

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]

PREVIEW

College Students' Perceptions of Parent-Child Relationships and Their Correlates:

Explanatory Style and Empathy

by

David R. Webster

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Interdepartmental Area of
Major: Psychological and Cultural Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Gargi Roysircar-Sodowsky

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 2001

UMI Number: 3041363

Copyright 2002 by
Webster, David Ray

All rights reserved.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3041363

Copyright 2002 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

DISSERTATION TITLE

College Students' Perceptions of Parent-Child Relationships
and Their Correlates: Explanatory Style and Empathy

BY

David R. Webster

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

APPROVED

DATE

Gargi Roysircar-Sodowsky
Signature

8/20/01

Gargi Roysircar-Sodowsky, Ph.D.
Typed Name

David Moshman
Signature

8-20-01

David Moshman, Ph.D.
Typed Name

Deborah L. Bandalos
Signature

8-20-01

Deborah L. Bandalos, Ph.D.
Typed Name

Susan M. Swearer Napolitano
Signature

8/20/01

Susan M. Swearer Napolitano, Ph.D.
Typed Name

Cynthia W. Esqueda
Signature

8-20-01

Cynthia Willis Esqueda, Ph.D.
Typed Name

Signature

Typed Name



GRADUATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR CORRELATES: EXPLANATORY STYLE AND EMPATHY

David Ray Webster, Ph.D.
University of Nebraska, 2001

Advisor: Gargi Roysircar-Sodowsky

In classical attachment theory, parental attachments are believed to form the basis of a cognitive framework for psychological development and interpersonal functioning. This study investigated the theoretical concept of attachments to parents as having pervasive influence on psychological adaptation into young adulthood. It was also believed that separate attachments to mothers and fathers would produce differential effects on psychological adaptation and that these attachments would continue to be influential for young adults. Specifically, traditional-age (approximately 18 to 23) college students' perceptions of separate attachments to their mothers and fathers were related to students' self-reported explanatory style and empathy. Because of their presumed importance for interpersonal functioning and adaptation, explanatory style and empathy were believed to be important variables to investigate in connection to parental attachments.

Using a survey methodology, data were collected and analyzed from 362 college students (women: 288, men: 74) who attended a Midwestern university. Students from a variety of undergraduate courses received course credit for their participation in the study.

Results of a multiple regression supported the hypothesis that parental attachments, assessed by the Inventory of Parent Attachments (IPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1989), were positively related to explanatory style. Davis' (1980)

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) was used to assess cognitive empathy (Perspective-Taking) and emotional empathy (Empathic Concern, Personal Distress). The hypothesized relationship between Mother Attachment and empathy was partially supported: Mother Attachment was positively related to cognitive empathy (Perspective-Taking) and emotional empathy (Empathic Concern). However, Father Attachment was negatively related to Personal Distress. Unexpectedly, Personal Distress emerged as the single best predictor of positive-negative explanatory style.

Participants' written responses on the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Peterson et al., 1982) were qualitatively analyzed. Six attributional themes were identified: Self-Traits, Self-Behaviors, Other's-Traits, Other's-Behaviors, Relationships, and Circumstances. Notable distinctions emerged between men and women on the themes. Overall, women wrote more relationship-based causes (41%) than men did (31%). Men endorsed more self-based causes (Self-Traits, Self-Behaviors) than women at more than a 4:1 ratio.

Acknowledgments

Foremost, I wish to express my thanks to my committee chairperson and advisor, Gargi Roysircar-Sodowsky. Her encouragement to me to pursue this topic; her valuable insights, and challenges to strive for investigative excellence undergirded much of this project. Her recommendations contributed to my learning not only about classical attachment theory, but also to my consideration of nontraditional caregivers as primary attachment figures. I also appreciate her mentorship through the course of my doctoral training, during this project, into the oral defense, and beyond.

Next I would like to express my thanks to my co-chair, David Moshman. His availability for consultation on various aspects of the final draft was especially invaluable. I am indebted to David for his incisive comments on the finer points of classical attachment theory and how these issues affected the methodology and my conceptualization of the study.

I would like to express my thanks to my other committee members: Susan Swearer, Deborah Bandalos, and Cynthia Willis-Esqueda. Each member's separate contributions positively influenced the study. Susan Swearer's recommendations to consider the salience of schema theory lent an additional perspective that enriched the notion of how primary attachments might be internalized. I am thankful for Deborah Bandalos' recommendations for methodological refinements in the early stages of the project. I appreciated Cynthia Willis-Esqueda's insights into aspects of the study that touched on attribution theory and gender differences in making causal attributions.

I also wish to thank Dennis Leitner, Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, for his time and helpful

suggestions on improving the statistical analyses in the final revisions.

I am especially grateful for the many students who volunteered for the study. Their comments about their lives and longings; their significant bonds and disappointments with people with whom they shared relationships, did not go unappreciated. I have learned a great deal about primary attachments; I have learned a great deal more about people. It is the latter that I can attest to as the most valuable body of knowledge I have gained to date in my graduate training.

I am thankful to Bill Keller, Substance Abuse Treatment Program Director, of the Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC) in Lincoln, Nebraska, for his indirect impact on my own professional development and on this project. His example of caring for people was a timely model for me to strive to find practical ways to use knowledge gained in research, in the interests of helping people with their problems.

I am thankful to my friends Ed and Lea Nilson for their friendship and fellowship. Our long talks about those who touched our lives influenced and shaped my thinking about attachments. I am thankful to my friends Bob and Nancy Legan who also were supportive and encouraging.

Finally, I wish to express my thanks to my immediate family. I am grateful to my parents for instilling me with intellectual curiosity, the determination to work hard, and courage to believe in myself. I am thankful for my sister, Ruthann W. Hoffman and my brother, Thomas Webster for their friendship and support. Those relationships remain a testimony to the lasting effects of secure bonds with people I love. Romans 8:28-30.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study	1
Attachment Theory	2
Internal Working Model: Conceptualization	3
Script Theory: A Conceptual Hierarchy of Mental Representations	4
Self-Schemas	5
Multiple Attachment Figures	5
Non-Traditional Caregivers	6
Cross-Cultural Patterns of Child-Caregiver Attachments	7
Explanatory Style	8
Empathy	9
Definitions and Measurement of Variables	11
The Parent-Child Relationship: Theorized Influences	11
Explanatory Style	12
Empathy: A Multidimensional Perspective	13
Research Questions	14

Limitations of the Study	15
Significance of the Study	15
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	17
Attachment Theory	17
Attachment Behavioral System	17
Normative Phases of Development of Attachment	18
Attachment Separation Anxiety	19
Internal Working Model of the Self and of Attachment Representations	20
Script Theory: Conceptual Improvements on the Organization of Mental Representations	22
Self-Schemas: Interpersonal Origins of Personality Traits	24
Multiple Attachment Relationships	27
Theoretical Basis	27
Fathers	27
Grandparents	28
Child Caregivers	28
Multiple Caregivers and Cross-Cultural Studies	29
Non-Traditional Families	30
Single Parent-Custodial Families and Stepfamilies	30
Conclusions	32
Perceptions of Attachment Relationships With Mothers and Fathers	33
Effects of Perceived Attachments to Both Parents Together	34
Mother Attachments	36

Father Attachments	38
Mixed Findings on Comparisons of Effects of Maternal and Paternal Attachments and Psychological Development	40
Conclusions: Discussion and Recommendations	41
Explanatory Style	44
The Original Learned Helplessness Model	44
The Reformulated Model of Learned Helplessness	46
Interpersonal Origins of Explanatory Style	47
Explanatory Style and Early Parental Relationships	48
Explanatory Style and Earliest Memories of the Parent-Child Relationship	49
Parental Modeling and Parental Causal Beliefs About the Child	50
Traumatic Early Family Experiences	51
Conclusions	52
Studies About Explanatory Style and Parent-Child Relationship Quality	52
Empathy	55
Historical Definitions	55
Empathy as Affective and Cognitive Components	56
A Multidimensional View of Empathy	57
Hoffman's Developmental Theory of Empathy	57
Davis' Organizational Model	61
Empathy Development and Parent Variables	63
Strong Relationships	63
Parental Involvement and Empathy Development	63

Relationship Quality Between Sex of Parent and Sex of Child	65
Relationship Quality With Extended Family Members and Empathy Development in Children and Adolescents	66
Parental Discipline	67
Non-Supported Relationships	68
Parental Affection and Empathy in Children	68
Mixed Support	69
Parents' Dispositional Empathy	69
Maternal Dispositional Empathy	69
Parental Bonds and Empathy	71
Traditional Views on the Importance of Attachments to Mothers and the Development of Empathy	71
Studies Relating Parent-Child Attachments and Empathy Among Infants and Young Children	72
Studies Relating Perceptions of the Parent-Child Relationship and Empathy Among Young Adults	74
Empathy and Explanatory Style	75
Perspective-Taking and Causal Attributions	75
Summary	77
Parent-Child Relationships and Empathy Development	77
Attachments and Empathy	79
Empathy and Explanatory Style	80
Empathy, Attachments, and Explanatory Style	80

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD	81
Participants	81
Instruments	82
Inventory of Parent Attachments	86
Attribution Style Questionnaire	90
Interpersonal Reactivity Index	96
Variables	98
Procedures	99
Data Collection	99
Design	99
Hypotheses and Data Analyses	100
Hypothesis One and Analysis One	100
Hypothesis Two and Analysis Two	101
Hypothesis Three and Analysis Three	101
Ancillary Research Questions and Analyses	102
Ancillary Question One and Analysis One	102
Ancillary Question Two and Analysis Two	103
Ancillary Question Three and Analysis Three	103
Ancillary Question Four and Analysis Four	103
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	107
Internal Consistency of Research Instruments	107
Inventory of Parent Attachments	107
Attribution Style Questionnaire	107

Interpersonal Reactivity Index	108
Analyses of Hypotheses	112
Hypothesis One	112
Hypothesis Two	118
Hypothesis Three	122
Ancillary Questions and Analyses	125
Ancillary Question One	125
Ancillary Question Two	125
Ancillary Question Three	126
Ancillary Question Four	126
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	144
Discussion of Hypotheses	146
Hypothesis One	146
Hypothesis Two	147
Hypothesis Three	149
Discussion of Ancillary Questions	151
Ancillary Question One	151
Ancillary Question Two	152
Ancillary Question Three	153
Ancillary Question Four	154
Counseling Implications	160
Limitations of the Study	163
Future Research Directions	165

REFERENCES	168
APPENDICES	201
A: University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval and IRB Informed Consent Form	201
B: Personal Data Questionnaire	206
C: Inventory of Parent Attachment (IPA)	207
D: Attributional Style Questionnaire	211
E: Interpersonal Reactivity Index	217
F: Permission Letter to Modify the IPA	219

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1: Summary of Demographic, Interpersonal, and Family Characteristics of Participants	83
2: Intercorrelations of IPA Separate Mother and Father Attachment Scales	89
3: Comparisons of Instrument Reliabilities for Mother Attachment, Father Attachment, Explanatory Style, and Empathy	113
4: Correlations Among Predictor Variables on Measures for Mother Attachment, Father Attachment, and Empathy (Perspective-Taking, Empathic Concern, Personal Distress)	114
5: Correlations Among Criterion Variables on Measures for Explanatory Style (Composite Positive, Composite Negative, Composite Positive minus Composite Negative) and Empathy (Perspective-Taking, Empathic Concern, Personal Distress)	115
6: Means and Standard Deviations of Variables Measured	116
7: Summary of the Forced-Entry Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Explanatory Style (Composite Positive minus Composite Negative) .	117
8: Summary of the Two-Step Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perspective-Taking	119
9: Summary of the Two-Step Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Empathic Concern	120
10: Summary of the Two-Step Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Personal Distress	121
11: Summary of the Three-Step Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Composite Positive Explanatory Style	123
12: Summary of the Three-Step Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Composite Negative Explanatory Style	124
13: Sex Differences Based on Measures of Mother Attachment, Father Attachment, Explanatory Style (Composite Positive, Composite Negative), and Empathy (Perspective-Taking, Empathic Concern, Personal Distress)	127

14: Frequency of Types of Explanations Made by Participants for Interpersonal Situations and Achievement Situations of Positive and Negative Valences	131
15: Frequency of Types of Explanations Made by Male and Female Participants for Interpersonal Situations and Achievement Situations of Positive and Negative Valences	138
16: Differences Based On Student Age Groups (Traditional versus Non-traditional) on Measures of Mother Attachment, Father Attachment, Explanatory Style (Composite Positive, Composite Negative), and Empathy (Perspective-Taking, Empathic Concern, Personal Distress)	143

PREVIEW

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1: Interpersonal Positive Situations (Total Sample)	132
2: Interpersonal Negative Situations (Total Sample)	133
3: Achievement Positive Situations (Total Sample)	134
4: Achievement Negative Situations (Total Sample)	135
5: Interpersonal Positive Situations (By Sex of Participant)	139
6: Interpersonal Negative Situations (By Sex of Participant)	140
7: Achievement Positive Situations (By Sex of Participant)	141
8: Achievement Negative Situations (By Sex of Participant)	142

PREVIEW

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Traditionally, young adulthood has been viewed as a time of increased separation from parents in order to achieve personal independence. Previously, the assumption was that young adulthood is characterized by conflict as people disengage from dependence on parents to achieve autonomy (Blos, 1972; Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Freud, 1958). In addition, Erikson (1968) stated that during late adolescence and young adulthood the task of identity formation gives rise to forming intimate relationships with peers. However, in a counterpoint to the theoretical consensus on adolescent individuation, other research states that parents, and not peers, are the most influential figures throughout adolescence and into young adulthood (e.g., Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983; Rosenberg, 1979; Smith, 1976). In either case, parents have a critical role; perhaps both issues -- separation from parents, as well as seeking parental support for adult roles and decisions -- are important for young adults.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships among perceptions of parental attachments, explanatory style, and empathy in traditional-age college students. This age group, roughly identified as young adult (ages 18 to 23), was of interest because parental influence in terms of emotional support is still important for psychological adaptation. Specifically, the researcher was interested in investigating whether internal models, presumed to derive from primary attachment relationships with parents, were related to factors in interpersonal functioning. Explanatory style and

empathy were two such variables and were of interest in part because they originate from interpersonal antecedents. Further, explanatory style and empathic ability appear to be vital for personal and interpersonal adaptation. Because of this likelihood, it was suspected that explanatory style and empathy would be highly schematized as mental representations and would be associated with primary attachment relationships. It was thus anticipated that this study would provide information as to whether internal models of the self and others would be influential in the expression of explanatory style and empathy. This chapter continues with brief discussions of classical attachment theory, explanatory style, and empathy, followed by a summary of the research questions.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1969/1982) stressed that, in particular, the mother-child bond has broad implications for cognitive, affective, and psychosocial development from childhood through young adulthood. Bowlby wrote at a time (that is, in the 1960s and 1970s) when it was believed that secure or insecure bonds between the infant and mother directly influenced psychological development. Bowlby theorized that self-representations that emanate from the parent-child attachment comprise the internal working model of the self which functions as a cognitive and affective filter through which future relationships are interpreted.

The present study focused on (a) self-reports of college students' perceptions of attachments with their mothers and fathers and possible other attachment figures (e.g., grandparents, aunts/uncles, siblings), and the relationships of these attachments with the participants' (b) explanatory style and (c) empathy. Because the study addressed the

relationship of variables (i.e., explanatory style and empathy) external to perceptions of parental attachments, the investigator addressed the broader domain of the internal working model of the self and its implications for young adults' psychological adaptation and interpersonal relationships. A brief discussion of script theory and self-schema theory also was included as conceptually related to the notion of internal models of the self.

Internal working model: Conceptualization. Bowlby was inspired by Craik's (1943) evolutionary perspective that survival is improved in individuals who are able to internalize a model of their environment as a means of adapting and modifying behaviors and courses of action. Similar to Craik, Bowlby (1969/1982) believed the internal working model of the self, composed of evolving cognitive and emotional mental structures, preceded language development. Memory development in infants facilitated the internalization of images of objects and people even when these were not present. According to Bowlby, the ability to internalize mental images represented the beginnings of a working model in which the infant was able to form simple attachment plans such as recognizing and searching out missing attachment figures. With language development, the child was able to communicate simple predictions of responses from the attachment figure. Language facility also enabled the child to negotiate his or her relational needs and goals and to anticipate the goals of the attachment figure.

Bowlby (1969/1982) conceptualized the internal working model as a network of interrelated and complementary mental representations of the self and attachment figure(s) which were derived from repeated experiences of the attachment figure's availability or avoidance. Bowlby proposed that quality of early attachments resulted in

degrees of security or insecurity in subsequent relationships. Bowlby believed a central purpose of the internal working model was to enable the infant to predict future interactions with parents. Furthermore, the internal model of the self served a self-fulfilling purpose by replicating early attachments in future relationships. Thus, Bowlby (1980) depicted working models as mental filters through which attachment relationships and social relationships were interpreted and self-understanding was constructed.

Script theory: A conceptual hierarchy of mental representations. Bowlby's (1973, 1979) formulation on mental models of the attachment relationships did not include the kinds of cognitive mechanisms that could influence later development. Schank's (1982) reformulation of script theory provides such a conceptualization of how interpersonal experiences are organized and manipulated in memory. Schank (1982) suggested that autobiographical memories are compartmentalized and organized into an elaborate set of schemas which represent elements of experiences such as space, time, movement, causality, motivation, and affect. The organization and hierarchical nature of the schemas may range from immediate experiences to those that are general and abstract. The network of schemas may also allow the individual to interpret immediate experience or predict future interactions based on memory content of attachment relationships. Schank proposed that a significant change in the working model of the self requires changes in many related schemas composed of salient experiences with the attachment figure. By implication, schemas may serve to interconnect multiple domains of self-knowledge at various levels of abstraction or generality. Therefore, an individual who has models of the self formed by insecure attachments may interpret the world in general as an unsafe

and untrustworthy place (Bretherton, 1996).

Self-schemas. Cognitive mechanisms such as scripts provide a clearer description of how information across many domains is organized and interrelated, such that these schemata may be accessed as a means of predicting the behaviors of others' or one's own behavior in immediate and future situations. Whereas scripts pertain to a wide range of mental representations, later theoretical formulations have identified that personality traits may be collections of special schemas, termed "self-schemas." Marcus (1977, p. 64) defines self-schemas as "...cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of self-related information contained in the individual's social experiences."

Self-schemas provide a potentially clearer picture of how information about the self originates, is organized and ultimately becomes part of each person's individual identity. Thus, self-schemas do not simply refer to information that is useful in predicting behavior, but also to information that pertains to descriptions and predictions of the core self. These self-schemas become the focus of both conscious and unconscious cognitive, affective or somatic attention that define the core self (Marcus, 1990). By implication, self-schemas likely are rooted in interpersonal experiences with attachment figures from which people derive their most salient information about themselves. As a result, schematic information about the self is directly linked to one's future social relationships (Marcus, 1983).

Multiple attachment figures. Bowlby (1969/1982) maintained that children form attachment relationships with any adults who provide them with ongoing physical care