



Dysfunctional Individuation Mediates the Relationship Between Perceived Parenting and Coping Among Emerging Adults



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Introduction

- A large body of literature has found that parenting influences child development both currently and across the lifespan.
- Parenting behaviors, such as autonomy support (AS) and psychological control (PC), have been associated with development in a number of ways during adolescence and emerging adulthood.
- Parental AS is defined as parenting behaviors that take an empathic stance toward their child, allow for choice among options, and offer a rationale when possibilities are limited (Ryan, Deci, Grolnick, & La Guardia, 2006)
- Parental PC is defined as behaviors that are manipulative of children's thoughts, autonomy, and emotional responses towards parents and other important aspects of a child's life. (Barber & Harmon, 2002)
- AS, in particular, has been associated with young adults voluntarily choosing to separate from caregivers (Kins et al., 2009; Kins et al., 2012).
- This decision to separate starts with parents, peers, and other significant persons and further extends to individuation and the development of a coherent, autonomous self (Brand et al., 2004).
- Furthermore, separation-individuation is viewed as an integral developmental process for many young people during emerging adulthood.
- Past research has found that while AS has been positively associated with individuation, PC has been associated with difficulty separating (Kins et al., 2009; Kins et al., 2012).
- Research also found that when the separation-individuation process goes awry, meaning there are signs of dysfunctional individuation (DI), emotion dysregulation and difficulty managing challenges tend to manifest (Brand et al., 2004).
- This difficulty may lead to lowered confidence in coping with challenges in emerging adulthood (Brand et al., 2004).
- Few studies have explored the relationships among perceived parental support during childhood, dysfunctional individuation, and coping self-efficacy among emerging adults.
- While AS and PC have been associated with well-being (Lee et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2007), we aim to examine how perceptions of parental AS and PC are associated with separation/individuation and coping during emerging adulthood.

Current Study

- To the authors' knowledge, no past study has examined the relationships among all of these variables: perceived parental support, perceived parental psychological control, dysfunctional individuation, and coping self-efficacy.
- Thus, the current study intend to examine the relationship among these variables.
- We hypothesize that an emerging adult's retrospective view of their parents' autonomy support and psychological control will have effects on their ability to separate, which in turn will affect their coping self-efficacy.

Method

Participants

- Participants: 120 undergraduate students at a Northwestern university, ($M_{age} = 19.91$ years, $SD = 1.77$; Female = 81.7%)
- White/European = 57.5%; Asian/Asian American = 21.7%; Hispanic = 8.3%; Biracial = 8.3%; Latinx = 6.7%; African American/Black = 5.8%; Multiracial = 5%; Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian = 1.7%; Other = 3.3%

Materials

- Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale (Mageau et al., 2015; autonomy support subscale, α for mothers = .93, α for fathers = .94; psychological control subscale, α for mothers = .90, α for fathers = .92) measures autonomy-supportive and controlling parenting behaviors using separate subscales. Participants responded using a Likert framework from 1 ("Do Not Agree At All") to 7 ("Very Strongly Agree").
- Dysfunctional Individuation Scale (Stey et al., 2014; $\alpha = .77$) measures inadequate individuation, characterized by deficient object constancy, polarized relational experiences, and impaired self-other differentiation. Participants responded using a Likert framework from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree").
- The Coping Self-Efficacy Scale (Chesney et al., 2006; $\alpha = .94$) measures confidence of coping with challenges and threats. Participants responded using a Likert framework from 1 ("Cannot Do At All") to 10 ("Certain Can Do").

Results

- On average, participants reported that they perceived higher levels of support from both their mother and father (see Table 1) compared to their perceptions of parental psychological control.
- Correlations demonstrated significant relationships among autonomy support, psychological control, dysfunctional individuation, and coping self-efficacy (see Table 1).
- An ANOVA revealed no significant sex differences among the key variables.
- Mediation analyses were conducted to assess the potential mediating role of dysfunctional individuation between parental autonomy support and coping self-efficacy and between parental psychological control and coping self-efficacy.
- For mothers, dysfunctional individuation mediated the relationships between autonomy support and coping self-efficacy ($\beta = 2.15$, 95% CI [.29, 4.74]) as well as between psychological control and coping self-efficacy ($\beta = -4.23$, 95% CI [-7.92, -1.54]).
- For fathers, dysfunctional individuation also mediated the relationships between autonomy support and coping self-efficacy ($\beta = 2.29$, 95% CI [.24, 5.12]) and between psychological control and coping self-efficacy ($\beta = -2.97$, 95% CI [-6.66, -.52]).

Discussion

- In general, participants reported that they retrospectively perceived their parents as supportive of them during childhood, which resulted in less reported difficulty separating from their parents, which then resulted in higher reported confidence in their ability to cope with challenges.
- For emerging adults who felt that their parents were more supportive of their autonomy, their confidence in their own coping skills was higher. This relationship was mediated by dysfunctional individuation.
- For emerging adults who felt that their parents were controlling of their psychological states, their confidence in their own coping skills was lower. This relationship was also mediated by dysfunctional individuation.
- However, individuals who reported that their parents were controlling and manipulative also tended to report that they had a more difficult time separating from their parents and/or family.
- Substantiating previous findings that parental AS and PC are associated with difficulty separating from parents (Kins et al., 2009, 2012), which may impact well-being (e.g., Brand et al., 2004), our data and design provided further evidence on the relationship and interactions between these three variables; especially in the context of emerging adulthood.
- Aligning with findings from Kins et al. (2009), our data has shown that having psychologically controlling parents was a risk factor for a more difficult separation process. A conceptual answer to this could be that young adults whose parents limited many aspects of their life and development would face many difficulty when they are forced to survive without parents (i.e., entering emerging adulthood).
- The retrospective nature of our data implied that changes in outcome variables were more dependent on how participants viewed parenting behaviors, and not on the intention behind these actions. Meaning, a parent's well-meaning behavior might backfire and leave adverse effects on their child if it was seen as controlling or manipulative by said child.
- A low sense of confidence in one's coping skills may have adverse effects on the individual's well-being and functioning due to the relationship between coping self-efficacy and mental and emotional health (Cotton, Mingione, & Mcleish, 2013).

Limitations:

- The study looked at coping self-efficacy and not coping behaviors. There might exist a discrepancy between one's sense of confidence in their coping ability and actual coping behaviors.
- The study looked at a sample that is predominantly White, which limits generalizability of the study findings.

Future directions:

- Future studies could collect data on perceived parenting behaviors directly from adolescents and young adults during specific developmental periods instead of gathering retrospective data from emerging adults.
- Further research could examine coping behaviors instead of coping self-efficacy.
- Results from Wang et al. (2007) showed that parental psychological control has little negative effects on children's functioning in East Asian countries. Therefore research into populations that view parental psychological control as less negative (i.e., East Asian cultures with Confucian beliefs) may be important to understand the effects of psychological control across cultures.

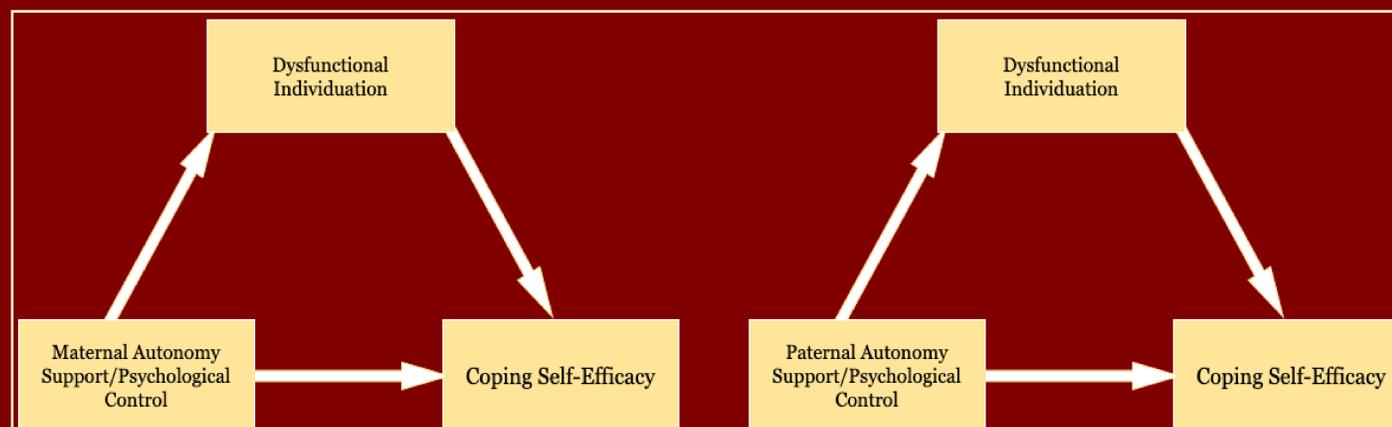


Fig. 1. Structural Models of The Mediation Analysis

Table 1. Correlations Among Parental and Adolescent Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Maternal Autonomy Support	4.87	1.18	-					
2. Maternal Psychological Control	2.89	1.17	-0.64**	-				
3. Paternal Autonomy Support	4.65	1.20	0.43**	-0.17	-			
4. Paternal Psychological Control	2.68	1.21	-0.22*	0.52**	-0.46**	-		
5. Dysfunctional Individuation	3.28	.95	-0.24**	0.36**	-0.23*	0.24*	-	
6. Coping Self Efficacy	154.22	39.23	0.41*	-0.10	0.46**	-0.06	-0.37*	-

Note: Coping Self-Efficacy was analysed as a sum score
*p < .05, ** p < .01

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Brand et al. (2004):

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/231181451> Parental Attachment Separation-Individuation and College Student Adjustment A Structural Equation Analysis of Mediational Effects

barber & harmon (2002)

<http://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/59f0/550858346f2685b6e4109d3b146b343f4a7b.pdf>

van petegem et al (2008)

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226958417> The influence of student characteristics and interpersonal teacher behaviour in the classroom on student's wellbeing

Kins et al (2012)

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225284879> When the separation-individuation process goes awry

Kins et al (2009)

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26762679> Patterns of Home Leaving and Subjective Well-Being in Emerging Adulthood The Role of Motivational Processes and Parental Autonomy Support