

Direct and Interactive Predictors of Young Children's Self-Concepts: Associations with Temperament, Parenting, and Family Interaction

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Abstract

This study explored how observed child temperament, parenting, and triadic family interaction at age 3 were associated with children's self-concepts at age 4. Results indicated that child temperament and both positive and negative family interactions were directly related to children's self-reported Timidity and Agreeableness. Moreover, both mothers' and fathers' parenting behavior interacted with child temperament to predict children's self-concepts. Findings support the view that various aspects of young children's self-concepts are differentially influenced by child temperament, dyadic parenting, and triadic family interaction.

Introduction

An emerging body of evidence indicates that young children may possess psychological self-concepts at an earlier age than previously expected (e.g., Eder, 1990). Despite assertions that children's early-emerging self-concepts develop as a function of both temperamental characteristics and family environment (e.g., Eder & Mangelsdorf, 1997), little research has linked the early self-concept to either family-level variables or observed emotional characteristics of the child.

Likewise, research on whole family-level dynamics has shown important associations with numerous child and family outcomes (e.g., McHale & Rasmussen, 1998), but has yet to examine the impact of triadic relationships on young children's psychological selves. The present study sought to explore how observed temperament, parenting, and family interaction are related to various dimensions of children's self-concepts in early childhood.

Research Questions

- 1) How are observed child temperament, mothers' and fathers' parenting behavior, and/or triadic family interaction at age 3 associated with children's self-concepts one year later?
- 2) Do dyadic and/or triadic family interaction patterns interact with child temperament to predict children's self-concepts?

Method

Participants

- 50 children (25 girls, 25 boys) and their parents
- Predominantly European-American, middle class, and well-educated.
- Participated when children were 3- and 4- years of age.

Measures

3 years

Child Temperament: Laboratory Temperament Assessment Battery (LABTAB; Goldsmith & Rothbart, 1990)

- Focus on 2 dimensions
- Boldness**
- Proneness to Distress**

Parenting observation: Coded observations of children and parents engaged in 10-minute puzzle task (mother-child and father-child pairs separately)

- Focus on composite dimension:
- Positive Engagement**

Family (triadic) interaction observation: Coded observations of children and parents engaged in 10-minute building task

- Focus on 2 composite dimensions:
- Family Positivity**
- Family Negativity**

4 years

Children's self-concept: Children's Self-View Questionnaire (CSVQ; Eder, 1990).

- Focus on 2 factors (see Brown et al., 2003):
- Timidity** (e.g., "When I see something scary on TV, I cover my face")
- Agreeableness** (e.g., "People want to be around me")

Results

1) *Are observed child temperament, mothers' and fathers' parenting behavior, and/or triadic family interaction at age 3 associated with children's self-concepts one year later?*

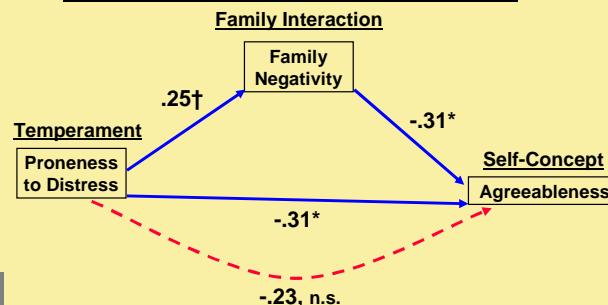
Correlational Analyses

- Self-reported **Timidity** associated with:
 - Low family positivity
 - High family negativity
 - High child proneness to distress
 - Self-reported **Agreeableness** associated with:
 - High family positivity
 - Low family negativity
 - Low child proneness to distress
- (see following table)
†p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01 for all analyses

	Timidity	Agreeableness
Family Interaction		
Positivity	-.37**	.24†
Negativity	.34**	-.32*
Temperament		
Proneness to Distress	.33*	-.31*
Boldness	-.19	.07

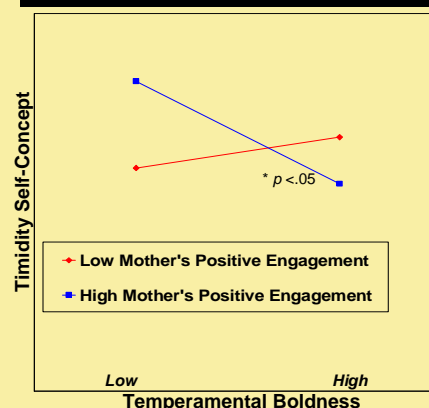
Regression Analyses

- Evidence for one mediational model: family negativity mediated the association between temperamental proneness to distress and self-reported Agreeableness (see following figure).

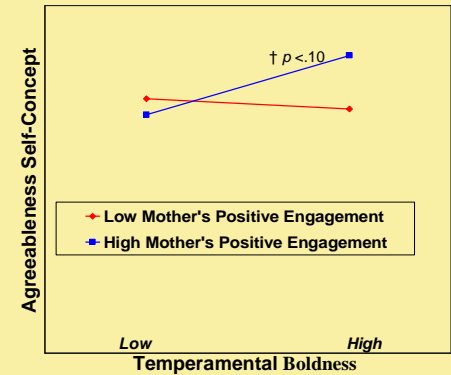


2) *Do dyadic and/or triadic family interaction patterns interact with child temperament to predict children's self-concepts?*

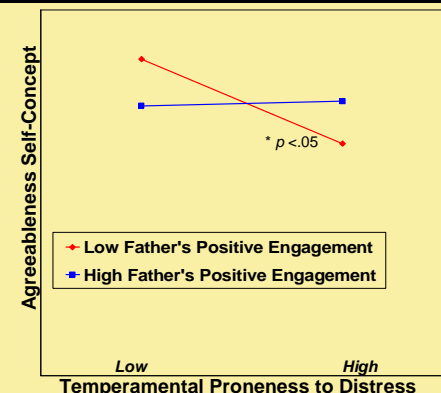
- The interaction between temperamental boldness and mothers' positive engagement predicted self-reported Timidity ($\beta = -.33$, $\Delta R^2 = .09$, $p < .05$)
- This indicated that boldness was negatively associated with Timidity only when mothers show high positive engagement (see following figure)



- This interaction also marginally predicted self-reported Agreeableness ($\beta = .28$, $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p = .08$)
- Analyses indicated that boldness was positively associated with Agreeableness only when mothers showed high positive engagement (see following figure)



- Furthermore, the interaction between temperamental proneness to distress and fathers' positive engagement predicted self-reported Agreeableness as well ($\beta = .39$, $\Delta R^2 = .14$, $p < .01$)
- This indicated that proneness to distress was negatively associated with Agreeableness only when fathers showed low positive engagement (see following figure)



Summary

- Children who are prone to distress at age 3 see themselves as more timid and less agreeable at age 4.

- Families with more positive and less negative interaction patterns at age 3 have children who describe themselves as being low on timidity and high on agreeableness one year later.

- The association between proneness to distress and self-reported agreeableness is mediated by family negativity.

- Links between temperament and children's self-concepts are moderated by both mothers' and fathers' parenting behavior.

- Mothers and fathers may play unique roles in helping children integrate emotional characteristics into their sense of self.

- Findings highlight differential influences of temperament, individual parenting and whole family interaction on the early-emerging self-concept.

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