

Family Influences on Adolescents' Self-beliefs: The Role of Parenting Styles and Attachment

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Abstract:

This review looks at what research in psychology has found about the how different parenting styles affect the self-belief of the adolescent. Research has found that confidence and self-esteem of the adolescent is enhanced when parenting is warm and supportive. On the other hand, negative behaviors like rejection or imposing control have been linked to a decline, in these aspects of self perception. In addition, attachments determines how adolescents perceive their own value and identity through interactions with their parents during their growth. Individual characteristics including resilience levels and the array of active and cognitive coping strategies adolescents possess subsequently mediate the relationship between external influences and developmental outcomes, thereby underscoring the active agency of the adolescent rather than the view of adolescents as inert recipients of conditions such as parenting styles. Consequently, schools ought to implement programs designed to strengthen nurturing behaviors and cultivate secure attachment bonds, while parental units should adopt strategies that enhance self-regard and self-efficacy among adolescents. Future scholarship must extend beyond cross-sectional measurements and reliance on retrospective self-reports, investigations should systematically assess differential paternal versus maternal influences, examine how cultural context and digital environments mediate familial transmission processes, and account for the modalities through which technological engagement reciprocally shapes emotional development. This review underscores the pivotal role of family for adolescents' mental health trajectories and articulates empirically derived, pragmatically oriented recommendations for adults seeking to amplify psychosocial growth in youth populations.

Keywords: Self-efficacy; self-esteem; adolescent development; parenting styles.

1. Introduction

Adolescents traverse a formative period during which conceptions of personal effectiveness and intrinsic value operationally defined as self-efficacy and self-esteem are crystallized. These self-beliefs exert a cascading influence on psychological well-being, academic persistence, and interpersonal effectiveness [1]. The conceptual basis of this process resides within attachment theory, originally articulated by Bowlby and subsequently refined by Ainsworth, identifying how early secure bonds serve as a secure base for emotional and behavioral development [2]. Experimental evidences further reinforces the theoretical account. youths nurtured within environments characterized by consistent emotional availability and attuned guidance demonstrate heightened adaptive capacities and self-assuredness, whereas individuals exposed to emotionally withdrawn, punitive, or neglectful parenting profiles frequently manifest maladaptive self-perceptions and compromised affective self-regulation. Despite the descriptive consonance, specific pathways and mechanisms remain insufficiently delineated.

This review aims to synthesize recent empirical evidence on two key pathways: 1. Direct effects of parenting styles on adolescent self-efficacy and self-esteem, 2. The mediating role of parent - child attachment in these associations. It further examines how individual factors such as resilience and coping strategy moderate these processes. By integrating longitudinal, mediation, and cross-cultural research, the review seeks to clarify mechanisms and inform practices aimed at strengthening adolescent development.

2. Core Concepts

Firstly, some concepts that will be mainly used in the following text will be defined and explained, in order to better expound the subsequent discussion.

2.1 Parenting Styles

Parenting style refers to the overall emotional climate and behavioral strategies that parents adopt in rearing their children. Classic frameworks distinguish four major styles. Authoritative parenting is characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and consistent but flexible rules, it is typically associated with positive developmental outcomes. Authoritarian parenting emphasizes strict discipline, high demands, and low warmth, often linked to higher compliance but lower psychological well-being. Permissive parenting involves high levels of warmth but few demands or rules, which may encourage creativity yet also risk poorer self-regulation. Neglectful or uninvolved parenting reflects both low warmth and low control, and is often

considered the most detrimental to children's psychosocial development [3]. These styles represent general patterns of interaction that may manifest differently across cultural contexts, such as higher tolerance for authoritarian styles in collectivist societies.

2.2 Attachment

Attachment is a long-term emotional bond that develops between children and caregivers. According to attachment theory, secure attachment emerges when caregivers are sensitive and responsive to children's needs, while insecure attachment patterns (avoidant, ambivalent, or disorganized) result from inconsistent, rejecting, or neglectful care. In adolescence, attachment continues to be a central organizing system for relationships and self-concept. Parent-adolescent attachment is especially critical, as it provides a basis for emotional security and shapes how young people tackle obstacles. Although peer and romantic attachments gain importance during this stage, research always shows that secure parental attachment remains uniquely predictive of adolescent well-being [4].

2.3 Self-efficacy and Self-esteem

Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura, refers to individuals' belief in their ability to organize and execute behaviors required to achieve specific goals. It is domain-specific, ranging from academic performance to emotion regulation. Adolescents with higher self-efficacy tend to persevere in the presence of obstacles, regulate their emotions more effectively, and show greater resilience [5]. Self-esteem, by contrast, reflects a more global evaluation of one's self-worth and value. High self-esteem is associated with better adjustment, social competence, and lower risk for internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression; longitudinal evidence indicates that self-esteem typically rises from adolescence into adulthood before declining in old age [6]. Although distinct, self-efficacy and self-esteem are interrelated; for instance, students who believe in their academic abilities may also develop stronger overall self-worth: confidence in one's abilities often reinforces positive self-evaluations, while global self-worth can motivate sustained effort.

3. Impact of Parenting Styles on Self-efficacy and Self-esteem

Over the past few years, studies have increasingly tested mechanisms linking the family environment to adolescents' self-beliefs using longitudinal, ecological, and mediation models. Two patterns recur across these designs: parenting characterized by warmth or low rejection is as-

sociated with stronger self-beliefs, whereas controlling or rejecting practices forecast weaker self-beliefs and poorer adjustment. In addition, recent work goes beyond global “style” labels to examine specific parental practices (e.g., emotional support) and how they operate through self-efficacy or self-esteem, which often alongside moderators such as socioeconomic status or clinical risk.

3.1 Detailed Review

3.1.1 Study1: linking parenting style to adolescent outcomes through self-esteem

In a study comprising 916 adolescents drawn from a single Chinese secondary school (M age = 14.4 years), Peng and associates quantified how parenting styles may shape mental well-being through the mediators of self-esteem and psychological inflexibility [7]. Participants self-reported on multiple axes: parenting attitudes, self-esteem, psychological inflexibility, life satisfaction, and depressive symptoms. Applying structural equation modeling and a bootstrapped sample of 5,000, the authors documented multiple indirect routes linking parenting characteristics to mental health. Findings indicate that parental emotional warmth fosters superior mental health by elevating self-esteem, whereas parental rejection and overprotection exert deleterious effects by diminishing self-esteem and by elevating psychological inflexibility. Notably, the chain mediation where self-esteem and psychological inflexibility jointly mediate the relationship between parenting style and adolescent mental health was significant. For emotional warmth, the indirect effect via self-esteem alone accounted for roughly 45% of the total effect and analogous self-esteem-based indirects were evident for rejection and overprotection ($\approx 29\%$). Although cross-sectional (so causality and directionality cannot be confirmed), the study’s multi-measure approach, large sample, and explicit mediation tests provide strong evidence that self-esteem is a mechanism through which parenting style map onto adolescent adjustment, tightly coupling parenting to adolescents’ internal self-evaluations.

3.1.2 Longitudinal associations between parenting and self-efficacy beliefs

Di Giunta and colleagues followed 103 Italian adolescents with mother and father reports across one year to test whether negative parenting such as rejection or control predicts later emotion-regulation self-efficacy (beliefs about managing anger or sadness) and dysregulation, while modeling links to aggressive behavior and depressive symptoms [8]. Time-1 adolescent reports of maternal or paternal rejection and control were used to predict Time-2 outcomes assessed via both questionnaires and

repeated diary-style self-reports collected across daily contexts. Path models showed that higher maternal rejection forecast greater aggressive problems, which in turn were significant indirectly linked to lower self-efficacy for anger regulation one year later ($b = -0.25$, 95% CI $[-0.55, -0.05]$). Maternal rejection also predicted higher depressive symptoms, which were associated with lower self-efficacy for sadness regulation and greater dysregulation. Maternal control related to higher depressive symptoms. Paternal control demonstrated both negative associations with anger dysregulation and, unexpectedly, an inverse association with depressive symptoms, underscoring that effects may differ by parent and by subtype of control. Overall, the longitudinal design strengthens temporal inference that early negative parenting predicts later decrements in adolescents’ emotion-regulation self-efficacy, a domain-specific efficacy construct highly relevant to coping and self-beliefs in adolescence. Limitations include a modest, single-city sample and reliance on perceptions of parenting; nonetheless, the time-lagged links to specific self-efficacy beliefs are a valuable mechanistic contribution.

3.1.3 Synthesis of detailed studies

Both studies converge on self-beliefs as active ingredients in the parenting–adjustment link. Peng et al. quantify the centrality of self-esteem with significant indirect effects, while Di Giunta et al. show that negative parenting precedes declines in emotion-regulation self-efficacy at follow-up research. Differences in constructs (global self-esteem vs. emotion-specific self-efficacy), settings (school vs. community), and analytic strategies (cross-sectional SEM vs. two-wave longitudinal paths) collectively support a generalizable pattern: warmth or acceptance supports stronger adolescent self-beliefs; rejection or psychological control undermines them. Remaining uncertainties such as causality, multi-informant convergence, cultural generalizability, set up the need for additional longitudinal and experimental works, interventions, including randomized parent-training programs and school-based initiatives aimed at strengthening adolescents’ self-beliefs.

3.2 Brief Review

Zhang & Zhang’s research employed case–control design with 120 adolescents with major depression and 120 healthy controls, the authors assessed general self-efficacy, parenting style (emotional warmth and understanding, punishment severity, denial), and depressive symptoms. Depressed adolescents reported significantly lower self-efficacy than controls; across the full sample, self-efficacy correlated negatively with depressive symptoms ($r \approx -.29$) [9]. Parenting dimensions showed expected asso-

ciations: emotional warmth and understanding related to lower depressive symptoms, while punishment severity and denial related to higher symptoms. Though they used cross-sectional and clinic-anchored, the findings link parenting quality and self-efficacy to clinically meaningful outcomes, such as the severity of depressive symptoms and levels of emotional resilience, reinforcing the role of self-beliefs in adolescent adjustment.

Tang conducted three-wave cross-lagged study for 8-13 years old children in China (with and without oppositional-defiant problems), which examined bidirectional links between parental psychological control and youth self-esteem [10]. Results indicated reciprocal mother-child effects (higher maternal psychological control → later lower self-esteem; lower self-esteem → later higher perceived maternal psychological control) and a parent-to-child effect for fathers (paternal control → later lower self-esteem). Although the younger cohort spans late childhood to early adolescence, the design highlights transactional dynamics relevant to the adolescent period: intrusive control can erode self-worth over time, and low self-esteem may elicit more control, potentially entraining a negative cycle. This study suggests that one-way interpretations are insufficient; longitudinal and dyadic analyses should be conducted in adolescent samples.

3.3 Interim Conclusion

Across diverse samples and methods, family parenting practices bear reliably on adolescents' self-efficacy and self-esteem. Warmth and acceptance align with stronger self-beliefs; rejection and psychologically controlling tactics predict weaker self-beliefs and poorer adjustment, including heightened emotional distress, reduced motivation, and impaired peer relationships. Evidence for mediation by self-esteem or self-efficacy and for bidirectional parent-adolescent processes suggests both mechanisms (self-beliefs as pathways) and transactions (low self-beliefs shaping later parenting). These patterns justify the next section's focus on attachment as a relational mechanism through which parenting exerts its effects.

4. Attachment as Mediator

Findings from section 3 indicate that parenting behaviors influence adolescents' self-efficacy and self-esteem. Yet the processes through which such effects occur are not fully explained by direct parent-child interactions. Attachment theory provides a powerful framework for understanding how family experiences are internalized into working models of the self. Secure attachment is expected to transmit the benefits of positive parenting into stronger self-beliefs, whereas insecure attachment may account for

the detrimental effects of harsh or controlling parenting. Below, this paper will review four recent studies that explicitly or implicitly test attachment as a mediator between parenting patterns and adolescent self-beliefs.

4.1 Detailed Review

4.1.1 Study 1: positive parenting, attachment, and adolescent life satisfaction

Li and colleagues tested the mediating role of parent-adolescent attachment in the relationship between positive parenting and life satisfaction [11]. Due to the large sample size (5047 adolescents), the statistical power and generalizability are relatively strong. Structural equation modeling revealed that fathers' positive parenting directly and positively predicted adolescents' life satisfaction, while mothers' positive parenting influenced life satisfaction only indirectly through parent-adolescent attachment, possibly because maternal parenting is more strongly tied to emotional processes rather than immediate behavioral outcomes. Fathers' parenting influenced adolescent well-being through both father-adolescent and mother-adolescent attachment pathways, suggesting a complex multifaceted attachment process. These findings emphasize that while both parental parenting behaviors are important, fathers' behaviors may exert multifaceted influences through multiple attachment relationships. The use of validated scales and robust models strengthens the confidence of the results, although the reliance on self-report instruments and cross-sectional design limits causal inferences. Nevertheless, this study provides strong evidence that attachment quality is a key pathway that translates parenting into adolescents' subjective well-being and self-concept.

4.1.2 Study 2: attachment and adolescent mental health

Tan's study recruited 633 Chinese adolescents aged approximately 11 to 14 years to examine whether parent-child attachment and adolescents' psychological quality jointly explain adolescent mental health, and whether coping strategies (task-focused versus emotion-focused) moderate these links [12]. In a moderated mediation model, they found that parent-child attachment significantly positively predicted mental health, with psychological quality including resilience and emotional regulation serving as a partial mediator. Specifically, adolescents with higher psychological quality reported fewer depressive symptoms and better emotional resilience. Task-focused coping moderated the latter pathway, such that the effect of psychological quality on mental health was stronger among adolescents with lower task-focused coping-sup-

porting an compensatory protective factor model where adolescents with less effective coping could benefit more from psychological quality. This moderation nuance underscores that attachment not only mediates parenting effects but does so differently depending on the adolescents' existing coping resources, adding depth to the theoretical model. Despite the reliance on self-report and the absence of longitudinal data, the study highlights that attachment quality is a primary explanatory mechanism linking parenting practices with adolescent self-beliefs and mental health, while also showing that adolescents actively shape these processes through their own capacities.

4.1.3 Synthesis of detailed studies

Together, these two studies reinforce the proposition that the quality of parent-child attachment functions as a mediating mechanism linking specific patterns of parenting to self-beliefs. Positive and stimulating parenting fosters attachment security, which subsequently enhances subjective well-being and promotes positive self-appraisals. By contrast, patterns characterised by rejection and excessive control compromise attachment security, leading to diminished self-regard. The data also reveal that the parenting influence can differ: paternal and maternal behaviours exert both direct and indirect effects that may diverge, suggesting a banquet of developmental subtleties. Furthermore, individual resilience among adolescents appears to moderate the strength of attachment mediation, underscoring both the universal and the context-dependent character of attachments. Such complexities should direct future researchers don't rely on single attachment constructs.

4.2 Brief Review

A meta-analytic synthesis by Pinquart, comprising 202 studies and a total sample of 81,485 adolescents, renders a robust empirical anchor to the linkage of parent-child attachment and self-esteem[13]. The derived effect size, moderate ($r \approx .34$), attests to substantial predictive strength. Longitudinal cohorts within the meta-set demonstrate that parent attachment forecasting self-esteem at later assessment points, albeit with moderated influence that increasingly attenuates with advancing developmental epochs. This synthesis firmly establishes attachment as one of the strongest predictors of adolescents' self-esteem, suggesting its importance for designing intervention programs, lending weight to the mediation models in more focused studies.

In a Dutch longitudinal sample of 1313 adolescents, Keizer and colleagues tested whether perceived quality of attachment to mother and father predicted within-person fluctuations in self-esteem over three years [14]. Results indicated that changes in perceived attachment quality

directly paralleled changes in adolescents' self-esteem, demonstrating dynamic coupling within individuals, meaning that fluctuations in attachment closely mirror fluctuations in self-esteem over time. The findings provide converging evidence that parent-child attachment functions as a key mechanism through which family dynamics shape adolescents' self-beliefs. By showing that variations in perceived attachment quality parallel changes in adolescents' self-esteem, the study strengthens the interpretation that attachment processes help explain how parenting experiences become internalized into self-evaluations over time.

4.3 Interim Conclusion

Through cross-sectional, longitudinal, and meta-analytic evidence, attachment emerges as a key mediator between parenting styles and adolescents' self-beliefs. Secure attachment bonds transmit the benefits of positive parenting into higher self-efficacy and self-esteem, whereas insecure bonds carry the risk of low self-worth and maladaptive self-concepts. The evidence is strengthened by meta-analytic consistency and longitudinal coupling, though most mediation studies remain cross-sectional and reliant on self-report. Future work should incorporate multi-informant designs including parents, teachers, and peers, along with longitudinal approaches to establish causal pathways and to examine cultural and gender differences in how attachment mediates the family to self-belief link.

5. Discussion and Suggestion

5.1 Overall Conclusion

This review confirms that both direct and mediated pathways connect family factors and adolescents' self-beliefs. Positive parenting that characterized by warmth and emotional support predicts stronger self-efficacy and self-esteem, while rejecting or controlling behaviors undermine these self-concepts. Attachment quality consistently emerges as a critical mediator linking parenting practices to adolescents' psychological adjustment. In addition, individual factors such as adolescent resilience and coping style can moderate the strength of attachment's influence.

5.2 Practical Implications

The above findings have several important implications for parents, educators, and policymakers. Parenting interventions should emphasize warmth, responsiveness, and autonomy support, which consistently predict stronger self-beliefs and healthier adjustment. Programs that encourage open communication and reduce psychologically

controlling tactics can foster secure attachment bonds, enabling adolescents to internalize a sense of competence and worth. Schools also have an important role in this process: partnerships with families and workshops for parents organized by schools can reinforce the idea that everyday parenting practices carry long-term significance for adolescents' resilience and self-concept. In fact, evidence shows that attachment-based interventions, such as family therapy and school-based mentoring programs, embedded in community or school settings can improve not only family relationships but also adolescents' ability to cope and thrive, highlighting the importance of addressing attachment security directly in applied contexts [15]. At the policy level, supporting family education and reducing stressors that compromise parental sensitivity may be crucial steps toward fostering a generation of young people with stronger self-efficacy and self-esteem.

5.3 Future Research Directions

Despite the strength of the existing literature, important uncertainties persist. A prominent methodological limitation is the widespread exclusive reliance on adolescents' retrospective self-reports, which raises the possibility of inflated shared-method variance. Multi-informant approaches, including parent or teacher perspectives, as well as behavioral or physiological measures, would provide a more balanced view. Relatively, the majority of studies adopt cross-sectional designs and therefore remain silent on the developmental course of self-beliefs, more longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to trace how parenting and attachment shape self-beliefs over time. Progress will also benefit from systematic comparisons of maternal and paternal influences: emerging data indicate divergent mediational pathways depending on the parent under consideration, and previous research neglects to systematically model the ways in which normative cultural expectations of parental gender interact with these influences. Equally, the surge in digitally-mediated communication forces investigators to assess whether attachment hierarchies and emotional regulation functions are reenacted or renegotiated when qualitative portions of the parent-child relationship are enacted via the screen.

6. Conclusion

This review sets out to examine how family factors, particularly parenting styles and attachment relationships, shape adolescents' self-efficacy and self-esteem. These self-beliefs are central to young people's adjustment, influencing their resilience, academic motivation, and emotional well-being. By reviewing recent empirical work, the study has highlighted both direct effects of parenting

and the mediating role of attachment in translating family dynamics into internalized self-concepts.

The evidence consistently shows that warmth, involvement, and autonomy support foster stronger self-beliefs, whereas rejection, overcontrol, and neglect weaken them. Attachment emerges as a robust mediator, demonstrating that the quality of the parent-adolescent bond explains much of how experience with parents are internalized into self-evaluations. Moreover, individual characteristics such as resilience and coping style can amplify or buffer these processes, underscoring that adolescents are not passive recipients of parenting but active participants in relational dynamics.

From this synthesis, several recommendations arise. Parents should adopt practices characterized by responsiveness and open communication, while schools and communities can provide supportive programs that strengthen family relationships. At the policy level, efforts to reduce stressors that compromise parental sensitivity are likely to have long-term benefits for adolescent development.

The significance of this review lies in integrating diverse findings into a coherent account of how family environments shape adolescents' self-beliefs. By clarifying both mechanisms and implications, the study contributes to developmental theory and provides a foundation for practical strategies that support adolescents in building positive and resilient self-concepts.

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