Emotional Autonomy versus Detachment: Revisiting the Vicissitudes of Adolescence and Young Adulthood

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RYAN, RICHARD M., and LYNCH, JOHN H. *Emotional Autonomy versus Detachment: Revisiting the Vicissitudes of Adolescence and Young Adulthood.* CHILD DEVELOPMENT, 1989, 60, 340–356. 3 studies reexamine Steinberg and Silverberg's construct of "emotional autonomy" (EA) in adolescent and young adult samples. We argue that rather than measuring either autonomy or independence, EA represents emotional detachment from parents. In Study 1, EA is shown to be negatively associated with early adolescents' (n = 148) reported quality of attachment to parents, but not to friends. In Study 2, EA is shown to be positively related to experienced parental rejection but largely unrelated to perceived independence-support in a high school sample (n = 193). In Study 3, EA in young adults (n = 104) is inversely related to measures of family cohesion, parental acceptance, independence support, and self-perceived lovability. Finally, a projective measure of parental nurturance taken by a subsample of subjects (n = 58) was associated negatively with EA but positively with perceived lovability. Discussion concerns the conceptualization of attachment versus detachment, dependence, and autonomy in theories of adolescence.

The process of individuation during adolescence and the transition to young adulthood has been characterized in terms of autonomy (Hill & Holmbeck, 1986; Shapiro, 1981), independence (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 1968), and detachment from family members (Blos, 1962, 1979; A. Freud, 1958), among other dimensions. Although interrelated, each of these terms can be given a distinct meaning. *Autonomy*, both etymologically and in current usage, refers to self-governance and self-regulation. Its opposite, heteronomy, pertains to being controlled by external forces or compulsions, in other words, the relative absence of volition (Deci & Ryan, 1987; Shapiro, 1981). The concept of *independence* concerns self-reliance, the ability to care for oneself. Dependence, conversely, describes relationships in which one relies on another for satisfaction of needs. Definitionally, it is clear that a person can be dependent on a provider without necessarily being controlled, that is, without lacking autonomy (Memmi, 1984). Indeed, a provider can even support autonomy while still caring for the dependent (Bretherton, 1987).

Finally, *detachment* has been used to describe the adolescent's withdrawing from the family, which in turn typically involves his or her moving toward new attachments or social bonds in the wider community (Blos, 1979; Damon, 1983; Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 1968; A. Freud, 1958; Petersen & Taylor, 1980). Although detachment can be viewed as an inevitable aspect of adolescent development, it can have both positive and negative connotations. Detachment can represent a necessary but not sufficient step toward independence and/or autonomy; it can set the stage for, but does not define, self-reliance or self-regulation. Yet detachment can also represent loss and separation, wherein a relatively dependent person is severed from a source of guidance, affection, or nurturance. Indeed, we will argue that some forms of detachment from the family are associated with an experienced lack of parental support and acceptance, which not only does not conduce to independence and autonomy but may actually interfere with the consolidation of identity and the formation of a positive self-concept.

A recent article by Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) rightfully highlights confusion in much of the literature on adolescence concerning specifically the concept of autonomy. In that discussion they focused on the "vicis-

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situdes of autonomy" defined as self-governance, as autonomy from peers, and as autonomy in relation to parents. With regard to autonomy from parents, they developed and employed a measure of *emotional autonomy* (EA), a concept derived from Douvan and Adelson's (1966) theory of adolescent development. Douvan and Adelson define emotional autonomy as "the degree to which the adolescent has managed to cast off infantile ties to the family" (p. 130). Emotional autonomy is viewed as an important aspect of individuation not only in Douvan and Adelson's work, but also in that of Blos (1979). Steinberg and Silverberg operationalized emotional autonomy by creating a measure intended to reflect both the "relinquishing of childish dependencies" and "individuation" through items that pertain exclusively to parent-child relations, such as perceptions of agreement between parent and adolescent; nonuse versus use of parents as resources; identification with parent practices; and how both parent and adolescent may be different when away from one another.

In the current studies, we reexamine this construct of emotional autonomy, particularly with regard to its distinction from the issues of detachment and independence. In our view, EA, as operationalized by Steinberg and Silverberg, may represent not merely a casting off of infantile ties but a more general reluctance to rely on the parents and a distancing of the adolescent from the parents. Furthermore, we assert that, although EA does indeed reflect nonutilization of parents and a severing of parent-child ties, this in turn should not be equated with the concepts of autonomy and independence development, which imply positive developmental processes that are not assessed by the EA construct. Instead we believe this measure better captures a sense of emotional detachment associated with the adolescent's view of the parental context as rejecting and unsupportive.

Alternatively, we suggest that individuation during adolescence and into young adulthood is facilitated not by detachment (i.e., "emotional autonomy") but rather by attachment where the latter is appropriately conceptualized. Drawing from recent attachment theory we would view attachment "not as an initially symbiotic relationship from which the child must eventually emerge as differentiated and separate, but rather as a relationship that, from the very beginning, permits optimal autonomy in the context of emotional support" (Bretherton, 1987, p. 1075). This definition applies to infancy, but it can also pertain to parent-child relations during adolescence. In this view, attachment is not a regressive bond from which the teenager must free him or herself but rather a dynamic relationship that changes in accord with the developmental tasks at hand. Teenagers who are attached to parents thus will experience them as emotionally accepting and supportive of independence and autonomy despite periodic struggles. Furthermore, such a "working model" (Bowlby, 1982) would be expected to facilitate individuation. Indeed, individuation is not something that happens *from* parents but rather *with* them.

This view of adolescent relations with parents is also consistent with recent work by object-relations theorists. For example, Behrends and Blatt (1985) argued that what makes an object relation gratifying or facilitating changes with development. *Gratifying involvement* describes those relationships that are optimal and appropriate to a person's developmental level, thereby "enabling the person to function with a degree of coherence and integrity that would not otherwise be possible" (p. 20). In adolescence and young adulthood, gratifying relationships with parents would involve emotional closeness and a sense of support within a context of encouragement for "one's efforts at individuation and autonomy" (p. 20).

Finally, we believe that our view concerning adolescent autonomy and attachment to parents is largely consistent with that presented by Hill and Holmbeck (1986) in work closely related to that of Steinberg and Silverberg (1986). Hill and Holmbeck state that "*autonomy*, as a label for freedom from parental attachments" (p. 181) is misleading. They argue, instead, that closeness with parents should be positively related to indices of autonomy. However, we expect to find that this measure of "emotional autonomy" will relate negatively to parent-child closeness and family cohesion as experienced by the adolescent. Hill and Holmbeck (1986) also consider misleading the use of the term detachment as a general descriptor of parent-child relationships in the second decade since it ignores the normative closeness of these relationships. We agree, and for present purposes will restrict the term detachment to describe an absence of experienced attachment or cohesion between parent and child. We expect to show, in turn, that EA closely approximates a measure of this specific form of detachment. We also suggest that lower EA will predict positive outcomes in late adolescence, a period where relationships with parents must be

drawn upon in the consolidation of identity (Damon, 1983).

These perspectives thus all suggest that facilitative parent-adolescent relationships can be characterized by a secure attachment, which will typically be accompanied by experienced acceptance and support for developmental tasks. Since we have asserted that the Steinberg and Silverberg construct of EA is better characterized as detachment, we have done three studies to examine this construct in relation to attachment-relevant dimensions, perceptions of parents' acceptance and support for independence, and to indices of self-concept and individuation. The first study explores directly the hypothesis that emotional autonomy is negatively related to adolescent-parent attachment. Using an early adolescent sample, we predicted that EA would show inverse relations with Greenberg's (1982) Inventory of Adolescent Attachments (IAA) that assesses the "felt security" of the parent-child relationship and the degree to which the adolescent utilizes the relationship for emotional support. Furthermore, we examine how various patterns of attachment to parents predict both EA and attachments to friends.

A second study relates EA to mid-adolescents' (aged 13–18) perceptions of parents' support for independence (vs. overprotection) and emotional acceptance (vs. rejection) using a well-validated measure (O'Brien & Epstein, 1982). The detached, deidealizing style captured by the EA measure was expected to be negatively associated with experienced support for independence and, more important, emotional acceptance by parents, which may be salient dimensions of experience within secure adolescent attachments.

In a third study, we examine EA within a late-adolescent to young adult college sample (ages 17–22). Here we expected to replicate and extend our findings with mid-adolescents by assessing outcomes pertinent to individuation. We again predicted that EA would negatively relate to perceived parental acceptance and support of independence. We also expected that subjects higher in EA would view their families as less cohesive. Finally, we predicted negative relations between EA and indices of self-concept and individuation. By contrast, perceived family cohesion and parental support and acceptance were hypothesized to relate positively to these outcomes, providing evidence that experiencing parents in a less detached manner is conducive to the accomplishment of adolescent and young adult developmental tasks.

Study 1

Insofar as the construct of emotional autonomy as instantiated by Steinberg and Silverberg reflects detachment, it should therefore negatively predict indices of parental attachment. Greenberg and his colleagues (Greenberg, 1982; Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983) have created an Inventory of Adolescent Attachment (IAA) which we employed in order to examine this hypothesis.

The IAA is based on an ethological-organizational view of attachment (Bowlby, 1982; Sroufe & Waters, 1977). It assesses two separate dimensions of attachment relationships: (1) the adolescent's "felt security" or quality of affect toward significant figures, and (2) proximity seeking—defined in terms of the adolescent's utilization or seeking of such figures in times of emotional need. Greenberg et al. (1983) have demonstrated that security in relation to parents is predictive of various indices of adolescents' well-being over and above security with peers. Furthermore, they showed that emotional utilization of parents was moderately positively related to security. Finally, their results revealed that parental utilization was not a function of age, and they suggested that across adolescence parents continue to be an important emotional resource. Their findings are consistent with a number of other perspectives on adolescence (e.g., Bell & Bell, 1983; Kandel & Lesser, 1969; Offer, 1969) that suggest the supportive role of parents throughout the epoch.

We hypothesized that insofar as EA actually indexes detachment it should be negatively correlated with both felt security and emotional utilization with regard to parents. In addition, various patterns of attachment were constructed using the two parent dimensions of the IAA based on suggestions offered by Greenberg et al. (1983). *Avoidant* attachments were defined as those characterized by both low felt security and low emotional utilization, *anxious* attachments were those involving low security but high emotional utilization, and *secure* attachments were those representing high felt security irrespective of utilization. Avoidant adolescents were expected to show particularly high levels of EA relative to those securely attached, since they neither experience the parents as emotional resources or as secure relationships. Anxiously attached subjects should show more moderate levels of EA. An additional, exploratory aspect of this study was the investigation of attachment to parents in relation to attachment to friends.

Method

Subjects.—Subjects were 148 students from the seventh grade in a suburban middle school. Socioeconomic status of students' families was largely middle to upper middle class, with student-reported parent education levels averaging greater than 12 but less than 16 years.

Procedure.—Both measures were administered by two examiners during a regularly scheduled class. Students were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the voluntary nature of their participation.

Measures

The Emotional Autonomy Scale (EA; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986) is a 20-item self-report survey consisting of four subscales. Two of these are described as affective aspects of EA (nondependency and individuation from parents) and two as cognitive aspects (perceives parents as people and deidealization). Four-point Likert-format items form these four subscales, and each was reported to have an internal reliability coefficient exceeding .60. Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale equals .75, also justifying the use of a summary score. Sex differences were apparent only on the deidealization subscale in their original sample, while SES effects were not in evidence. EA has been investigated in several studies and related to issues of conformity, peer pressure (Steinberg, 1987; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), and aspects of family relations (Steinberg, 1987, 1988).

Inventory of Adolescent Attachments (IAA; Greenberg, 1982) is a self-report device consisting of two dimensions—felt security (affective quality) and emotional utilization. The felt-security dimension consists of four items directed toward parents and four toward friends. Greenberg et al. (1983) report alphas of .70 and .51, respectively, for these four-item composites. Emotional utilization assesses the degree to which adolescents go to various target figures in five emotionally salient situations. We employed two targets, "parents" and "friends," in the present survey. Items were rated on five-point, Likert-type scales and arrayed so that higher scores represent greater security/utilization. Greenberg (1982) reports a 2-week test-retest reliability for their four factors from .70 to .89. Greenberg et al. (1983) provided evidence that these dimensions predicted various indices of well-being within an adolescent population.

Results

Preliminary analyses.—Sex differences were examined on the EA and IAA variables. Boys were higher on the total EA score, $t(146) = 3.8$, $p < .001$, and three of the four EA subscales: parents as people, $t(146) = 3.4$, $p < .001$; deidealization, $t(146) = 2.1$, $p < .05$; and individuation, $t(146)$, $p < .05$. On the IAA there were no differences between girls and boys on felt security with regard to either parents or friends. While girls reported greater emotional utilization of friends than boys, $t(146) = 4.6$, $p < .001$, no differences emerged for the parental utilization dimension.

Internal consistency, examined using standardized Cronbach's alpha (α), was .81 for EA, .82 and .82 for the IAA parent and friend felt-security dimensions, and .68 and .50 for parent and friend emotional utilization, respectively.

Correlations of EA and IAA variables.—Table 1 presents the intercorrelations between felt-security and utilization variables for both parents and friends and the EA subscale and total scores. In accord with hypotheses, EA is negatively related to felt security in the relationship to parents. Particularly strong is the negative relation between the individuation subscale of EA, the items of which tap the degree to which parents do not fully know or understand the adolescent (e.g., "my parents would be surprised to know what I'm really like") and the issue of security. Furthermore, the more "individuated" the adolescent the less secure the adolescent feels with friends. Higher EA is also associated with less utilization of parents but is generally unrelated to friend utilization. Of additional note is the positive association of felt security with parents and felt security with friends.

Three groups were formed to examine the effects of parent-adolescent attachment patterns on EA and attachments to friends. Means and standard deviations for these variables by group and sex are presented in Table 2. Avoidant subjects were those below the median on both felt security and utilization of parents ($n = 55$), anxious subjects were those low on security but high on utilization ($n = 24$), and secure subjects were those high on felt security ($n = 69$). A 3 × 2 (group × sex) analysis of variance on EA revealed differences for both group, $F(2,146) = 18.47$, $p < .001$, and sex, $F(1,147) = 10.61$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons (Scheffé) revealed that avoidant subjects were significantly higher

TABLE 1

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN EMOTIONAL AUTONOMY AND DIMENSIONS OF ADOLESCENT ATTACHMENT TO PARENTS AND FRIENDS IN SEVENTH-GRADE BOYS (n = 75), GIRLS (n = 73), AND TOTAL SAMPLE (n = 148)

	FELT SECURITY—PARENTS			EMOTIONAL UTILIZATION—PARENTS			FELT SECURITY—FRIENDS			EMOTIONAL UTILIZATION—FRIENDS		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Emotional autonomy:												
Deidealization	−.52***	−.27**	−.38***	−.36***	−.26**	−.31***	−.06	.08	.02	.06	.09	.02
Individuation	−.45***	−.76***	−.61***	−.25**	−.37***	−.32***	−.17	−.34***	−.26***	.01	.16	.02
Nondependency	−.22*	−.26**	−.24***	−.38***	−.44***	−.41***	.27**	.01	.13	−.01	.07	−.01
Parents as people	−.14	−.34***	−.24***	−.02	−.23*	−.14*	−.18	−.09	−.12	.11	−.16	−.12
Total score	−.49***	−.61***	−.53***	−.36***	−.45***	−.41***	−.08	−.15	−.12	.07	.03	−.04
Index of attachments:												
Felt security—parents	...	...	...	.43***	.45***	.44***	.23**	.26**	.25***	.04	−.19	−.07
Emotional utilization—parents	...	...	...	...	...	...	−.02	−.01	−.01	.15	.01	.09
Felt security—friends	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	.15	.19	.22***

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

TABLE 2

MEANS (and Standard Deviations) FOR AVOIDANT, ANXIOUS, AND SECURE ATTACHMENT GROUPS ON EA, AND FELT SECURITY AND EMOTIONAL UTILIZATION OF FRIENDS

	AVOIDANT (Boys n = 29; Girls n = 26)		ANXIOUS (Boys n = 10; Girls n = 14)		SECURE (Boys n = 36; Girls n = 33)	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
Emotional autonomy:						
Boys$_c$	3.33	(.34)	3.12	(.44)	3.00	(.43)
Girls$_d$	3.24	(.41)	2.98	(.34)	2.65	(.46)
Total	3.28$_a$	(.38)	3.03$_b$	(.38)	2.83$_b$	(.47)
Felt security—friends:						
Boys$_c$	3.69	(.53)	3.38	(.55)	3.91	(.57)
Girls$_c$	3.67	(.72)	3.30	(.55)	3.99	(.67)
Total	3.68$_a$	(.62)	3.33$_b$	(.54)	3.94$_a$	(.61)
Emotional utilization—friends:						
Boys$_c$	3.62	(.86)	3.52	(.74)	3.62	(.86)
Girls$_d$	4.26	(.69)	4.39	(.70)	4.13	(.90)
Total	3.92$_a$	(.85)	4.02$_a$	(.83)	3.87$_a$	(.91)

NOTE.—Subscripts with the same letter indicate no statistical differences between groups at $p < .05$ level.

than either anxious or secure subjects on EA, and males were higher than females. On felt security with friends, group differences were again in evidence, $F(2,146) = 9.47$, $p < .001$, and revealed significantly lower security among anxious subjects than in either avoidant or secure groups. There were no sex differences. For utilization of friends, no group difference emerged. However, a main effect for sex, $F(1,147) = 20.69$, $p < .001$, did emerge: girls were higher on emotional utilization of friends than boys. No group × sex interactions were found on any of the three dependent variables.

Discussion

Results of Study 1 are consistent with the major hypotheses—namely, that EA would be associated with less felt security within the parent-adolescent relationship and with less emotional utilization of the parent by the adolescent. The absence of felt security among those high in emotional autonomy is particularly consistent with our reconceptualization of EA as detachment. The relationship between EA and the dimension of emotional utilization, however, bears further discussion. Low utilization, we argue, is an aspect of detachment, in which the nonreliance on parents may represent a distrust or avoidance of parental provisions. We suggest that the ability to utilize parents is a developmental support and is typically a positive influence. Yet one might also interpret this finding as support for the EA construct, insofar as nonutilization of parents in emotionally charged situations could be interpreted as indexing less dependence. While the current data are insufficient to resolve this interpretive ambiguity, it does point out that one can meaningfully construe EA in terms of a loss of support and attachment rather than as a manifestation of autonomy.

Study 2

Method

Subjects.—Subjects were 213 students (107 female; 106 male) from a suburban high school outside of Rochester, NY. The subjects were drawn from 10 classrooms, three each from grades 9 and 10, and two each from grades 11 and 12. Classrooms were chosen on the basis of administrative considerations and teachers' willingness to participate. Socioeconomic status of the students ranged widely but was primarily middle to upper middle class. Average parent education levels as reported by students were greater than 12 years but less than 16 for both mothers and fathers. Students with only one known or living parent were excluded from analyses, as well as those whose data were incomplete. Thus the final sample was 193 (95 female, 98 male). Fifty-one subjects reported parental divorce or separation, the effects of which were a focus of exploratory analyses.

Procedure.—Measures were administered by a single examiner in two testing sessions during regularly scheduled classroom periods, using procedures described in Study 1.

Measures

Measures were the Emotional Autonomy Scale (see Study 1), and the Mother-Father-Peer Scales (MFP; Epstein, 1983). The MFP consists of 56 items rated on 5-point Likert-type scales that assess the dimensions of acceptance versus rejection (by mother, father, and peers) and the encouragement of independence versus overprotection (by mother and father). Only the mother and father scales were used in this sample. Acceptance versus rejection is defined as the degree to which parents communicate love, acceptance, and appreciation of the child, while the independence dimension taps the degree to which self-reliance and the development of social and other skills are encouraged. The MFP scales have good internal consistency, with alphas ranging from .82 to .91. Construct validity has been extensively studied, relating adult MFP scores to indices of self-esteem (Epstein, 1983). In addition, Ricks (1985) found that mothers who reported maternal acceptance as a child were more likely to have infants of their own classified as securely attached.

Results

Preliminary analyses.—Sex × grade ANOVAs were run on both EA subscale and total scores and on MFP variables. There were no significant effects or interactions of gender and grade on EA variables or on parent independence encouragement. However, main effects for both grade, $F(3,189) = 4.73$, $p < .01$, and sex, $F(1,192) = 5.33$, $p < .03$, on parent acceptance were in evidence. Inspection of these means revealed that parent acceptance was lowest in tenth grade, highest in ninth grade, and intermediate in grades 11 and 12. Girls also reported greater experienced acceptance than boys. The interaction of gender and grade on parent acceptance was not, however, significant. Subsequent analyses collapse across sex and grade. Standardized alpha for the EA scale was .72 in this sample.

Correlations of EA, MFP, and family status.—Table 3 presents the correlations between student reports of parent styles and EA subscales and total score. MFP variables are presented for both parents and mothers and fathers separately. Results show negative relations between adolescent reports of parental acceptance and EA. Independence encouragement, contrary to prediction, was largely unrelated to EA, with the exception of the positive relation between the total parent independence score and the deidealization subscale. Marital status is related to perceived parental acceptance, with adolescents whose parents are divorced or separated reporting less maternal, paternal, and parent total acceptance. In addition, EA is greater in families of divorce or separation. This latter relation is carried particularly by the EA "parents as people" subscale.

Exploratory model.—Variables that were significantly related in the correlational results were examined using a path model (Fig. 1) so as to further explicate the nature of their interrelation. The model presented is post hoc, and therefore should be interpreted with caution. In order to estimate the model's parameters, a two-step simultaneous regression procedure was performed in which (1) EA total was regressed onto mother acceptance, father acceptance, and marital status variables, and (2) each of the acceptance variables was regressed onto marital status. Standardized beta weights appear on paths demarking significant relations. The adjusted R^2 for the regression of EA onto the three variables in step 1 was .16, $p < .0001$.

Discussion

Results of Study 2 demonstrate that the "emotional autonomy" construct is positively associated with perceived parental rejection versus acceptance. This relation further supports our view that, rather than indexing autonomy or individuation, EA can also be interpreted as a problem in attachment, with high EA adolescents lacking a sense of their parents' love and acceptance. Contrary to prediction, however, EA is largely unrelated to experienced parental support for independence.

The item content of the MFP acceptance scale concerns the parents' liking, care, and positive regard for the child. Direct content overlap with EA items is not apparent. However, the two scales both assess perceptions of parents, albeit from a much different viewpoint. For example, the EA "individuation" subscale (the strongest correlate) includes such items as "I wish my parents would understand who I really am" and "There are things that I will do differently from my parents" (scored positively), which one might expect to negatively relate to MFP acceptance items such as "My father gives me the feeling he likes me as I am," or "My mother enjoys being with me" (scored positively). Content overlap thus does not directly account for these results, except in an intended sense: that the psychological meaning of EA is in large measure dynamically opposed to feeling secure (Study 1) or accepted (Study 2).

TABLE 3

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN EMOTIONAL AUTONOMY (EA), PARENT RATINGS, AND PARENT MARITAL STATUS FOR TOTAL HIGH SCHOOL SAMPLE
(n = 193)

	EA—Deidealization	EA—Individuation	EA—Non-dependency	EA—Parents as People	EA—Total	Marital Status[a]
Mother acceptance	−.23**	−.38***	−.17*	−.22**	−.39***	−.19**
Father acceptance	−.22**	−.30***	−.15*	−.22**	−.33***	−.42***
Parent acceptance (total)	−.25***	−.39***	−.18**	−.26***	−.41***	−.36***
Mother independence	.14	.13	.02	.01	.11	−.02
Father independence	.12	.06	.04	.04	.09	.03
Parent independence (total)	.15*	.11	.05	.03	.12	.00
Marital status[a]	.09	.08	.02	.20**	.16*	...

[a] 1 = intact; 2 = divorce, separation.
* = $p < .05$.
** = $p < .01$.
*** = $p < .001$.

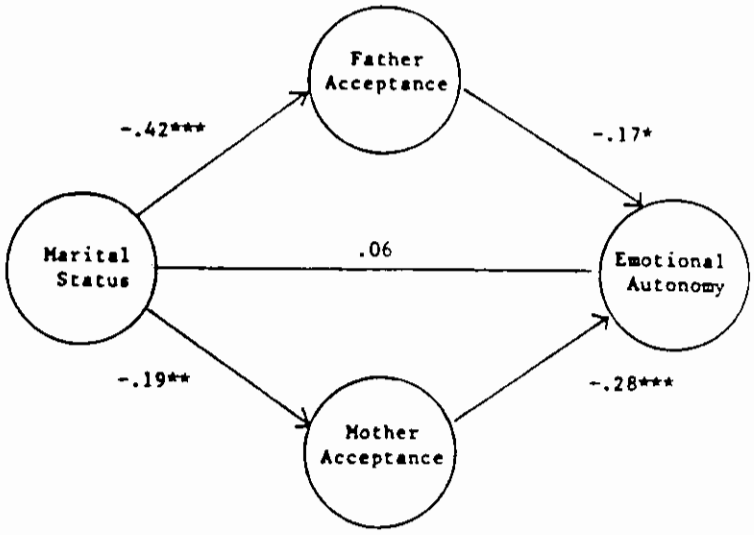


FIG. 1.—Exploratory path model predicting emotional autonomy from marital status, father acceptance, and mother acceptance.

It should be noted that the age range of this sample (grades 9–12) overlaps only slightly with the sample used by Steinberg and Silverberg to develop their EA construct (grades 5, 6, 8, 9). However, even within our grade 9 sample ($N = 66$) the negative relation between parent acceptance and EA holds ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, there is an absence of grade-related trends for the EA-acceptance relation within our mid-adolescent population.

An exploratory aspect of this study involves the relations among parent marital status, experienced acceptance, and EA. Results show that there is less experienced parental acceptance (or more rejection) in homes of adolescents reporting parental separation or divorce. In particular, father rejection is rated more highly in such families, which might be expected since most often it is fathers who leave the family. Wallerstein (1983), in fact, has described this pattern as frequent among children of divorce. In turn, rejection is associated with greater EA. This exploratory model suggests that one route to EA (i.e., detachment) is through actual separation from parents and the felt rejection that accompanies this event.

Although the current findings relate EA and parental rejection, neither of these variables is examined with regard to actual outcomes of individuation. Thus our claim that EA is not conducive to the resolution of adolescent developmental tasks cannot be herein substantiated. A great deal of developmental research and theory suggests that individuation and identity formation processes are consolidated during late adolescence and the transition to young adulthood (Damon, 1983; Erikson, 1968; Waterman, 1982). Hence we proceed in our next investigation to examine EA within this period.

Study 3

Damon (1983) characterizes the final chapters of adolescence and the onset of young adult personality development in terms of the *consolidation of self*. At this time, one's task is to draw selectively from previous identifications and relationships and integrate them into an autonomous self that can in turn relate meaningfully to others.

In this process of identity integration, the prior and current relations with parents figure heavily. A positive attachment characterized by felt support for independence and acceptance facilitates both internalization and identity consolidation. We suggest, therefore, that insofar as "emotional autonomy" is an index of detachment, it should be negatively related

to the individual's ability to draw upon parental resources or to internalize them. More specifically, insofar as EA is associated with experienced parental rejection and nonsupport, it is also likely to be related to the development of a more negative self-view and sense of well-being within subsequent relationships. Accordingly, we suggest that not only will emotional autonomy in young adulthood impede the consolidation of self, it will have negative implications for the resolution of what Erikson (1950) referred to as the psychosocial challenge of "intimacy versus isolation."

We attempted to test these issues regarding EA within a young adult college sample, ages 17–22. Specifically we hypothesized:

1. "Emotional autonomy" would be negatively related to experienced emotional acceptance and independence support by parents.

2. Whereas the experience of parental acceptance and independence support would be positively related to self-esteem, self-perceived lovability, and greater individuation, EA would negatively predict these outcomes.

3. Families experienced as cohesive also would be characterized by experienced parental acceptance, that is, communication of love and understanding. Such a finding would extend the post hoc model identified in Study 2. Cohesiveness, which reflects emotional bonding within the family, would also be negatively related to EA, which indexes detachment.

In a supplementary analysis we also examine Behrends and Blatt's (1985) construct of gratifying involvement in relation to EA and our other study variables. Specifically, we used Blatt, Chevron, Quinlan, and Wein's (1981) projective measure of parental nurturance. We hypothesized that parent representations reflecting nurturance would be negatively correlated with EA. By contrast, nurturance ratings would be positively associated with self-esteem, perceived lovability, and separation-individuation. Finally, we expected that the more subjects represented parents as nurturant the more they would report family cohesion, parental support of independence, and parental acceptance.

Method

Subjects.—Subjects were 104 (41 male, 63 female) undergraduates drawn from a lecture course in psychology. Participation in research was optional, part of a system of extra credit awards. Subjects ranged in age from 17 to 22. (Subjects older than 22 were excluded from data analyses.) A subset of these subjects (n = 58) also completed the Blatt Object Relations Scale.

Procedure.—Testing was accomplished in small groups run during evenings. Subjects completed surveys at their own pace and scheduling but in the presence of a trained administrator.

Measures

In addition to the Emotional Autonomy Scale and the Mother-Father-Peer Scales previously described, the following measures were employed.

The Sources of Self-Esteem Scale (SOSE; O'Brien, 1981) is a 116-item, multidimensional self-report inventory that assesses nine dimensions of self-esteem and two subsidiary aspects of self-concept. Items are presented in a 5-point Likert-type format. Individual scale scores as well as a composite score can be computed for each subject. For the purposes of the current study, the subscales of lovability, competence, and global self-esteem were of interest, although all subscales were administered. The discriminative and convergent validity of the SOSE has been reported by both Epstein (1983) and O'Brien (1981). In addition, the SOSE evidences respectable reliability for all of its scales.

The Separation-Individuation Inventory (SII; Christenson & Wilson, 1985) is a 39-item self-report device designed to measure disturbances in separation-individuation processes within adult populations. Items pertain to issues of relationships, differentiation, and the defense of splitting. Each item presents a description that is rated on a 10-point scale in terms of how characteristic it is of the subject. This scale was reversed for the current analyses so that higher scores would represent greater individuation. Christenson and Wilson report a coefficient alpha of .92 and a single factor structure. They reported evidence of the scale's utility in differentiating patients diagnosed with borderline disorders from university employees.

The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES-III; Olson, McCubbin, & Associates, 1983), a 20-item survey, taps two orthogonal dimensions frequently described in family systems theories: family cohesion and family adaptability. Cohesion is of particular relevance and is defined as "the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another" (Olson et al., 1983, p. 48). Adaptability concerns the

TABLE 4

RELATIONS BETWEEN EMOTIONAL AUTONOMY (EA) TOTAL AND SUBSCALE SCORES, SEPARATION-INDIVIDUATION (SII), AND THE DIMENSIONS OF PERCEIVED LOVABILITY, COMPETENCE, AND GLOBAL SELF-ESTEEM FROM THE SOSE (n = 104)

	Global SE	Lovability	Competence	Separation-Individuation
Emotional autonomy:				
Total score	−.12	−.50***	−.06	−.13
Deidealization	−.07	−.38***	−.03	.15
Individuation	−.14	−.43***	.03	−.23*
Nondependency	−.14	−.26**	.09	.21*
Parents as people	−.19	−.36***	−.19	−.36***
Sources of self-esteem:				
Global	...	.52***	.63***	.46***
Lovability	...	...	.21*	.52***
Competence	...	...	...	.27**

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

flexibility of family structure in terms of role relations and power. Although reported, adaptability scores are less relevant to the current study. The FACES III survey employs a self-report, 5-point, Likert-type format. Internal consistency coefficients are .62 for the adaptability dimension and .77 for cohesion. Test-retest reliability after 4–5 weeks is .80 for adaptability and .83 for cohesion. Face validity, content validity, and discrimination between clinic and nonclinic groups have all been established by the authors.

The Blatt Object Representation Scale (BORS) (Blatt et al., 1981) is a procedure for evaluating the content and structural dimensions of written descriptions of significant others (e.g., parents). Subjects are given a blank sheet of paper with the instructions, "Describe your mother" on one page, followed by a request on the next page to "Describe your father." From these descriptions, BORS variables are obtained using procedures specified in the Blatt et al. manual. Varied qualities of the parent as represented in the description are rated on seven-point scales. If a particular category is irrelevant or not scoreable, a rating of 4 is assigned. Other scales include those pertinent to verbal fluency and conceptual level of the protocol. The BORS was normed on adolescent and adult populations. Interrater reliability (α) for item ratings ranged from .68 to .92. Blatt et al. report a stable three-factor structure to these multiple ratings: Factor 1 = parental nurturance; Factor 2 = parental striving; Factor 3 = verbal fluency. Blatt et al. report interrater coefficient alphas exceeding .9 for factor 1, parental nurturance, the variable relevant to the current study. Avery and Ryan (1988) recently showed that this nurturance factor was positively associated with both perceived parental autonomy support and involvement as well as self-esteem, perceived competence, and sociometric outcomes in middle childhood.

Results

Effects of gender, age, and gender × age interactions were examined using simultaneous regression procedures in which these effects were regressed onto the variables of EA, family cohesion, and parent independence support and acceptance. These analyses revealed neither main effects nor interactions such that subsequent analyses collapse across these variables.

Correlational analyses.—For purposes of explication, EA, self-concept variables, and the measure of separation-individuation are treated as outcome variables, whereas family and parent measures are treated as independent variables. Table 4 presents the interrelations among the varied outcomes, and Table 5 presents correlations between parent and family measures and the outcome measures.

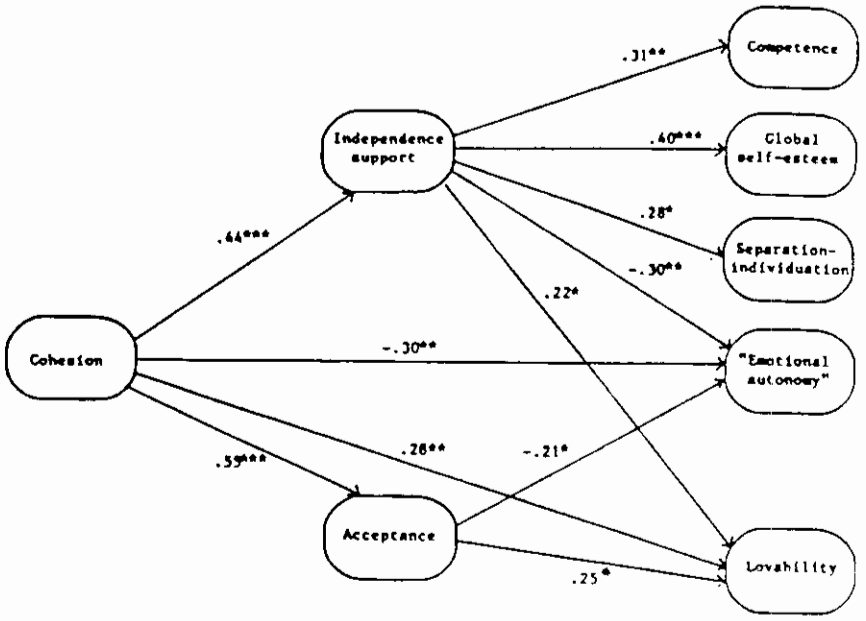
Results presented in Table 4 suggest that EA is primarily related to the issue of lovability. Young adults with greater emotional autonomy are less likely to feel worthy of love, but do not report less global self-esteem or competence. Total EA was unrelated to the SII. However, EA subscale scores related to this variable differentially. Notably, subjects high on EA individuation evidenced *lower* separation-individuation, as did those who were high on the EA parents as people sub-

TABLE 5

RELATIONS BETWEEN DEVELOPMENTAL "OUTCOMES" AND PARENTAL ACCEPTANCE, PARENTAL INDEPENDENCE SUPPORT, FAMILY COHESION, AND FAMILY ADAPTABILITY ($n = 104$)

	EA (Emotional Autonomy)	SOSE			SII (Separation—Individuation)
		Global SE	Lovability	Competence	
MFP:					
Mother acceptance	−.36***	.25*	.32**	.03	.18
Father acceptance	−.44***	.18	.51***	.05	.25**
Parent acceptance (total)	−.51***	.27**	.54***	.05	.28**
Mother independence	−.46***	.29**	.34***	.02	.24*
Father independence	−.45***	.33***	.45***	.25**	.32***
Parent independence (total)	−.55***	.37***	.47***	.15	.33***
FACES III:					
Cohesion	−.54***	.20*	.51***	−.05	.11
Adaptability	−.35***	.22*	.15	.11	.07

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



+Absence of path means non-significant relations.

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

FIG. 2.—Path model of relations among family cohesion, parent variables, and outcome variables

scale. However, EA nondependency items positively predicted SII scores.

Results in Table 5 demonstrate that both parent acceptance and independence support are associated with greater self-esteem, perceived lovability, separation-individuation, and lower EA. Competence self-esteem was, by contrast, less related to parent variables, with the exception of father independence encouragement. Family cohesion was positively related to perceived lovability and negatively to emotional autonomy.

Path Modeling

A model was specified that included hypothesized direct linkages between family cohesion and parental acceptance and between both cohesion and parental acceptance and emotional autonomy. In addition, parental acceptance and independence support were hypothesized to directly predict variables reflecting self-concept and separation-individuation.

To test the parameters in this model for significance, a two-step regression analysis was performed. First the "independent" variables of cohesion, parent independence support, and parent acceptance were entered simultaneously in five regression equations to predict each of the "dependent" variables—namely, global self-esteem, lovability, competence self-esteem, separation-individuation, and EA. Second, parental independence support and acceptance were regressed separately onto the cohesion variable. From these sets of regressions, standardized regression coefficients were obtained and tested for significance. Significant relations are depicted in Figure 2.

Cohesion significantly predicted parent acceptance and independence support, while these two parent variables were differentially predictive of developmental outcomes. Specifically, parental acceptance was significantly related only to emotional autonomy (negatively) and to lovability (positively). By contrast, independence support predicted competence self-esteem, global self-esteem, separation-individuation, and EA (negatively). The variable of cohesion was directly related, as expected, to EA and to lovability. Adjusted R^2 for the five outcome variables when predicted from the three independent variables were: for "emotional autonomy" .41, for global self-esteem .20, for competence

TABLE 6

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN BLATT OBJECT RELATIONS SCALE NURTURANCE FACTOR AND FAMILY, PARENT, AND SELF-RELATED RATINGS, INCLUDING "EMOTIONAL AUTONOMY" (n = 58)

	BORS		
	Mother Nurturance	Father Nurturance	Parent Nurturance (Total)
Family ratings:			
Cohesion	.55***	.65***	.75***
Adaptability	.26*	.17	.26*
Parent ratings:			
Mother independence	.46***	.19	.40***
Father independence	.30**	.20	.31**
Parent independence (total)	.45***	.23*	.43***
Mother acceptance	.52***	−.04	.31**
Father acceptance	.28**	.62***	.57***
Parent acceptance (total)	.49***	.44***	.56***
Self ratings:			
"Emotional Autonomy"	−.44***	−.49***	−.58***
Global self-esteem	.21	.21	.26*
Lovability	.40***	.50***	.56***
Competence	.10	−.10	.00
Separation-individuation	.09	.08	.10

* $p < .10$.
** $p < .05$.
*** $p < .01$.

self-esteem .08, for lovability .37, and for separation-individuation .10.

Supplementary data: Object Relations Scale (BORS).—A subset (n = 58) of the sample completed the BORS, an unstructured measure of subjects' "object representations." The dominant dimension tapped by the BORS is parental nurturance. Two raters independently rated 25 protocols according to procedures specified by Blatt et al. (1981). Interrater reliability as determined by Pearson correlations was .84, .78, and .80 for the mother, father, and parent nurturance factor scores. Scores from the rater who scored all 58 were used in this analysis.

Correlations between mother, father, and parent (total) nurturance ratings and this study's family, parent, and self-related variables are presented in Table 6. Consistent with Behrends and Blatt (1985), the BORS related to both parent independence support and acceptance. It was also strongly (r = .75) related to family cohesion, suggesting that the nurturance rating primarily reflects affectional bonding. BORS nurturance related to the self-ratings of lovability (positively) and emotional autonomy (negatively), supporting the view that EA indexes an experience of low parent nurturance and the absence of an affectional tie with parents.

General Discussion

The variable of emotional autonomy as instantiated by Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) shows robust and consistent relations to perceptions of the family and parental environment and with aspects of self-concept. Most notably, EA is associated in the current studies with: (1) less felt security and utilization of parents in young adolescents, (2) greater perceived parental rejection (vs. acceptance) in both mid-adolescent and young adult samples, and (3) less experienced family cohesion and parental acceptance in young adults. In general, the more "emotional autonomy" teenagers or young adults express, the less connected or secure they feel within the family, the less they experience their parents as conveying love and understanding, and the less they report willingness to draw upon parental resources.

Our major concern, therefore, is not with the measure of EA per se but its interpretation as a form of autonomy. Neither the evidence presented here nor that presented by Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) or Steinberg (1988) supports the premise that EA is a marker of self-regulation or of self-reliance. Instead, it appears that EA is most meaningfully construed as *emotional detachment*. We further suggest that whereas the concept of

emotional autonomy initially may have been intended to convey the relinquishing of *infantile* attachments (e.g., Douvan & Adelson, 1966), the EA measure reflects instead the loss of developmentally appropriate attachments.

Viewed as an index of detachment, however, the EA measure helps illuminate significant issues in the area of adolescent development. Returning to Steinberg and Silverberg's original report, it makes good sense that one would find increased conformity in adolescents who feel rejected and detached from their parents. More conformity with peers thus may reflect a compensatory dynamic among adolescents lacking in emotional support at home, who then seek extrafamilial acceptance. In contrast, our data suggest that those who report more secure attachments to parents also report more emotional security with friends.

Evidence from our young adult sample also suggested that those who are more emotionally autonomous (detached) from parents may develop a more negative self-view. Both emotional autonomy and experienced parental rejection were associated with lower perceived loveworthiness. These findings may reflect internalization of the adolescent's relationship with parents, such that those who feel more detached and rejected view themselves as less loveworthy, while those with more emotional ties and sense of being accepted develop a more positive view of their own value and worth to others. This hypothesis is also supported by our results showing that more nurturant parent representations on the BORS were related to less detachment (EA) and a more positive view of one's own lovability. Furthermore, the parent nurturance variable, which reflects what Behrends and Blatt (1985) called a "gratifying involvement," was closely associated with family cohesion, parent acceptance, and parent independence support among young adults. This pattern of results supports the view that facilitative relations between parents and young adults may involve both emotional closeness and felt support for developmentally appropriate tasks. Such findings have potentially important implications for the process referred to by Damon (1983) as the consolidation of self.

However, our predictions concerning parental independence support and EA were only partially supported. Whereas perceived independence support was strongly and negatively related to EA in the college sample, the two variables were largely unrelated in high school students. It is plausible that the issue of independence is much more salient to college students, who are, in fact, away from home and experiencing more pressure toward self-reliance. Future research might assess the relative salience of parental support for autonomy, independence, and parental acceptance in different stages of development with regard to the quality and maintenance of attachment.

An exploratory aspect of Study 2 concerned parents' marital status within the high school sample. These data suggested that among the sequelae of divorce or separation may be a strong sense of rejection, particularly by the father. In turn, this experience can lead to greater detachment. As a frankly post hoc finding, these data should be interpreted cautiously but have important implications for the study of outcomes of divorce.

The current studies do not directly assess parental style. Indeed, as was true of Steinberg and Silverberg's (1986) original report, the vicissitudes of adolescence are herein explored exclusively from the perspective of the adolescent or young adult. Accordingly, causal inferences regarding the actual parental behaviors that lead to detachment, or that contribute to individuation, should not be drawn from these data, which instead concern the adolescent's phenomenal world. While objective characteristics of the family (e.g., marital status, parenting style) may relate to these dimensions of experience, we suggest that the study of the adolescent's representation of self and others and its impact on the development of a mature self-concept and identity is significant in its own right. Nonetheless, research using observational or interview methodologies that assess those parent characteristics contributing to "emotional autonomy" (i.e., detachment) would be of interest. Of additional note is the close correspondence between content areas tapped by several of the measures employed (e.g., lovability and acceptance; EA nondependency and IAA emotional utilization). These overlaps within the nomological nets cast within the various studies were intended to aid in the reinterpretation of EA, but they also further attest to the interconnections between important concepts in developmental theory and the difficulties involved in their measurement.

Most generally, both this and Steinberg and Silverberg's (1986) original research suggest that attachment versus detachment to

parents is a highly important aspect of the vicissitudes of adolescence. We would add further that growth in independence and autonomy does not necessarily require severing emotional ties with parents or nonutilization of the emotional support parents can afford. More likely it requires that parents provide support for the developmental tasks of adolescence in a context of family cohesion and love. Insofar as one conceives of attachment as both an emotional bond and a sensitivity to developmental needs, then it would seem that it is attachment rather than detachment that optimises individuation and the capacities for relatedness to self and others during adolescence and early adulthood.

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