

CONSTRUCTIONS OF EARLY PARENTING, INTIMACY AND AUTONOMY IN YOUNG WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

This study explores relations between young women's patterns of intimacy and autonomy and their constructions of early relationships with their parents. Based on Bowlby's (1973) notion of the 'internal working model' of attachment, it was predicted that women evidencing intimacy in current relationships would construct perceptions of their parents as having been accepting. It also was hypothesized that women exhibiting greater autonomy in their everyday functioning would describe their parents as having afforded them more encouragement of independence than those displaying less autonomy. Intimacy was measured using the Revised Intimacy Interview (Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky, 1985) and autonomy measures included the General Causality Orientation (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Self-Reliance (Greenberger et al., 1974) scales. Results suggest that, as predicted, women displaying intimate relationships perceived their fathers as having been more accepting than those evidencing either enmeshed (merger) or superficial relationships. Further, autonomy was tied to constructions of support for independence by mothers and fathers. The findings shed light on the underlying dynamics and defenses of individuals displaying different patterns of intimacy and autonomy.

KEY WORDS • autonomy • intimacy • parenting

The capacities for forming intimate relationships and for autonomous functioning are two key indices of adaptation in young adulthood. Intimacy, for

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example, has been closely linked to well-being (Reis, 1984) and autonomy has been described as a hallmark of mental health (Jahoda, 1958). While theoretical interest in psychological factors underlying these capacities has been longstanding, efforts to explore them empirically have been few. The present study relies on attachment and object relations theories in suggesting that autonomy and intimacy are linked to adults' constructions of the quality of their early relationships. Intimacy in current relationships and autonomy in everyday functioning are examined in relation to models of early relationships with parents in a sample of young women.

Attachment and object relations theories describe a link between models of early relations and both intimacy and autonomy. In Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory, the caretaker's acceptance of the child and responsiveness to his or her needs are internalized in the form of 'internal working models' of the self in relationships. These mental models guide appraisals of the self and others and serve as anticipatory images of what is to be expected in relationships. As such, these models determine the closeness to or distance from others an individual maintains in order to feel safe (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). Bowlby also predicted that children whose parents provide them with a 'secure base' from which to explore the world, 'grow up to be secure and self-reliant' (Bowlby, 1977: 206). Winnicott (1965) suggested that the internalized relationship with the attachment figure provides the context within which autonomy develops. He suggested that autonomy is possible once the supportive caregiver has become built into the personality. Thus, attachment and object relations theories predict that models of secure early relationships will facilitate the development of both intimacy and autonomous functioning.

In describing links between models of relationships, intimacy and autonomy, we first discuss possible models of early relationships. Bowlby's theory, which has been applied primarily in infancy, describes three types of attachment relationships. In secure attachment, the model of the caretaker is as consistently available and responsive. In avoidant attachment, the model of the caregiver is hypothesized to be insensitive and rejecting. Finally, in ambivalent attachment, the caregiver is unpredictable and inconsistent in responding. Main & Solomon (1990) added a fourth category, disorganized/disoriented, which implies a conflicting model with elements of more than one type activated under stress.

These attachment types, assessed through the strange situation procedure (Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969), have been found to be associated with the quality of future relationships. Children with secure attachments have been found to be more empathic toward peers and less overdependent on teachers (Sroufe, 1983). They also have more friends, are more capable of reciprocity, and approach and respond to others with more positive affect (Sroufe et al., 1984; Waters et al., 1979).

Recently, researchers have examined concomitants of adults' constructions of early relationships. Main et al. (1985) used the Adult Attachment Interview (George et al., 1984) to assess three 'working models' of attachment — secure, dismissing and preoccupied — in mothers. Main et al.

found that mothers classified as secure tended to have securely attached infants, whereas mothers classified as insecure tended to have insecurely attached infants. Kobak & Sceery (1988) found that young adults who were classified as dismissing of attachment had more distanced interpersonal relationships, their peers perceived them as hostile, and they experienced loneliness and a lack of support in their relationships. Ryan & Lynch (1989) found that perceptions of parental rejection in childhood predicted low perceived loveworthiness in high school and college students.

In the present study, young women's models of early relationships with their mothers and fathers are assessed on three dimensions: the degree to which individuals feel that their parents accepted, appreciated and loved them in childhood; the degree to which they feel that their parents encouraged their independence; and the degree to which they idealize their parents or perceive them as unrealistically infallible. These first two dimensions are presumed to be the key dimensions in parental rearing style (e.g. Schaefer, 1959) and correspond well to the parent characteristics described by attachment and object relations theories.

To what types of intimacy patterns might such dimensions of early relations be related? Several recent studies have attempted to characterize adult patterns of current relationships with peers and romantic partners. Hazan & Shaver (1987) described three styles. In the secure style, individuals are comfortable depending on others and having others depend on them. Individuals with an avoidant style feel uncomfortable being close to others and worry about having to become too intimate. Finally, those with an ambivalent style feel that others are reluctant to become as close to them as they would like and worry that others may abandon them. Linking these styles with models of early relations, these authors found that individuals with a secure style described warm relationships with both of their parents, individuals who reported having an avoidant style described their mothers as cold and rejecting, and those reporting an ambivalent style depicted their fathers as unfair and uncaring. Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991) identified four prototypes of adult attachment with peers based on adults' internal models of self and other: secure, preoccupied, fearful-avoidant and dismissive-avoidant. Supporting links to childhood experiences, these authors found that type of attachment to peers was related to the same type of attachment to parents. Together these findings support the theory that the perceived quality of early relations with parents are linked to the way individuals approach and experience current relationships.

In order to examine current patterns of intimacy, we use the conceptualization and measure developed by Orlofsky and his colleagues (e.g. Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky, 1985; Orlofsky, 1976) which is based on Erikson's (1963) theory. According to Orlofsky, the capacity for intimacy can be conceptualized along two dimensions: commitment, or the degree of investment in a relationship, and depth, the ability to be close, open and accessible, and respectful of another person's differences from oneself.

Individuals can be placed into one of four categories — intimate, superficial, merger and isolate — based on differences on the depth dimension. Further, within each of the first three categories there are two subtypes differing on the commitment dimension. Intimate (committed) and preintimate (uncommitted) individuals are involved in relationships characterized by openness, caring and respect for the integrity of the self and others. Stereotyped (uncommitted) and pseudointimate (committed) individuals typically maintain many relationships, but they are superficial, somewhat utilitarian, and lacking in closeness. Merger-committed and uncommitted individuals form relationships that are characterized by enmeshment and overdependency. They become absorbed in relationships at the expense of their own autonomy. Finally, individuals categorized as isolate are either completely or nearly completely withdrawn from relationships. It should be noted that there are links between these categories and those described earlier: intimate with secure; superficial with dismissing; merger with preoccupied; and isolate with fearful-avoidant.

A number of studies have supported the validity of the intimacy status construct. Placement in the intimate status has been associated with interpersonal perceptiveness (Orlofsky, 1976), facility in the expression of affect (Orlofsky & Ginsburg, 1981) and higher scores on other measures of Eriksonian personality development (Orlofsky, 1978). The merger category, developed to be relevant to women's approach to intimate relationships (Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky, 1985), is a newer addition that has received some empirical support (e.g. Bellew-Smith & Korn, 1986).

Autonomy is a construct that has been variously conceptualized and operationalized (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). As conceived in the present study, autonomy concerns the process of regulating one's own behavior and experience and governing the initiation and direction of action (Ryan, 1991). When one is autonomous, one experiences self-determination or a sense of being the origin of one's own actions (deCharms, 1976). This can be contrasted with an experience of being controlled by others or feeling at the mercy of unknown forces that one is helpless to control. Recently, authors have stressed that autonomy is different from independence, which typically involves a detachment from others (Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Lynch, 1989). Acknowledging and being comfortable with one's inevitable dependence on others and willingly accepting support from others is part of healthy autonomy. Supporting this reasoning, Ryan & Lynch (1989) found that adolescents who were more emotionally detached from parents were, by several indices, *less* individuated.

It should be noted that while, in the present study, intimacy and autonomy are described separately, they are linked both conceptually and in our measures. Higher levels of autonomy, individuality and self-development make possible higher levels of interpersonal relatedness and vice versa (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994). Supporting this, Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky (1985) found more disorders of separation-individuation in the merger and low intimacy groups than in intimate groups. Only intimate individuals are comfortable with both intimacy and autonomy.

It was hypothesized that the capacities to open oneself to another and to be close to another without fusion and loss of identity are based on a secure construction of early relationships. Such constructions might be characterized by a feeling of acceptance by parents without fear of rejection. Therefore, intimate women were expected to report more parental acceptance in childhood than women in the merger or superficial statuses. Merger individuals, since they are overdependent and have difficulty allowing autonomy in the other, were hypothesized to construct early relations characterized by both lack of acceptance and lack of independence encouragement. Finally, superficial individuals were expected to construct early parenting relations as lacking in acceptance but were also, based on Kobak & Sceery's (1988) and Main et al.'s (1985) findings with avoidant subjects, expected to idealize their parents. Finally, individuals categorized as isolate were expected to be low on all three dimensions.

It was expected that autonomous functioning would be associated with constructions of parents as having been supportive of autonomy. Support for the importance of perceptions of parental autonomy support has been provided in studies of parenting styles in children. Grolnick et al. (1991) found that children who described their parents as autonomy supportive were more autonomous in their reasons for engaging in school-related activities, perceived themselves as more competent in school, and displayed more understanding of the sources of control in their classrooms relative to those perceiving their parents as more controlling. Ryan & Lynch (1989) demonstrated that greater self-esteem and individuation were associated with parental independence encouragement in childhood.

While attachment theorists emphasize the ways in which constructions guide expectations of relationships, there are likely bidirectional processes associated with these relations. Current relationships may, either temporarily or permanently, mold and change remembrances and models of early relationships. For example, when individuals are in secure current relationships they may remember or 'construct' more accepting parents than when in less secure relationships. This is consistent with Halverson's (1988) suggestion that when adults remember their pasts they 'tend to interpret and reconstruct events in terms of their present personalities'. In this study, we assume a bidirectional pathway between constructions of early relationships and patterns of intimacy and autonomy. Since we assume such relations, we examine associations in our study.

Method

Subjects were 50 undergraduate women enrolled in an introductory psychology course; they received course credit for their participation in the study. The women ranged in age from 19 to 22 years with a mean of 19 years, 7 months. Since the Intimacy Interview emphasizes enduring relationships and women under the age of 19 are less likely than older women to have had such long-term relationships, only women 19 years and older were eligible to participate

in the study. Information regarding marital status of parents and family social status was obtained from 49 of the subjects. Of these, 42 came from families in which parents were married, 6 from families where parents were separated or divorced, and one subject's father was deceased. On the Hollingshead's (1975) Four Factor Index of Social Status, three subjects were status V (lower class), five were status IV (lower-middle class), nine were status III (middle class), 17 status II (upper-middle class) and 15 status I (upper class).

Subjects signed up for an experiment called 'Relationships'. They each participated in a 1½-hour session in which they were first administered the Revised Intimacy Status Interview and then completed three questionnaires: the Mother-Father-Peer Scale, the General Causality Orientation Scale and the Self-reliance Scale.

The Mother-Father-Peer Scale (MFP, Epstein, 1983) was used to assess the quality of subjects' constructions of their parents' behavior during the subjects' early childhood. The scale measures acceptance versus rejection by mothers, fathers and peers, encouragement to independence versus overprotection by mothers and fathers, and maternal and paternal idealization. Only the mother and father scales were relevant to this study. Acceptance concerns the degree to which individuals feel they were loved and appreciated by their parents in childhood (e.g. 'When I was a child my mother could always be depended on when I really needed her help and trust'). Encouragement to independence assesses the extent to which individuals feel their parents accepted and encouraged their self-reliance and development of social and other skills (e.g. 'My father encouraged me to make my own decisions'). The idealization dimension measures the degree to which there is an unrealistic perception of the parent as infallible (e.g. 'My mother was close to a perfect parent').

The MFP scale includes 60 items, each consisting of a statement about the parent which is rated on a 7-point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Internal consistency estimates for the subscales range from .82 to .91. Perceived parental acceptance has been found to be positively correlated with self-esteem and perceived lovability and perceptions of independence encouragement have been found to be correlated with separation-individuation and self-esteem (Ryan & Lynch, 1989).

The General Causality Orientation Scale (ACI) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) was used to measure an aspect of autonomy. Its three subscales correspond to three causality orientations: Autonomy, Control and Impersonal. An autonomy-oriented individual freely chooses to engage in activities for the value inherent in them. The more control-oriented individual focuses on the extrinsic contingencies in situations and is motivated by internalized controls or 'shoulds'. The impersonal orientation involves a feeling that one cannot achieve desired outcomes because forces in the world are uncontrollable or unpredictable.

The ACI consists of 12 vignettes depicting interpersonal or achievement-oriented situations. Each vignette is followed by three items which correspond to the three causality orientations on which subjects indicate the degree to which each response would be characteristic of them in the vignette situation. For example, to a vignette inquiring about the first question one might have when offered a new position, the responses are: 'I wonder if the new work will be interesting' (Autonomy), 'Will I make more at this position?' (Control), and 'What if I can't live up to the new responsibility?' (Impersonal). Construct validity has been derived from the scale's correlations with measures of depression, social anxiety, self-derogation and other related constructs. Internal

consistency estimates for the three subscales range from .70 to .76 and test-retest reliabilities are above .70 (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

The Self-reliance Scale of the Psychosocial Maturity Inventory (Greenberger et al., 1974) was used to measure other aspects of autonomy. The scale is composed of 10 items, each of which is rated from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The items measure one's sense of control over one's life, absence of excessive dependence on others and initiative. An example is 'In a group I prefer to let other people make the decisions'. The subscale has adequate internal consistency (.7-.8 using the Kuder-Richardson formula) and test-retest reliability (Greenberger et al., 1974) and is correlated positively with another measure of autonomy, resistance to peer pressure (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986).

The Revised Intimacy Status Interview (Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky, 1985) was used to assess the quality of current relationships. The semi-structured interview, which lasts approximately 45-60 minutes, includes open-ended questions about close friendships and romantic relationships. The interview is tape-recorded for later coding. Interviews are evaluated according to two criteria: (1) depth or quality of friendships and romantic relationships and (2) commitment versus no commitment to romantic relationships. On this basis, subjects are classified into one of seven statuses; intimate, preintimate, pseudointimate, stereotyped, merger-committed, merger-uncommitted or isolate, as described earlier. These, in turn, can be collapsed into four types: intimate, superficial, merger and isolate.

In order to facilitate the placement of subjects into intimacy statuses, relationships with friends and romantic partners are first evaluated on a number of dimensions each described in the manual by several criteria. For example, with regard to friends, criteria for closeness include: maintaining close contact, sharing common interests, mutual trust and care, understanding their needs. For romantic relationships, degree of openness includes sharing personal problems and worries, expressing anger and accepting and resolving differences. Following this, raters examine descriptions of the seven intimacy categories including the dimensions on which subjects were evaluated. Raters match subjects' placement on dimensions with the intimacy status prototypes.

To assess *Reliability of Intimacy Ratings*, the first author completed ratings on all subjects. In order to assess the reliability of interview ratings, a second rater rated 10 randomly selected tapes. Interrater reliability (intraclass correlations) exceeded .82 for the intimacy dimensions. Using a criterion of exact agreement, interrater agreement for intimacy status was 100 percent.

Results

Subjects were categorized into *intimacy statuses* as follows: 9 women were rated intimate, 10 preintimate, 10 merger-committed, 7 merger-uncommitted, 7 stereotyped, 6 pseudointimate and one isolate. Owing to the nature of the hypotheses and consistent with previous uses of the intimacy interview (Bellew-Smith & Korn, 1986; Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky, 1985), intimate and preintimate women were combined to form the high intimacy group, merger-committed and uncommitted women were combined to form a merger group, and stereotyped and pseudointimate women were combined to form the superficial group. Since only one subject was categorized as isolate, this subject was excluded from analyses of the intimacy statuses.

In order to determine the independence of the MFP subscales, correlations among the six subscales of the MFP were computed (see Table 1). Results indicated significant relations within and across parents. In particular, for both mothers and fathers, the acceptance and idealization scales were positively correlated. Acceptance and idealization were each moderately related to independence encouragement. There were positive cross-parent relations for independence encouragement and idealization.

TABLE 1
Correlations among subscales of the Mother–Father–Peer Scale

	F. Acc.	F. Ideal.	F. Ind. Sup.	M. Acc.	M. Ideal.
Father acceptance	—				
Father idealization	.67***				
Father independence support	.47***	.33**			
Mother acceptance	.26	.04	.13		
Mother idealization	.21	.30*	.18	.58***	
Mother independence support	.20	-.04	.42**	.53***	.36*

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

Relations between the autonomy measures are depicted in Table 2. Two of the subscales of the ACI were significantly though modestly correlated: subjects reporting higher control scores tended to report high impersonal scores. This is consistent with the results of Deci & Ryan (1985) indicating relative independence among the subscales. Self-reliance was moderately positively correlated with the autonomy subscale of the ACI ($r = .34$, $p < .05$).

TABLE 2
Correlations among autonomy variables

	Autonomy	Control	Impersonal
Autonomy	—		
Control	-.08	—	
Impersonal	.02	.39**	—
Self-reliance	.34*	-.14	-.21

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Relations between intimacy and autonomy were examined using ANOVAs with intimacy classification as the independent variable and the four autonomy variables as dependent variables. There were no significant relations between intimacy status and either the ACI subscales or self-reliance. In order to further examine possible predicted relations, pairwise t -tests for intimacy groups for each dependent variable were conducted. None of the t -tests was significant.

To determine whether women in the high intimacy, merger and superficial groups differed in their perceptions of early parenting (the six subscales of the

MFP scale), a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed. The MANOVA indicated overall differences (Wilks's lambda = .53 $F(12,82) = 2.53, p < .007$). Subsequent ANOVAs revealed significant group differences on three of the subscales: father acceptance, father idealization and mother encouragement of independence (see Table 3). Planned comparison *t*-tests indicated that father acceptance was higher in the high intimacy group relative to the merger ($t = 3.34, p < .002$) and superficial ($t = 2.12, p < .04$) groups, but the difference between the merger and superficial groups was not significant. Thus, women who displayed intimate relationships tended to describe their fathers as having been more accepting in their childhoods than those displaying either merger or superficial relationships. Father idealization was higher in the high intimacy ($t = 2.66, p < .02$) and superficial groups ($t = -2.41, p < .02$) relative to the merger group. Finally, women in the superficial group reported lower levels of encouragement of independence by their mothers relative to those in the merger group ($t = 2.02, p < .05$) but the difference between the intimate and superficial groups did not reach significance.

TABLE 3
Means (and SDs) for Mother–Father–Peer subscales as a function of the intimacy group

	High Intimate (<i>n</i> = 19)	Merger (<i>n</i> = 17)	Superficial (<i>n</i> = 13)	<i>F</i> (2,48)
Father acceptance	42.74 (5.9)	34.56 (8.5)	37.00 (9.4)	5.00**
Father idealization	18.42 (5.7)	13.37 (5.4)	19.07 (7.3)	4.10*
Father independence support	48.63 (9.0)	47.38 (21.1)	47.38 (9.7)	.14
Mother acceptance	42.89 (5.9)	42.53 (9.4)	40.61 (7.4)	.37
Mother idealization	18.94 (6.1)	17.76 (6.3)	20.08 (6.0)	.56
Mother independence support	49.37 (10.1)	51.23 (8.5)	43.15 (10.8)	3.04*

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Because the three subscales of the MFP were correlated, it was also of interest to examine the effects of intimacy status on each subscale controlling for the other two. In order to do this, three analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) with intimacy status as the independent variable and one of the MFP subscales as the dependent variable (e.g. mother acceptance) and the other two as covariates (e.g. mother idealization, mother independence encouragement) were conducted for each parent. The results (see Table 4), including least squares means (means adjusted for the two covariates), indicated similar results to the ANOVAs: significant effects for father acceptance, father idealization, and a marginally significant effect for mother encouragement of independence. For father acceptance, intimates were marginally higher than mergers ($p < .07$), but significantly higher than those in the superficial group ($p < .003$). Those in the merger group were marginally higher than those in the superficial group ($p < .07$). For father idealization, women in the intimate and merger groups did not differ, but both were lower

TABLE 4
Least squares means (and SEs) for Mother–Father–Peer Subscales as a function of intimacy group with two Mother–Father–Peer Scales as covariates

	High intimate	Merger	Superficial	<i>F</i> (2,48)
Father acceptance	40.92 (1.08)	37.78 (1.22)	34.43 (1.26)	7.78**
Father idealization	15.49 (.96)	15.55 (1.00)	19.70 (1.05)	5.61**
Father independence support	45.31 (2.23)	48.69 (2.36)	49.07 (2.64)	.71
Mother acceptance	42.37 (1.45)	42.34 (1.58)	39.72 (1.78)	.76
Mother idealization	18.33 (1.13)	17.14 (1.20)	20.73 (1.36)	1.89
Mother independence support	48.67 (2.00)	51.02 (2.14)	44.20 (2.41)	2.78 ⁺

⁺*p* < .10; **p* < .05; ***p* < .01.

than women in the superficial group (*p* < .006). Finally, for mother encouragement of independence, women in the merger group were higher than those in the superficial group (*p* < .04), but the difference between the intimate and superficial groups did not reach significance.

TABLE 5
Multiple Regression Analyses Regressing Autonomy Indices onto Perceptions of Early Parenting

	M. Acc. ^a Beta	M. Ideal ^b Beta	M. Ind. Sup. ^c Beta	R ²
Self-reliance	-.32	.25	.29†	.11
Autonomy orientation	.03	-.10	.34*	.11
Control orientation	-.05	-.02	-.04	.01
Impersonal orientation	.06	.15	-.38*	.11
	F. Acc. ^a Beta	F. Ideal ^b Beta	F. Ind. Sup. ^c Beta	R ²
Self-reliance	.06	.01	.25	.08
Autonomy orientation	-.06	-.14	.28†	.08
Control orientation	.11	-.13	-.44**	.17
Impersonal orientation	-.29	.27	.06	.03

Notes. Betas are standardized coefficients for the final equation.

^a M. Acc. (F. Acc.) = Mother (Father) Acceptance.

^b M. Ideal (F. Ideal) = Mother (Father) Idealization.

^c M. Ind. Sup. (F. Ind. Sup.) = Mother (Father) Independence Support.

⁺*p* < .10; **p* < .05; ***p* < .01.

In order to examine *relations between autonomy subscales and models of parenting*, multiple regression analyses entering the three MFP subscales (for each parent) were conducted (see Table 5). Simultaneous entry was utilized. For mothers, encouragement of independence was significantly positively associated with the autonomy orientation and negatively with the impersonal

orientation indicating that women who described their mothers as having encouraged their independence scored as more autonomous and less impersonal on the ACI. There was also a marginally significant positive association between maternal encouragement of independence and self-reliance ($p < .09$). For fathers, encouragement of independence also was predictive: individuals reporting higher encouragement of independence were lower on control orientation and marginally higher on autonomy orientation relative to those reporting less encouragement.

Discussion

Based on object relations and attachment theories, we predicted that current patterns of intimacy and autonomy would be associated with constructions of early relationships with parents. In general, our results support this hypothesis in that women evidencing intimate, superficial and merger relationships constructed different pictures of their early experience with parents. Further, greater autonomy in women's current lives was associated with a model of having been afforded encouragement of independence in childhood.

In particular, one of our primary hypotheses was that women evidencing intimate relationships would perceive themselves as having been provided more acceptance in childhood than those evidencing either superficial or merger relationships. This hypothesis was supported for perceptions of fathers but not mothers. In accordance with attachment theory, this finding may indicate that women with secure representations of fathers may be able to open themselves and become close to another while maintaining respect for autonomy of the other and themselves (Bretherton, 1988). The finding of low perceived acceptance by father emerging for both the superficial and the merger groups suggests a similar dynamic within the two groups, though their approach to relationships is quite different. Perhaps the merger group's enmeshed approach to relationships, whereby others are kept overly close, and the superficial group's distanced stance represent opposite strategies for protecting against experiences of rejection.

The lack of findings for acceptance by mother was surprising given the almost exclusive emphasis in early writings on attachment on the mother-child relationship, which has been viewed as the prototype for all later love relationships (Bowlby, 1969). Other theorists, however, have recognized the importance of the father. According to these theorists (e.g. Burlingham, 1973), the father entices the child to individuate from the mother by representing for the child the new and exciting 'other than mother world'. Studies have recently demonstrated that patterns of father-child interaction are associated with children's social competence and, specifically, that father-child physical play serves as a context within which children learn to decode the affective signals of their partners (e.g. MacDonald & Parke, 1984).

It should be noted, however, in understanding these patterns of relations that the intimacy interview emphasizes romantic rather than friendship

relations. It may be that the importance of acceptance by father holds for these cross-sex relationships but may not be as significant for relationships with same-sex others. This issue requires additional research.

Our results also supported the hypothesis that women involved in superficial relationships would report greater parental idealization. This result must be interpreted in light of the low acceptance also reported by these women. There are two possible interpretations of these findings. First, it is possible that fathers whose daughters develop superficial relationships present themselves as being superior, hiding their true feelings and weaknesses. Such a presentation might make it difficult to feel 'good enough' to be accepted by the father and, perhaps others, and so the women may develop a stance of keeping others distant. Another possibility is that the idealized view is a defense against the negative affect associated with a realistic perception of the father.

For mergers, while we predicted that low acceptance would be combined with low independence encouragement, we found evidence of *high* independence encouragement. We suggest that, in the context of low acceptance by father, encouragement of independence by mothers may be associated with an experience of abandonment and feelings of neglect. If this were so, the merger group's approach to relationships would suggest a way of guarding against abandonment by keeping the attachment object overly close. Another possible explanation is that, in a positive sense, mothers support the independence of their daughters. Fathers, on the other hand, may give daughters the message that the result (autonomy) is unlovable and the girl grows into a woman who is anxious that she will not be loved if she is too independent from others. It is also possible, as others have argued (Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky, 1985) that the merger is a developmental phase that might change as women mature and become more self-confident. The fact that, controlling for the other MFP variables, acceptance by father was only marginally lower for those in the merger category relative to those in the high intimate group (in contrast to the very low father acceptance scores of the superficial women), suggests a less extreme interpretation for merger status.

Our results also suggest that, as predicted, the capacity for autonomy is associated with perceptions of parental encouragement of independence in childhood. Women who experienced a greater sense of autonomy in their everyday behavior tended to describe their mothers as having been high in encouragement of independence. We also found a marginal positive association between perceived maternal support for independence and self-reliance. The weaker association for self-reliance may have been due to the inadequacy of our self-reliance measure, which contained only 10 items. Additionally, we found that lack of encouragement of independence by mothers was associated with a sense of helplessness and ineffectiveness in achieving desired outcomes, and lack of encouragement of independence by fathers was associated with attunement to external controls or pressures in regulating behavior.

One surprising finding was that intimacy and autonomy variables were

uncorrelated. This finding appears to be in contrast with a study by Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky (1985), who found that high intimacy women have fewer problems in separation-individuation relative to low-intimacy women. In attempting to integrate these findings, we suggest that the two studies have tapped different constructs. Whereas we have assessed reported self-reliant, choiceful everyday functioning, Levitz-Jones & Orlofsky (1985) assessed individuation and acceptance of separation and loss *in relationships*.

In general, our study supports the idea put forth by attachment and object relations theorists that models of early relationships may guide the types of current relationships in which one engages by determining the levels of closeness or distance from which one can relate and feel safe. We suggest also that the findings likely indicate bidirectional pathways in which constructions guide relationships but relationships influence constructions. It should be noted also that, while we have emphasized the fact that our measures picked up perceived or constructed relationships, there may be elements of truth in these depictions. Women describing unaccepting fathers may well have had fathers who did not accept them as constructions likely result from actual transaction patterns (Bowlby, 1973). It would be important to do further studies which begin to disentangle the causal relations of these variables, i.e. whether perceptions of parenting are driving current relationship experiences or vice versa and how much of the variance is actual versus constructed. It would of course be important to extend this study to a sample of men in order to compare how their constructions of early relationships predict intimacy and autonomy. Since the Revised Intimacy Interview has, to our knowledge, been administered only to women, it would be important to examine the relevance of the merger status for men.

Finally, several limitations of the study need to be mentioned. First, the sample was composed of young adult women in western culture. Western culture may be unique in its emphasis on the importance of individuality and independence (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994). In other cultures, individuals may have different experiences or construe them differently. A similar point could be made for young versus older adults. In addition, most of the women came from families with two parents. The differential significance and centrality of mothers versus fathers in mother-only or father-only families remains to be explored. Finally, limitations were posed by the self-report nature of some of the measures. Observational data would be helpful to begin to validate the reported relationships, especially using longitudinal methods that would begin to disentangle causal connections.

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