

It is not what you look at, but what you see: How negative meaning-making relates to perceived parenting style and feeling worthy of love

Amelia D. Coffman, Camilla S. Øverup, Julie A. Brunson, Linda K. Acitelli

Introduction

Previous research has demonstrated that an autonomy-supporting parenting style is related to several adaptive emotional and relational outcomes later in life, including feeling worthy of love (WOL; Øverup, Brunson, Steers, & Acitelli, 2014; Roth & Assor, 2012). Events that are seen as threats to the self (to self-worth or to an interpersonal relationship) may result in negative meaning-making of events (Besser & Priel, 2011). Parental expectations may be interpreted in various ways (both positive and negative) by an individual.

H1: An (perceived) autonomy-supporting parenting style will be negatively associated with negative meaning-making of parental expectations (*a* path).

H2: Negative meaning-making of parental expectations will be negatively associated with feeling worthy of love from family (*b* path).

H3: Negative meaning-making of parental expectations will mediate the association between an (perceived) autonomy-supporting parenting style and feeling worthy of love from family (*c* and *c'* path).

Measures

Participants completed the Perceived Parenting Style scale (Robbins, 1994) scale, four items that assessed negative meaning-making of parental expectations (e.g., "It felt bad because they (parents) demanded too much of me;" Bardone-Cone, Harney & Boyd, 2012) and a single question that asked: "In thinking about the present, please indicate how often you feel worthy of love from your family."

Method

Participants & Procedures

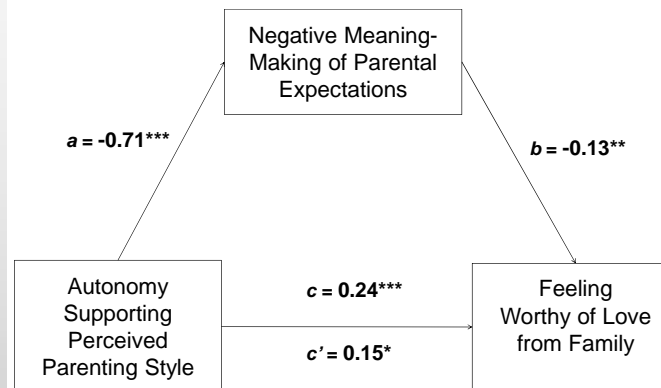
Participants were 210 undergraduate students (Mean age = 23.81, *SD* = 5.83, 58.3% female) from a large, southern university. The sample was ethnically diverse (30% Hispanic, 28% Caucasian, 17% Asian, 12% African-American, 9% Multi-racial and 4% Middle Eastern). All study materials were completed online, and extra credit was awarded to be used towards class credit. Mediation analyses were conducted using conditional process analysis (Hayes, 2013), controlling for gender and age.

Results and Discussion

Consistent with expectations, we found that a perceived autonomy-supporting parenting style was negatively associated with negative meaning-making of parental expectations (*a* path, see Figure 1). Additionally, greater negative meaning-making of parental expectations was associated with lower amounts of feeling WOL (*b* path). As hypothesized, negative meaning-making of parental expectations mediated the relationship between an autonomy-supporting parenting style and feeling WOL (*c* and *c'* path).

In sum, individuals whose parents support their autonomy seem to interpret parental expectations less negatively, and may in turn feel more WOL. This study contributes to the literature by seeking to understand how individual differences in a perceived autonomy-supporting parenting style and negative meaning-making of parental expectations influence feeling worthy of love.

Figure 1.
Negative meaning-making of parental expectations as a mediator of the association between an (perceived) autonomy supporting parenting style and feeling worthy of love.



References

- Bardone-Cone, A. M., Harney, M. B., & Boyd, C. A. (2012). What if high expectations feel good? Perceived parental expectations, their meanings, and bulimic symptoms in Black and White college women. *Eating Behaviors, 13*(2), 170-173.
- Besser, A., & Priel, B. (2011). Dependency, self-criticism and negative affective responses following imaginary rejection and Failure threats: Meaning-making processes as moderators or mediators. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes, 74*(1), 31-40.
- Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis*. New York: The Guilford Press
- Øverup, C. S., Brunson, J. A., Steers, M.-L. N., & Acitelli, L. K. (2014). I know I have to earn your love: how the family environment shapes feelings of worthiness of love. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*.
- Robbins, R. J. (1994). An assessment of perceptions of parental autonomy support and control: Child and parent correlates. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). University of Rochester, Rochester, NY.
- Roth, G., & Assor, A. (2012). The costs of parental pressure to express emotions: Conditional regard and autonomy support as predictors of emotion regulation and intimacy. *Journal of Adolescence, 35*(4), 799-808.