

# The Role of Unconditional Parental Regard in Autonomy-Supportive Parenting

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## Abstract

Two studies explored the role of parents' unconditional positive regard (UCPR) as perceived by adolescents and young adults in promoting the effectiveness of specific parenting practices that may support offspring's academic autonomous motivation. Study 1 tested the hypothesis that UCPR predicts rationale-giving and choice-provision practices and, at the same time, moderates their relations with adolescents' autonomous motivation. Study 2 replicated the association between UCPR and the parental practices, and further explored the role of parents' authenticity as an antecedent of UCPR and parental autonomy support. Study 1 included 125 adolescents and Study 2 considered 128 college-students and their mothers. The offspring reported on their perceptions of their mothers and on their autonomous motivation, and the mothers reported on their sense of authenticity. Both studies found consistent associations between UCPR and parenting practices that may support autonomous motivation. Moreover, Study 1 demonstrated that the rationale giving and choice provision were more strongly related to adolescents' autonomous motivation when adolescents perceived mothers as high on UCPR. Finally, Study 2 demonstrated that mothers' authenticity predicted UCPR, which in turn was related to autonomy-supportive parenting. Findings support the assumption that parents' autonomy-supportive practices are more effective when accompanied by UCPR.

In the last few decades, research anchored in self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) has demonstrated the advantages of autonomy-supportive socialization practices for children's well-being, academic engagement, adaptive emotion regulation, and prosocial behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Grolnick, 2003; Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997; Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, recent empirical attention has turned to antecedents of autonomy support, mostly in the children's environment (Grolnick, 2003, 2007). Following this line of research, the present investigation explored possible parent-related antecedents of autonomy-supportive parenting (ASP). The moderating effect of one of these antecedents on the positive effects of ASP was also tested.

Within SDT, the ASP concept refers to parental practices that are hypothesized as enhancing offspring's sense of self-determination regarding the actions or goals in which they engage (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Specifically, such practices may include taking the child's perspective, acting in ways that encourage choice, providing meaningful rationales and relevance, and refraining from using language or other actions that are likely to be experienced as pressure toward particular behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Supporting autonomy in these ways has been found to enhance intrinsic motivation, facilitate well-internalized extrinsic motivation, prompt the experience of autonomy and authenticity, and result in effective performance

and psychological well-being (Grolnick, 2003; Grolnick et al., 1997).

Nevertheless, since ASP is defined by specific behaviors such as providing clear rationales and limited choices, Grolnick (2007) argued that these exact same practices could also be enacted in a controlling, autonomy-suppressive way, in which case children would not perceive them as autonomy-supportive. For example, a parent may provide a rationale for his/her expectations but do so in a very coercive tone of voice without giving the child an opportunity to express doubts or concerns. Likewise, even when a rationale is not conveyed in a controlling way, it might be perceived by children as an autonomy-suppressive strategic parental attempt to obtain the child's compliance with the parental agenda. Katz and Assor (2007) reviewed research showing that choice-provision, another autonomy-supportive behavior, does not always enhance autonomous motivation. Thus, it appears that generally desirable parenting practices that would be considered autonomy-supportive from an SDT perspective do not always yield autonomy-enhancing motivational effects.

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In the present research, we focused on a parental antecedent of ASP—unconditional positive regard (UCPR)—that is likely to be an important determinant of the extent to which parents' rationale giving and choice provision actually lead to their children's autonomous motivation. In our first study reported here (Study 1), we used a moderated mediation model (James & Brett, 1984; Judd & Kenny, 1981; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) to examine UCPR as a possible predictor of these specific parenting practices, and at the same time as a possible moderator of the relations between those practices and children's outcomes. In Study 2, a replication of the link between UCPR and ASP is examined, and, in addition a possible antecedent of UCPR is explored. Specifically, a parental personal disposition—authenticity (Kernis & Goldman, 2006)—was hypothesized to function as an antecedent of UCPR.

### **CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE OF PARENTAL UCPR AS A MODERATOR AND PREDICTOR OF RATIONALE GIVING AND CHOICE PROVISION**

Following Rogers (1961), children's experience of UCPR is defined as children's perception that their parents accept their emotional experience and do not view it as invalid or wrong, even when they clearly do not accept the child's behavior. Rogers (1951, 1959) was the first to posit that UCPR is crucial for optimal human development. According to Rogers, UCPR creates a growth-promoting climate that is important for children's development of unconditional self-regard. Empirical research on UCPR is quite scarce, despite the considerable research that has been conducted in the last decade demonstrating the harmful effects of "parental conditional regard"—parents' provision of warmth and affection that is contingent on their child's behavior (Assor, Roth, & Deci, 2004; Assor & Tal, 2012; Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005; Roth, 2008; Roth & Assor, 2010, 2012; Roth, Assor, et al., 2009; Roth, Ron, & Benita, 2009).

In the present research, we focused on offspring's perceptions of school-related UCPR, referring to children's perception of their parents as accepting their feelings toward school-related issues, even when children do not meet parental expectations for academic effort and performance. Thus, when children experience their parents as high on UCPR, they perceive their parents as accepting their emotional experience regarding school even when parents are not satisfied with their school behavior.

For example, if a child is bored and irritated by a teacher and consequently publicly makes fun of the teacher or insults him/her as "incompetent," parents who are high on UCPR can clearly indicate that this is an unacceptable behavior. However, they would also convey their understanding and acceptance of the emotional experience underlying the unacceptable behavior. Such a parent might take the child's perspective and acknowledge the child's feelings, provide rationale for discontinuing the hurtful behavior toward the teacher, and work with the child in

an attempt to deal with the situation in a more constructive and less hurtful way. In some cases, the parent may even try to help the child feel less irritated and angry at the teacher by helping the child see that what was boring repetitive teaching for her/him was useful and necessary for other children. In this case, the child may start to feel less irritated by the teacher. Importantly, the decrease in anger toward the teacher would not be due to an attempt at suppressing feelings that are unacceptable to parents, but due to a more positive interpretation of the perceived frustrating behavior of the teacher.

It is important to note that we view UCPR as an experience of children and not as an experience of parents. From the parent's point of view, he/she may use conditional regard (e.g., love withdrawal) because the parent deeply cares about the child and would like to "motivate" him/her. Thus, the experience of conditional regard is the child's experience and not the parent's. Also, note that especially with regard to the variable of UCPR, we are discussing a phenomenological experience of the child. This experience may be produced by a combination of subtle parental behaviors across a relatively long time period. But parents may be the least capable of providing accurate reports of the extent to which they behave in ways that reflect UCPR.

The concept of UCPR should be differentiated from two related concepts—parental warmth (Schaefer, 1965) and parental conditional regard (Assor et al., 2004; Roth, Assor, et al., 2009)—that are also distinct from each other. Past research has demonstrated that warmth and conditional regard are only moderately interrelated, and each has unique effects on important psychological outcomes (Assor et al., 2004; Roth, 2008; Israeli-Halevi, Assor & Roth, in press). Thus, parental expression of warmth and affection does not necessarily involve or preclude parents' conditional regard—their usage of warmth conditionally as a "carrot and stick" means for shaping children's behavior (i.e., using warm regard as a contingent positive reinforcement or withdrawing it as punishment). In the current research, we measured both warmth and conditional regard to examine their discriminant validity with UCPR. Thus, UCPR may differ from warmth because the latter may not necessarily involve unconditional acceptance of the child's experience when the parent does not accept the child's behavior. As for parental conditional regard, it is possible to claim that UCPR may not differentiate from this concept because the two may emerge as two poles of the same continuum. However, low UCPR does not necessarily involve high conditional regard. Thus, permissive or neglectful parenting may result in low perceptions of both UCPR and conditional regard. Measurement of warmth and conditional regard will permit validation of the UCPR concept.

In our current research, to elucidate the relatively unexplored concept of UCPR as a predictor of ASP, we did not examine a general autonomy-supportive climate, which may involve confounding parental practices that do not necessarily yield autonomy-enhancing motivational effects or may include perceptions of UCPR. Instead, in Study 1, we narrowed our empirical

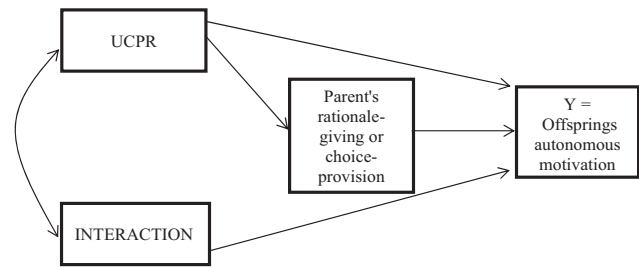
focus to the exploration of only two specific parental practices held in wide consensus for their autonomy-enhancing potential (i.e., parental rationale giving and choice provision; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Van Petegem, 2015). In addition, to validate those practices' autonomy-supportive effects, in Study 1 we examined not only offspring's perceptions of parents' practices but also offspring's self-reports about their own autonomous motivations. Moreover, in both of our studies, to further enable specificity of reporting among parents and offspring, we selected one specific domain for investigating UCPR and ASP—academic engagement—which is a key area for negotiation between parents and children (Smetana, Daddis, & Chuang, 2003).

As depicted in Figure 1, using a moderated mediation model (Preacher et al., 2007), in Study 1 we hypothesized that UCPR would serve as a predictor of rationale giving and choice provision and at the same time would act as a moderator in the relation between these practices and offspring's outcomes. Thus, we hypothesized that these two potentially autonomy-supportive practices—rationale giving and choice provision—would show stronger positive effects on offspring's self-reported autonomous motivation for academics when accompanied by a perception of their parents as higher in school-related UCPR. Parents who can take their child's perspective and accept the child's emotional experience at school despite unacceptable child behaviors may be able to provide more appropriate choices for future academic behavior that are relevant to the child's experience and more meaningful rationales for parental expectations based on the child's perspective, thus leading to higher autonomous motivation in the child. This hypothesis is also consistent with Darling and Steinberg's (1993) view that specific parental practices may have different effects depending on parents' more general attitudes. For example, Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, and Darling (1992) showed that the effectiveness of parents' school involvement in facilitating adolescents' academic achievement was greater among authoritative than nonauthoritative parents. In line with this approach, we hypothesized that the positive effects of specific potentially autonomy-supportive parental behaviors may be enhanced when the parents are perceived as high on UCPR.

If UCPR is an important antecedent of the discussed practices and moderator of their effects, it is useful to examine possible parental characteristics that may predict UCPR, such as parental authenticity. In our second study, we tested the hypothesis that parents' self-reported authenticity would predict their children's perceptions of UCPR and by doing so would predict offspring's perceptions of ASP.

## PARENTS' AUTHENTICITY AS A PREDICTOR OF UCPR AND ASP

Authenticity is defined as autonomous acts that originate from one's core self, representing those preferences and values that are wholeheartedly endorsed (Kernis & Goldman, 2005). Authentic actions are those for which one takes responsibility; they are not half-hearted or disowned (Ryan & Deci, 2006).



**Figure 1** UCPR as a predictor of parental practices and as a moderator of their effects on autonomous motivation. Schematic representation of the moderated mediation hypothesis adopted from Preacher et al. (2007). Note: UCPR = offspring's perception of unconditional parental regard. INTERACTION = interaction between UCPR and parent's rational giving/choice provision.

More specifically, Kernis and Goldman (2005, 2006) suggested that authenticity comprises four distinct but interrelated components: awareness, unbiased processing of self-relevant information, relational orientation, and behavior that coincides with the core self. In the present research, we focused on the latter behavioral manifestation of authenticity, which results from the other three components (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) and entails the extent to which individuals engage in behaviors freely because those behaviors align with their core values, beliefs, and self-aspects (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Lakey, Kernis, Heppner, & Lance, 2008). SDT theorists define this behavioral aspect of authenticity as self-integration or autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2006; Ryan, Deci, Grolnick, & La Guardia, 2006).

Research has supported the validity of Kernis and Goldman's (2005) measure for authenticity, demonstrating its relations with various aspects of healthy psychological and interpersonal functioning (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Lakey et al., 2008). For example, Lakey et al. (2008) found that authenticity predicts not only low defensiveness but also mindfulness, which involves the extent to which individuals pay nonjudgmental and unbiased attention to their current experiences (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Moreover, past research found mindfulness to be strongly related to autonomous functioning, characterized by relatively low levels of ego-involvement (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Recent SDT research suggests that authenticity of significant adults may affect children. Thus, Roth, Assor, Kaplan, and Kanat-Maymon (2007) demonstrated that teachers' authenticity (referring to the behavioral equivalent of autonomous motivation; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2006) predicted students' perceptions of autonomy-supportive teaching. In addition, Roth (2014) showed that teachers' authenticity (autonomous motivation) predicted students' perceptions of autonomy-supportive teaching through the moderating factor of teachers' belief that autonomous motivation is essential to life satisfaction.

Along the same lines, the present research extended these prior findings on teachers to parents. In this research the measurement of parental autonomy support was not restricted to the specific potentially autonomy-supportive practices of rationale giving and choice provision as we did in Study 1; instead we

used a well-known and elaborated measure of ASP (the Perceptions of Parents Scale; Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991; Niemiec et al., 2006). To our knowledge, the only studies that have explored parental characteristics in relation to ASP were conducted by Landry et al. (2008) on mothers' trust in children's organismic development and Grolnick, Price, Beiswenger, and Sauck (2007) on mothers' ego-involvement. In these rare studies of a parental dispositional factor as an antecedent of ASP, Landry et al. (2008) found that parental belief that a child's healthy development occurs naturally predicts ASP, whereas Grolnick et al. (2007) found that ego-involved mothers were prone to environmental pressures that undermine ASP. No prior research has explored parental characteristics as antecedents of children's perceptions of UCPR.

Thus, in Study 2, we tested whether or not parents' self-reported differences in authenticity would predict ASP through UCPR. One process by which parents' authenticity (autonomous motivation) might lead their children to view them as higher in UCPR might be that authentic parents, who act freely, mindfully, and nonjudgmentally, may likewise relate nonjudgmentally to their children's experiences, viewing those experiences as aligned with what they perceive as their children's authentic core values, beliefs, and self-aspects. Therefore, such parents may be nonjudgmental about their children's academic experiences and more accepting when the children fail to meet parental expectations (UCPR). In turn, such parents might be perceived as more autonomy supportive inasmuch as they may be more willing to take the child's perspective, encourage the child's expression, and provide relevant rationales and some degree of choice (ASP).

The second process by which authenticity (autonomous motivation) might lead to UCPR involves parents' personal, experience-based understanding of autonomous motivation and its benefits. In this process, parents who have experienced the advantages of autonomous motivation would prefer that their children also act from autonomous motivations because they understand that these types of motivations lead to a high quality of life. Indeed, Roth (2014) found a relation between the behavioral component of teachers' authenticity and their belief that autonomous motivation is important for life satisfaction. Thus, autonomously motivated parents may use their own motivational experiences as a basis for inferring the importance of being accepting of children's experiences (UCPR) and in turn more supportive of their autonomy.

## THE PRESENT STUDIES

We conducted two studies to test the present hypotheses concerning UCPR and autonomy supportive practices. We investigated the extent to which adolescents (Study 1) and young adults (Study 2) perceived their parents as providing regard that was not contingent on their academic achievements and efforts, thus replicating the studied relationships in two different age groups and academic settings—junior high school and college,

respectively. The focus on adolescents is in line with various developmental and motivational researchers (Hill & Holmbeck, 1986; Ryan & LaGuardia, 2000; Steinberg, 1989) who consider the development of a more autonomous functioning as a critical developmental process for adolescents. As a consequence, an important task for parents is to support their offspring's autonomous regulation (Soenens et al., 2007). Additionally, we focused on adolescents and young adults due to their sufficient maturity to respond to the parenting evaluation and self-report measures (Merrell, 2008). Research on the development of self-understanding (e.g., Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 1998) has indicated that by the age of 15 most adolescents are capable of describing the types of psychological processes assessed in the present research.

The first study tapped adolescents' reports of their parents' behaviors (UCPR, rationale giving and choice provision) and self-reports (autonomous motivation). As described above, we tested the role of UCPR as a predictor of parents' rationale giving and choice provision, and as a moderator of the relation between these practices and adolescents' autonomous motivation to engage in academic activities. The second study tapped mothers' reports concerning their own authenticity (autonomous motivation) as well as their offspring's (college students') perceptions of the mothers' UCPR and ASP. Hence, the second study tested the hypotheses that mothers' authenticity would predict their offspring's perception of UCPR, which in turn would predict the offspring's perceptions of ASP.

## Study 1

The first study tested the hypotheses that perceived UCPR would predict perceived parental rationale giving and choice provision and would moderate their relations with adolescents' autonomous academic motivation. Thus, we hypothesized that rationale giving and choice provision would relate more strongly with adolescents' autonomous motivation when they perceived parents as providing greater UCPR.

## Method

**Participants and Procedures.** Participants were 125 ninth-grade students (52% female) ages 14 to 15 years old ( $M = 14.5$  years) from five classes in two Israeli junior high schools serving middle- and lower-middle-class families. As required by the Israeli Ministry of Education, active informed consent was obtained from the adolescents, and passive informed consent was obtained from parents. The latter procedure entailed parents' receipt of a letter from the researcher providing information about the study purposes and method; parents were asked to complete a form if they did not wish their child to participate in the study. Only two families declined to permit their children's participation.

Research assistants administered questionnaires to students while teachers were not present in the classroom. Participants



completed the questionnaires in two consecutive sessions, separated by 1 hour. In the first session, participants reported on their perceptions of parents (ASP and UCPR), and in the second session they reported on their motivation in school.

**Measures.** Students responded to all three scales using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not true at all*) to 6 (*very true*).

**Students' Perceptions of Mothers' Rationale Giving and Choice Provision.** This measure included two subscales, for students' perceptions about mothers' rationale giving and choice provision. For rationale giving, we used Roth, Assor, et al.'s (2009) measure, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of .72. Participants first read a stem describing a brief account of a parent-child school-related disagreement ("When I think that my investment in school is adequate, but my mom thinks it is not, she. . ."). Three items describing mothers' rationale giving followed the stem (e.g., ". . .she explains to me why she thinks so"). For choice provision, the 3-item subscale for mothers' provision of choice was taken from Niemiec et al. (2006), comprising items such as "My mother, whenever possible, allows me to choose what to do" (Cronbach's alpha = .87).

**Students' Perceptions of Mothers' Academic-Related UCPR.** This 4-item measure was developed for the present study (Cronbach's alpha = .88). Three items assessed students' perceptions of their mothers' unconditional acceptance and approval in relation to the students' academics (e.g., "My mother usually makes me feel that she loves and appreciates me regardless of my academic achievements"), and one item assessed unconditional acceptance in general. Discriminant validity was computed using the scale's correlation with the parental warmth scale (Children's Report of Parent Behavior Inventory; Schludermann & Schludermann, 1983; Cronbach's alpha = .86; mean = 5.14; SD = 1.34) and with two components of parental conditional regard (Roth, Assor, et al., 2009): conditional negative regard (i.e., love withdrawal contingent on the adolescent's failure to meet parental academic expectations; "If I do poorly in school my mother will ignore me for a while"; Cronbach's alpha = .86; mean = 1.76; SD = .70) and conditional positive regard (i.e., provision of more affection than usual contingent on the adolescent's success in meeting parental academic expectations; "I feel that when I'm studying hard my

mother appreciates me much more than usual"; Cronbach's alpha = .91; mean = 3.18; SD = 1.34). As expected, UCPR correlated positively with warmth ( $r = .53, p < .01$ ), negatively with conditional negative regard ( $r = -.51, p < .01$ ), and negatively with conditional positive regard ( $r = -.28, p < .01$ ). These moderate correlations for UCPR with warmth, love withdrawal, and conditional positive regard suggest that the concepts are related but distinct and measure different phenomena.

**Students' Self-reported Autonomous Motivation in School.** This 8-item measure was based on the mean of the two 4-item subscales from Roth et al.'s (2007) scale that directly measured autonomous motivation for the academic domain: identified and intrinsic motivation subscales. This tool assessed the extent to which the adolescent identified with the value of learning for his/her future plans, together with interest and enjoyment in learning. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this measure was .81.

## Results and Brief Discussion

As seen in Table 1, the pattern of correlations among the research variables supported our hypotheses. Adolescents' perceived UCPR and perceived parental rationale giving and choice provision all revealed positive correlations with self-reported autonomous motivation, and UCPR also correlated positively with provision of rationale and choice.

To test the main hypothesis theorizing that UCPR would predict choice and rationale provision and would moderate their relations with adolescents' autonomous motivation, we used the SPSS macro developed by Preacher et al. (2007) to test moderated mediation. We conducted the analysis for rationale giving and choice provision separately because we hypothesized that each of the potentially autonomy-supportive practices could be enacted in different emotional contexts (i.e., high or low on UCPR; Darling & Steinberg, 1993) and as such might yield different correlates.

First, we found that the relations between UCPR (the independent variable) and the two hypothesized mediators were significant ( $b = .38, p < .01$  for the relation with choice provision and  $b = .26, p < .01$  for the relation with rationale giving). The moderated mediation model (see Figure 1) for choice provision revealed that only the interaction term of UCPR  $\times$  Choice had a

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics for Study 1 Variables

Variable	M	SD	Correlations		
			UCPR	Rationale	Choice
Perceptions of mothers' UCPR	4.89	1.05	—		
Perceptions of mothers' rationale-giving	4.82	1.03	.26**	—	
Perceptions of mothers' choice-provision	4.65	.83	.48**	.24*	—
Self-reported autonomous motivation	4.12	.91	.40**	.40**	.43**

Note. UCPR = unconditional parental regard.

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

significant effect on autonomous motivation ( $b = .07, p < .05$ ). The same held true for the moderated mediation model (see Figure 1) for rationale giving; thus, only the UCPR  $\times$  Rationale interaction had a significant effect on autonomous motivation ( $b = .11, p < .05$ ). The signs of the interaction terms were consistent with the interpretation that the indirect effect was larger for students who perceived their parents as higher on UCPR.

Next, we probed the indirect effects on three different values of the moderator (UCPR): the mean (4.89), one standard deviation above the mean (5.94), and one standard deviation below the mean (3.84). Along with normal-theory tests, we tested whether the three conditional indirect effects differed from zero. For choice provision, all three conditional indirect effects were positive and significant (For  $-1SD$ :  $b = .071, p < .05$ ; for the mean:  $b = .091, p < .05$ ; and for  $+1SD$ :  $b = .11, p < .05$ ). Thus, the magnitude of the conditional indirect effects revealed that the indirect association between UCPR and adolescents' autonomous motivation through choice became stronger as a function of increment in UCPR. For rationale giving, significant conditional indirect effects emerged corresponding to the mean ( $b = .061, p < .05$ ) and to one standard deviation above the mean ( $b = .09, p < .05$ ), but the effect for one standard deviation below the mean was not significant ( $b = .03, ns$ ). Hence, the conditional indirect effects' magnitudes indicated that, as UCPR increased, the indirect effect through rationale became stronger.

In the last decade, bootstrapping has been advocated as an alternative to normal-theory tests of mediation (Lockwood & MacKinnon, 1998; MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). To obtain bootstrap confidence intervals, we used 5000 resampling. For choice provision, the 95% confidence interval was  $\{.11, .24\}$  with indirect effect value of 0.14 ( $p < .05$ ), and for rationale giving the confidence interval was  $\{.07, .22\}$  with a value of .09 ( $p < .05$ ). Because these intervals did not contain 0, the conditional indirect effects significantly differed from 0, at  $\alpha = .05$ . Thus, bootstrapping added to the results of the normal-theory tests.

In sum, the findings of Study 1 supported the hypotheses that UCPR would predict adolescents' autonomous motivation through both potentially autonomy-supportive practices (i.e., provision of choice and rationale). Moreover, the results supported the hypothesis that UCPR would moderate the effects of these practices on adolescents' autonomous motivation. Thus, the relations between the specific autonomy-supportive practices and adolescents' autonomous motivation were stronger for adolescents who perceived their mothers as high on UCPR.

## Study 2

In Study 1, UCPR was identified as playing a dual role in predicting and moderating the effect of potentially autonomy-supportive practices on adolescents' self-reported academic autonomous motivation. In light of this important role played by UCPR in the effectiveness of parental practices, it seemed important to explore its antecedents. Hence, we undertook Study

2 to shed some light on a specific parental characteristic—authenticity—as a possible predictor of offspring's perceptions of parents' academically related UCPR.

The goal of Study 2 was to test the hypothesis that mothers' authenticity would predict their college student offspring's perceptions of UCPR, which in turn would predict those college students' perceptions of the mothers' autonomy support. Thus, Study 2 sought to replicate the association found in Study 1 between UCPR and autonomy support in an older age group and in a different academic setting. Furthermore, Study 2 expanded on the previous study by further exploring the role of UCPR as mediating the relation between parental authenticity and ASP.

## Method

**Participants and Procedures.** Participants were 128 college students (63% women) with a mean age of 21.3 years ( $SD = 1.67$ ) and their mothers (mean age = 48 years,  $SD = 4.5$ ). The students received extra credit in an introductory psychology course for their and their mothers' participation in the study. At the end of one of their classes, those students who consented to participate completed the two questionnaires, reflecting their perceptions of their mothers' UCPR and autonomy support. A trained research assistant gave the instructions. The research team contacted mothers by mail. Mothers self-reported their authenticity and returned the completed anonymous questionnaire by mail in a sealed envelope. Only two mothers did not send in their reports.

**Measures.** College students and their mothers completed questionnaires using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not true at all*) to 6 (*very true*).

**Mothers' Self-reported Authenticity.** Kernis and Goldman's (2006) 11-item *behavior* subscale was used (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .68$ ). Mothers rated the extent to which they behaved in accordance with their own values, preferences, and needs (e.g., "I find that my behavior typically expresses my values"; "I try to act in a manner that is consistent with my personally held values, even if others criticize or reject me for doing so").

**College Students' Perceptions of Mothers' Academic-Related UCPR.** This was the same 4-item measure from Study 1. Cronbach alpha coefficient in this sample was .92.

**College Students' Perceptions of Mothers' Autonomy Support.** We used the well-known autonomy support subscale of the Perceptions of Parents Scale (Grolnick et al., 1991; Niemiec et al., 2006), which included three parts: three items assessing mothers' provision of choice (similar to the choice-provision items used in Study 1), three items assessing

**Table 2** Descriptive Statistics for Study 2 Variables

Variable	M	SD	Correlations	
			Mothers' authenticity	Perceptions of mothers' UCPR
Mothers' self-reported authenticity	5.24	.83	—	
Students' perceptions of mothers' UCPR	5.88	1.15	.29*	—
Students' perceptions of mothers' ASP	5.35	1.16	.27*	.69*

Note. UCPR = unconditional parental regard; ASP = autonomy-supportive parenting.  
\* $p < .01$

mothers' taking of her child's perspective (e.g., "My mother is usually willing to consider things from my point of view"), and three reversed items assessing parental control (e.g., "My mother tries to tell me how to run my life"). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .87.

## Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the three research variables, including zero-order correlations. In line with our prediction, the three correlations were positive and significant. Specifically, mothers' self-reported authenticity significantly correlated positively with their young-adult offspring's perceptions of mothers' UCPR ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ) and perceptions of mothers' ASP ( $r = .27, p < .01$ ). The correlation between UCPR and ASP was also positive and significant,  $r = .69, p < .01$ .

Our main hypothesis in the second study focused on perceived maternal UCPR as a mediator of the relation between mothers' authenticity and perceived maternal ASP. To test for mediation, the bootstrap confidence interval was calculated with 5000 resampling. The 95% confidence interval was  $\{.09; .28\}$  with indirect effect value of 0.18 ( $p < .05$ ). Because these intervals did not contain 0, the conditional indirect effect significantly differed from 0, at  $\alpha = .05$ . It is important to note that while regressing ASP simultaneously on UCPR and parents' authenticity, the beta coefficient for the relation between UCPR and ASP is .66 ( $p < .01$ ), and the beta coefficient for the relation between authenticity and ASP is .15 ( $p < .05$ ).

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Considerable research in the last three decades has established the association between parents' autonomy-supportive practices and their children's autonomous motivation; however, exploration of possible factors that may enhance ASP or its impact is less common. The present studies extend past research by shedding some light on possible predictors of ASP for adolescents and young adults in the academic domain. The findings of the first study support the hypotheses that UCPR both predicts potentially autonomy-supportive practices and moderates their effects on adolescent offspring outcomes. Specifically, perceptions of the mother's UCPR were found to predict her perceived

provision of rationale and choice, which, in turn, predicted her adolescent's autonomous motivation to engage in school. Furthermore, the mother's UCPR was also shown to moderate the relation between perceptions of her rationale and choice provision and her adolescent's autonomous academic motivation. Specifically, the relation between each potentially autonomy-supportive practice (providing choices, giving rationales) and adolescents' autonomous motivation was stronger when the youngsters perceived their mothers as providing higher UCPR. This finding coincides with the SDT proposition that autonomy-supportive practices should be enacted with warm, nonjudgmental acceptance.

Investigating an older age group of college students and their mothers, the second study replicated the first study's finding concerning the role played by the mother's UCPR in predicting her autonomy-supportive practices. Study 2 then expanded on the prior study by exploring the role of maternal authenticity as a predictor of UCPR and ASP. In line with our hypothesis, the mother's self-reported authenticity predicted her young-adult offspring's perception of her UCPR, which in turn predicted the young adult's perception of the mother's ASP. Thus, Study 2 is one of the first studies to explore a specific characteristic of parents that may predict ASP.

UCPR is one of few concepts in psychological research that attract much theoretical attention and discussion but have not been subjected to systematic empirical research. One reason that may explain this lacuna is the nondirective nature of UCPR as a socialization practice. Thus, research on socialization devotes attention to parenting practices that have the potential to direct the child's behavior and perspective. The present research is one of few studies that empirically explore outcomes of UCPR. Moreover, the main argument that was supported in the present research is that directive parental practices (e.g., provision of rationale) are more effective when accompanied by children's perceptions of UCPR.

In line with the above reasoning, this is the first study to test, within the SDT, Darling and Steinberg's (1993) influential proposition that specific parental practices may have different effects depending on parents' more general attitudes. Thus, our findings are in line with Darling and Steinberg's (1993) reasoning that UCPR may serve as an emotional context (parental style) in which parental autonomy-supportive practices seem to be more effective. Darling and Steinberg suggested that parental style

may influence the effectiveness of parental practices in at least two ways: (a) by transforming the nature of the parent–child interaction, and thus moderating the specific practices’ influence on child outcomes, and (b) by influencing the child’s openness to parental influence. The present findings cannot support these processes, but it seems valuable to speculate about them in relation to the specific parental style and practices explored here.

The first process—transforming the parent–child interaction—suggests that the nature of the parental rationale-giving or choice-provision practice itself may change according to the emotional climate in which it is enacted. Thus, one may speculate that the child will perceive these specific practices as truly autonomy supportive when the emotional climate in which they are communicated to the child is genuinely characterized by UCPR. On the other hand, the same practices will likely be less effective (i.e., not truly autonomy supportive) when the child does not experience UCPR by parents. For example, when the parent who is communicating a rationale is perceived by the child as judgmental and as using conditional regard to shape the child’s behaviors, the child may perceive the parent’s rationale giving as relatively controlling. In such a case, a supposedly autonomy-supporting explanation or justification for parental expectations may be perceived by the child as controlling because it is provided in a judgmental context in which the child feels he/she is valued as either “good” or “bad”—as deserving parental love and acceptance or not—based on the child’s behaviors. In line with this reasoning, autonomy-supportive practices may be applied instrumentally but ineffectively by social agents who understand these techniques’ potential effectiveness in reducing the child’s resistance to the agent’s socialization attempts but who fall short of generating the desired consequences because the practices are not delivered within an emotional climate of unconditional acceptance.

The second process suggested by Darling and Steinberg (1993) focuses on the child’s openness to parental influence as a consequence of the familial emotional climate. A well-documented finding is that children identify with parents and adopt their behaviors more frequently when the parents are perceived as affectionate and caring (Payne & Mussen, 1956; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, it may be speculated that UCPR can contribute to more successful socialization attempts because children are more willing to adopt a warm and affectionate parent’s expectations than a distant and judgmental parent’s. Moreover, affectionate parents who respond nonjudgmentally to their children’s misbehavior (or to children’s failures in meeting parental expectations) may be able to provide feedback that can be heard and digested by the child without suppressing the child’s autonomy. In contrast, that very same feedback may be perceived as autonomy suppressive in other contexts where the parent–child relationship is characterized by a more controlling and judgmental climate. In other words, parents who are perceived as conditionally accepting, where parental love is seen as contingent upon the child’s behavior, might have to “walk on eggshells” in order to be perceived as less autonomy suppressive by their children, whereas parents who are perceived as provid-

ing UCPR may be able to communicate their opinions, and disappointments, without the detrimental effects of coercive and intrusive parenting (Barber, 1996). Indeed, this discussion is speculative, and future research would do well to explore these two processes suggested by Darling and Steinberg (1993) in relation to UCPR and ASP.

Without a doubt, using autonomy-supportive practices (rationale giving, choice provision, perspective taking, etc.) accompanied by positive regard in response to children’s transgressions seems a demanding task for parents at times. However, based on the results of the present studies, it seems legitimate to speculate that acceptance of the experience that led to the child’s misbehavior (UCPR) may lead to a genuine attempt to take the child’s perspective, and as a result may make the rationale for parents’ expectations and provisions of choice more relevant to the child’s experience. However, as the present results suggest, mothers vary in this capacity. Study 2 provides the first indication for a factor that may explain part of this variation. Mothers’ authentic behavior—their autonomous acts aligning wholeheartedly with their core beliefs, preferences, and values—was found to predict young adults’ perceptions of their mothers’ UCPR—offspring’s perceptions of nonjudgmental parental acceptance—which in turn predicted these college students’ perceptions of autonomy-supportive mothering. It may be conjectured that the nondefensive responses of parents to their own authentic experiences may be extended to their responses to their children’s experiences. Thus, being able to be open up nonjudgmentally to one’s own authentic positive and negative experiences may perhaps allow parents to accept their children’s experiences, even when those children are already young adults, with a less judgmental stance and with fewer distortions. If validated by future research, this finding has high theoretical and practical value.

Among the strengths of the present research are the multiple reporters (mothers and their children during adolescence and young adulthood) and the rigorous data-analysis approach. Nonetheless, the main limitation of the two studies is their cross-sectional design that does not allow causal inferences. Given the theoretical causal assertion suggested here, it seems important to further explore those questions via a longitudinal design that would allow limited support for causal hypotheses. Moreover, the current cross-sectional design did not allow for testing of developmental questions related to the specific parental behaviors explored here. In addition, the current studies focused on school-related UCPR; future researchers would do well to explore UCPR in other domains such as prosocial behaviors, emotion regulation, and so forth. In addition, the relations among domains should be investigated, together with the exploration of a general UCPR approach that is examined across domains. Another limitation involves the focus on mothers. It is reasonable to claim that in specific domains (e.g., sports, academics) perceptions of fathers’ UCPR may be a more powerful predictor of children’s outcomes in comparison to perceptions of mothers. In addition, we assessed only one out of four components of authenticity (the behavioral component). Although



Kernis and Goldman (2006) argue that the behavioral manifestation of authenticity results from the other three components, future research may want to explore the four components of parental authenticity. Finally, the present research examined UCPR and authenticity as possible predictors of ASP. Future research should examine other possible predictors, especially parents' socialization.

In sum, the present research findings support the hypothesis that provision of UCPR enhances the effectiveness of parents' provision of rationale and choice in relation to their children's autonomous academic motivation. Thus, acceptance of children's experiences in a manner that is not contingent on their behaviors appears to make parental practices more effective. Furthermore, parents' authentic behavior (i.e., behavioral engagement that aligns with one's core values, beliefs, and self-aspects) predicts parents' nonjudgmental acceptance (i.e., UCPR) of their children's experience, which in turn predicts children's perceptions of ASP. Future research should explore the specific mechanisms underlying these effects.

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