ns*	.006
Mothers' Permissiveness	0.11	*ns*	.000

and the authority variables were associated with 52% of the variance in SE. The variable of Overgeneralization alone accounted for 41.8% of the variance in SE, while the three cognitive factors were associated with 44.3% of the variance and the six authority variables accounted for an additional 7.7% of the variance in SE.

The order of entry of the independent variables into the hierarchical regression equation was then reversed; in other words, the

authority variables were entered into the equation prior to the cognitive factors. A summary of these analyses is presented in Table 3. The six authority variables were associated with 16.8% of the variance in SE. Even after the entry of these authority variables, the cognitive

Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for All Participants, But With Parental Authority Variables Entered First

	Dependent Variable = Self-Esteem		
Independent Variables	$F(1,288)$	p	Partial r^2
Fathers' Authoritativeness	53.68	<.00001	.102
Mothers' Authoritativeness	26.10	<.0001	.049
Fathers' Authoritarianism	5.79	<.05	.011
Mothers' Authoritarianism	1.45	*ns*	.003
Fathers' Permissiveness	1.20	*ns*	.002
Mothers' Permissiveness	0.58	*ns*	.001
Overgeneralization	172.24	<.00001	.327
Self-Criticism	10.47	<.01	.020
High Standards	2.88	*ns*	.005

factors accounted for an additional 35.2% of the variance in SE, and the Overgeneralization variable alone accounted for 32.7% of the SE variance.

In an effort to investigate the differential effects of the cogni-

tive and authority variables upon the SE of young men and young women, further regression analyses were completed on the male and female data separately. A Summary of these hierarchical regression analyses is presented in Table 4. For the male subjects, 46.8% of the SE variance was associated with the nine variables: the cognitive factors were

Table 4

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for the Male and Female Participants Separately

	Dependent Variable = Self-Esteem					
	Male Participants			Female Participants		
Independent Variables	*F(1,100)*	*p*	*Partial* r^2	*F(1,143)*	*p*	*Partial* r^2
Overgeneralization	65.58	<.00001	.349	147.11	<.00001	.447
Self-Criticism	8.42	<.01	.045	2.72	*ns*	.008
High Standards	0.19	*ns*	.001	7.32	<.01	.022
Fathers' Authoritativeness	7.43	<.01	.040	20.36	<.0001	.062
Mothers' Authoritativeness	2.39	*ns*	.013	4.99	<.05	.005
Fathers' Authoritarianism	0.06	*ns*	.000	0.22	*ns*	.001
Mothers' Authoritarianism	0.22	*ns*	.001	1.26	*ns*	.004
Fathers' Permissiveness	2.59	*ns*	.014	1.11	*ns*	.003
Mothers' Permissiveness	0.92	*ns*	.005	1.28	*ns*	.004

associated with 39.5% of the variance in SE, and the authority variables accounted for an additional 7.3% of the SE variance. When the order of entry was reversed, the authority variables were associated with 20.4% of the variance in SE, with the cognitive factors then accounting for an additional 26.3% of the SE variance. For the female participants, 56.6%

of the variance in SE was associated with the nine independent variables, with the cognitive factors accounting for 47.7% of the SE variance and the authority variables accounting for an additional 8.8% of the variance. Reversing the order of entry revealed that the authority variables were associated with 18.5% of the SE variance, and the cognitive factors augmented this R^2 by an additional 38%.

Discussion

One striking finding in the present study is the magnitude of the relationship between Overgeneralization and SE, especially relative to the relationships of the other cognitive variables (High Standards and Self-Criticism) to SE. Ever since James' (1890) seminal suggestions that SE is strongly affected by the extent to which individuals' accomplishments match their aspirations, psychologists have stressed the importance of setting personal standards that are not excessively high. Since the inevitable outcome of establishing high personal expectations for performance is the experience of failure (at least for most individuals), it has been repeatedly emphasized that to avoid such failure (and the concomitant self-denigration), individuals should be encouraged to adopt standards of performance that will reduce the disparities between personal aspirations and personal accomplishments. However, as can be seen in Table 2, the cognitive variable of Overgeneralization is associated with nearly 42% of the variance in SE, with the variables of Self-Criticism and High Standards adding only 2.5% to this r^2 value. Breaking these results out separately for the male and female participants, we can see in Table 4 that Overgeneralization accounted for

approximately 35% of SE variance for the men, with Self-Criticism significantly augmenting this r^2 value by 4.5%; for the women, 44.7% of the SE variance was associated with the Overgeneralization variable, with only High Standards adding significantly to this r^2 value (partial r^2 = 2.2%). Clearly the present findings suggest that neither maintaining High Standards for one's personal performance nor Self-Criticism are strongly predictive of SE once the effects of Overgeneralization have been taken into consideration; the tendency to Overgeneralize from failure in a specific domain to a more general sense of personal failure has far more significant implications for SE. Furthermore, the results of the present study suggest that the deleterious effects of Overgeneralization upon SE are stronger for women than for men.

These present results, which are consistent with investigations of the relationships of the ATS measures to depression (e.g., Carver et al., 1985; Carver, LaVoie, Kuhl, & Ganellen, 1988; Ganellen, 1988), suggest that Overgeneralization may be an important cognitive dimension for clinical contexts. In fact, therapeutic interventions that are aimed at the restructuring of cognitive Overgeneralization may be more effective than those which attempt to counter High Standards or Self-Criticism. This may well provide an important focus for future research within clinical settings.

The strong relationship between Overgeneralization and SE in the present study may also help to explain why those who struggle with low SE often adopt one of the following two "coping strategies." For some individuals who have feelings of incompetence and inadequacy, the

tendency is to restrict the time and energy which they expend when working on projects. Although typically unaware of it, the cognitive ruminations may follow along this sort of tact: "If I do not accomplish my goal, but I haven't really given 100%, then I haven't really failed." Thus the anxiety that might result from the Overgeneralization of failure in a specific situation to a more general sense of personal failure may be avoided. For other low SE individuals, however, the "strategy" seems to be quite different. Rather than attempting to avoid the anxiety of personal failure through reduced effort, these individuals overachieve. They seem to be driven not to fail in specific circumstances, thus avoiding the denigrating personal consequences of Overgeneralization. While admittedly speculative, these suggestions offer a reasonable explication of the mediating influence of Overgeneralization in SE

Another important finding in the present study derives from the relative effects of familial factors vs. cognitive factors upon SE. While the variables of parental Authoritativeness and Authoritarianism were robustly predictive of SE, the effects of these familial variables were overshadowed by the cognitive factors (especially Overgeneralization). For example, Overgeneralization alone accounted for nearly 42% of the variance in SE; furthermore, Overgeneralization was associated with 32.7% of the SE variance after the parental authority variables had been entered into the regression equation.

One implication of these findings is the suggestion that investigations of SE development include more than one domain of potential

influence --- for example, in the present study, the use of both familial factors and cognitive factors. Whereas the Authoritativeness and Authoritarianism variables accounted for nearly 17% of the variance in SE when the cognitive factors were not taken into consideration, once the cognitive factors were considered, then the authority variables were associated with only 6.7% of the SE variance. Thus including the cognitive domain in the present study served to temper a potential overemphasis upon the role of parental authority in SE development.

A related practical implication of these findings is a suggestion that those programs which are designed to assist adults in their role as parents should continue to instruct these individuals in appropriate uses of authority; as can be seen in Table 2, once the cognitive factors had been entered into the hierarchical regression model, the authority variables still accounted for almost 8% of SE variance. However, the role of parental authority in SE development should not be emphasized to the exclusion of an understanding of the role that cognitive factors (such as Overgeneralization) play in the derivation of SE.

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