

THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF PARENTAL CONDITIONAL REGARD

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Abstract: Parents often try to promote internalization of valued behaviors by making their regard contingent on children's enactment of those behaviors. We present findings suggesting that while parental conditional regard (PCR) might lead to enactment of expected behaviors, this practice has great costs. We refer to four types of costs: (1) Stressful and conflicted internalization of parental expectations, (2) rigid and low-quality performance in the domain on which parents' regard was contingent and in related domains, (3) poor well-being, and (4) negative affect in relation to one's parents. Importantly, our research suggests that positive PCR (i.e., giving more regard when children comply with parental expectations) is as harmful as negative PCR (i.e., withdrawing regard when children do not comply with parental expectations).

Key words: Conditional regard, Parental control, Internalization

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INTRODUCTION

The approach to socialization in which parents provide affection, attention and esteem when their children display particular behaviors and withhold affection, attention and esteem when the children do not is frequently used and widely endorsed, although psychologists differ in their view of its effectiveness. The purpose of this article is to clarify the concept of "parental conditional regard" (PCR) and present research demonstrating the harmful psychological and relational correlates of this approach.

Defining the concept of parental conditional regard

Parental conditional regard (as defined and measured by Assor, Roth, & Deci, 2004) is a socializing practice in which parents make their affection and appreciation contingent on the child's display of parentally desired behaviors in the following way:

- When children behave according to specific parental expectations they get more affection, attention and appreciation than usual (positive conditional regard),
- Whereas when children do not behave according to specific parental expectations they lose affection and esteem, perhaps even feel ignored or rejected (negative conditional regard).

It is important to note that we treat parental conditional regard as domain-specific. For example, the child receives a great deal of affection only if s/he does well in school.

From a behaviorist perspective, conditional regard might represent the contingent administration of reinforcements and punishments, which are expected to improve discrimination between desired and undesired behaviors and to increase the likelihood of desired behaviors that are emitted (Gewirtz & Pelaez-Nogueras, 1991; McDowell, 1988). However, other psychological theorists have presented a quite different view of the desirability of conditional regard as a socializing strategy. Rogers (1951) proposed that parents' conditional regard undermines children's self-esteem and interferes with personal exploration. Object relations theorists (e.g., Miller, 1981), have suggested that children, when they learn they are not

loved unconditionally, behave in ways they imagine will yield the desired love. The instrumental behaviors thus persist, but the satisfaction the children experience when they successfully execute the behaviors is fleeting because the behaviors never yield the unconditional regard the children truly desire.

Research on constructs related to conditional parental regard such as love withdrawal (e.g., Elliot & Thrash, 2004; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957) and psychological control (e.g., Barber, 1996, 2002; Barber, Stolz, & Olsen 2005; Soenens, Elliot, Goossens, Vansteenkiste, Luyten, & Duriez, in press; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyten, Duriez, & Goossens, 2005; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyckx, & Goossens, in press) indicates that these constructs are associated with various indicators of poor psycho-social functioning such as depression, maladaptive perfectionism, delinquency and substance abuse. However, the construct of conditional regard differs from the constructs of love withdrawal and psychological control in that conditional regard includes also conditional provision of parental affection, attention and esteem.

The practice of conditional parental regard, unlike love withdrawal and psychological control, was hardly examined empirically. In view of the lack of sufficient research on conditional parental regard and the divergent theoretical views on the desirability of this practice, we set up a program of research to investigate the correlates and effects of parental conditional regard, and to compare it to other practices that we consider more desirable. This research is guided, mainly, by Self Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In our research, we examined the correlates and consequences of conditional provision of parental love using the conception of internalization developed by SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). We specifically hypothesized that parents' conditional regard leads to a problematic type of internalization (referred to as introjection) which prompts pressured, anxious, rigid and low-quality performance in the domains on which parents' regard was contingent. In addition, conditional regard is also assumed to have negative effects on one's well-being and emotional state, as well as on one's affect toward parents (see Assor et al., 2004).

SDT posits four levels of internalization (see Table 1) that can be placed along a continuum of perceived autonomy versus coercion. The lowest level of internalization is termed *external*. Behaviors so motivated are controlled by external contingencies involving threats of punishments or the offering of material rewards rather than enacted volitionally.

Table 1. Levels of internalization of parentally valued goals and behaviors

Level	Behavior - Goals
Extrinsic	Behavior is controlled by the hope to gain material rewards and privileges, or to avoid loss of such rewards or privileges
Introjected	Behavior is controlled by the desire to avoid feeling guilty, ashamed or unworthy, as well as the striving for highly positive evaluations
Identified	Behavior is guided by an identification with and understanding of its value for the person
Integrated	Behavior is guided by its perception and experience as reflecting the most central aspects of one's self-chosen identity

Next along the internalization and autonomy continuum is a motivational style termed *introjection*. In this type of internalization, behavior is controlled by the desire to avoid feeling guilty, ashamed or unworthy, as well as the striving for highly positive evaluations (self-evaluation and others' evaluations). Although in introjected motivation the enactment of behavior is not dependent on pressures or rewards offered by others, this level is still considered relatively controlled (rather than autonomous). This is because the source of the coercion that was once external to the person has been "introjected" (i.e., "taken in") and now resides with the person, so that one now feels controlled by an internal force that links feelings of self-esteem and social acceptance to the enactment of specific behaviors.

According to SDT, introjected regulation involves internal pressure, *inner compulsion*, and tension. That is, *the sense that one has to behave in specific ways to be worthy*. The theory predicts that being internally controlled in this way will typically yield the target behaviors, but the behaviors are expected to be associated with a variety of negative affective consequences such as feelings of internal compulsion, anxiety and the perception that one is motivated by guilt and shame.

A greater degree of autonomy is said to result from identifying with the importance of the behavior vis-à-vis one's personal values and goals. The resulting motivation, which is referred to as *identified regulation*, is considered relatively autonomous because the person engages in a certain action because she/he accepts its value as his or her own. The next motivation – *integrated* – is associated with an even greater degree of perceived autonomy because in this type of motivation actions are viewed not only as valuable and reasonable but also as central to one's self-determined identity.

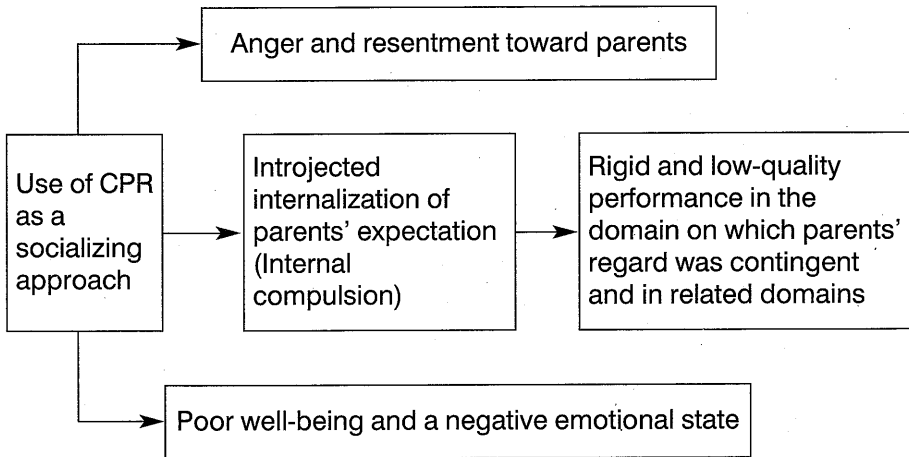


Figure 1: Expected effects of parental conditional regard.

AEEFFECTS OF PARENTAL CONDITIONAL REGARD

We posited that parents' use of conditional regard as a socializing practice would lead to four types of negative consequences: (1) introjected internalization, (2) rigid and low-quality performance in the domain on which parents' love was contingent and in related domains, (3) poor well-being and a negative emotional state, and (4) negative affect in relation to one's parents. Figure 1 depicts the four types of effects of PCR.

When parents make their affection, attention or appreciation dependent on compliance with their expectations, children are likely to feel that they have to enact parentally expected behaviors in order not to lose parental affection, and perhaps also in order to enhance parental regard. Moreover, it is likely that in such situations children's own self-regard becomes intertwined with parental regard. And, as explained in the previous section, actions that are motivated by concern for maintaining esteem from others or from oneself are conceptualized in SDT as internalized at an introjected level. Thus, parental conditional regard represents a prototypic social context for promoting introjection, because the contingent esteem from parents can be readily transformed into the contingent self-esteem that underlies introjected regulation (see Assor et al., 2004; Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995). The parental expectations that have been introjected are likely to be experienced as a source of internal compulsion and pressure because the

potential emotional cost of losing parental affection creates a strong sense of pressure and leaves no room for deliberation and choice. As a result, the major motivation for enacting actions on which parental regard hinges is to avoid guilt and shame and/or to enhance self-esteem. Thus, conditional regard is predicted to result in the children's merely introjecting parental expectations rather than identifying with them because they were able to think, weigh and choose.

Empirical evidence supporting our formulation concerning the effects of PCR on internalization comes from four studies. Assor et al. (2004) found that American college students who perceived their parents as hinging their regard on academic success, achievement in sport, pro-social behavior or suppression of negative emotions reported feeling internally compelled to act in ways that would attain those parentally valued attributes. They described their sense of internal compulsion and pressure with phrases such as: "Sometimes I feel like there is a something inside me which, in a way, drives and compels me to suppress my negative emotions and not show them", "Sometimes I feel that, no matter how hard I practice for sport, it is never enough", "Sometimes I feel that my need to be sensitive to others' needs and feelings causes me to ignore my own needs", and "Sometimes I feel that my need to study hard controls me and leads me to give up things I really want to do".

Importantly, the dependence of parental regard on emotion suppression was negatively related to feelings of choice with regard to the suppression of negative emotions. For the other three domains, conditional regard was unrelated to the sense of choice in enacting parentally valued behaviors. Overall, then, it appears that the experience of PCR creates a strong internal pressure to act in accordance with parental goals, but with a great deal of resentment and with no sense of identification and choice.

Assor et al. (2004) did not differentiate between positive parental conditional regard and negative conditional regard. In an attempt to examine the correlates of these potentially distinct types of conditional regard, Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Deci, and Ryan (2006) created scales which successfully distinguish between these two practices in the domains of negative emotion suppression and academic achievement. They focused on Jewish-Israeli high school students, and found that it was only positive conditional regard that was related to introjected internalization. Negative PCR did not appear to lead to any kind of internalization, but more to anger and resistance toward parents.

Friedman and Assor (in Assor, Cohen-Melayev, Kaplan, & Friedman, 2005) extended the study of parental conditional regard to the domain of religious socialization. They studied students attending a modern orthodox Jewish school, and found that perceived PCR in the domain of religious practice was related to introjected internalization of religious practices. Introjection was indicated by reports that one is observing religious practices in order not to feel guilty or ashamed of herself/himself.

A fourth study bearing on the relations between parental conditional regard and offspring emotional state was carried out by Shavit-Miller and Assor (2003). College students in the USA and in Israel completed a scale assessing the use of the conditional regard practice by their parents in three domains (emotion suppression, pro-social behavior, and academic achievement). In addition, they completed an open questionnaire, asking participants to describe thoughts and feelings concerning themselves and their parents. Qualitative analysis of the open-ended questionnaires of participants scoring high or low on the PCR scale was used to identify the effects of the experience of parental conditional regard on participants' psychological development. Although the major focus of the study was on the differential effects of parental conditional regard on females and males, clear differences emerged between the high and low PCR groups.

Specifically, participants who described their parents as more inclined to use conditional regard to promote internalization of parental expectations showed a more introjected and conflicted pattern of internalization of those expectations relative to low PCR participants. This pattern was particularly strong for females, many of whom reported feeling alienated from the goals on which parental regard depended, yet felt internally compelled to pursue those goals because otherwise they would feel utterly worthless or unworthy of their parents' love. Many also did not allow themselves to seriously reflect on parental goals and values.

Discussion of the finding revealing greater vulnerability of females to PCR is beyond the scope of the present article. In general, we posit that because of early gender socialization processes, women are more inclined to base their sense of self-worth and well-being on the satisfaction of the need for relatedness. As a result, they might be less able to tolerate parental love withdrawal and might also feel more responsible for their parents' suffering when they refuse to accept parental expectations. Consequently, women are more inclined to internalize parental expectations with which they do not truly identify (and at the same time are also more inclined to feel angry and

conflicted regarding the introjected parental expectations). This assumption is now examined in a study employing both quantitative and qualitative means.

DOMAIN-SPECIFICITY OF PARENTAL CONDITIONAL REGARD

If a parental value is internalized, regardless of the type of internalization, one would expect some degree of subsequent enactment of behavior reflecting that value. Thus, to the degree that PCR promotes introjection, it is expected to promote enactment of the behaviors on which parental affection depends. For example, if a child experiences his/her parents' affection as dependent on his/her academic achievement, s/he is predicted to introject the goal of academic achievement and subsequently invest great efforts in studying. However, because the focus is on attaining a satisfactory grade as a means of maintaining other- and self-regard through one's achievements, the child is likely to exhibit a pattern of intellectual engagement that is narrow, rigid, and not very creative or deep.

Thus, the concern with attaining the grade and the related positive evaluation would cause the child to focus only on issues related to the test, and not to waste time on subjects that might interest him/her, but are not likely to appear in the test. Similarly, because grades are so important, one would be inclined to stick to well tried methods rather than try more innovative methods. Finally, because academic success is so important, one may study too much unnecessarily (e.g., keep exercising although one already knows the material), showing what Covington (1992) has termed a pattern of over-striving.

The idea that PCR is likely to lead to low-quality, rigid behavior applies also to other domains in addition to the academic domain. In the pro-social domain, we expect that children who experience parental affection as dependent on them helping others would be inclined to help, but they are not likely to show much empathy and sensitivity to the people they help. In the emotion regulation domain, children who experience parental regard as dependent on them concealing and suppressing their negative emotions are likely to, indeed, show a suppressive, over-controlling, pattern of emotion regulation. However, it is quite likely that the concern with avoiding the experiencing of negative emotions will undermine their capacity to recognize emotions in others, as well as to listen and show empathy when close others disclose painful feelings.

The relations between PCR and rigid, low-quality, performance was examined in a number of studies. Roth et al. (2006) reported on three studies pertaining to this issue. In two studies they found that Israeli high school students who perceived their parents as using the practice of positive PCR to promote academic achievement were described by their teachers as showing grade-focused academic engagement. This type of engagement is characterized by a tendency to study only what appears in the test, feeling deeply hurt when one does not succeed in an assignment or test, and arguing forcefully with the teacher about grades. Importantly, positive PCR was negatively related to a higher quality of academic involvement termed interest-focused engagement. This deeper type of intellectual engagement was also assessed via teacher ratings and refers to students' tendency to show interest and invest effort and time also in materials that might not appear in the test. Consistent with our theory, the effect of positive PCR on grade-focused studying was mediated by the feeling that one is internally compelled to study hard (i.e., introjected internalization of the value of academic work). It appears then that while positive PCR did promote academic effort, this engagement was rather narrow and shallow.

Negative PCR in the academic domain was related to lack of academic achievement, and was unrelated to grade-focused engagement and interest-focused engagement. Interestingly, Assor, Kaplan, Roth, and Kanat-Maymon (2005) described a similar pattern of lack of academic engagement that is associated with highly controlling teacher behavior. Thus, negative PCR appears particularly problematic since it does not promote any kind of investment, not even a rigid, low-quality, engagement.

Roth et al. (2006) found a similar pattern also in the domain of fear and anger suppression. Thus, high-school students who perceived their parents as using the practice of positive PCR to promote suppression of fear or anger reported that they often feel overwhelmed by their negative emotions and they often find it impossible to pursue their daily tasks when they experience fear or anger. Following the terminology suggested by Ryan, Deci, and Grolnick (1995), this style was termed "dis-regulation" and it is very close to Block and Block's (1980) under-controlled style. Positive PCR in the domain of negative emotion suppression was also related to a suppressive regulatory style, which refers to the tendency to almost always try to suppress and conceal one's negative feelings. This suppressive regulatory style is very close to the over-controlling style described by Block and Block (1980) and to the construct of expressive suppression (Gross & John, 2003).

Importantly, positive PCR was not related to the more flexible and adaptive style of integrated regulation, in which people try to understand the reasons for their negative feelings, and choose to express or suppress their emotions depending on the extent to which suppression or expression might promote their goals. In the academic domain, as shown in Assor et al.'s (2004) study, the effect of PCR on the rigid, low-quality, styles of emotion regulation was mediated by feelings of internal compulsion (an indicator of introjected internalization). Negative PCR in the emotion suppression domain was related to dis-regulation, and was unrelated to suppressive regulation or integrated regulation. Thus, negative PCR appears particularly problematic since it is associated only with the most ineffective style of emotion regulation.

The third study reported by Roth et al. (2006) examined the relations between PCR, children's ability to recognize and experience sadness, and children's inclination to empathize and help others who feel sad. Parents of Israeli kindergarten children (ages 5-6) completed questionnaires assessing their tendency to use positive and negative PCR. The children were administered an emotion-focused interview adapted from Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, and Braungart (1992). It was found that both types of PCR were negatively related to the following child variables: (1) Capacity to recognize sadness in other children, (2) capacity to experience sadness, and (3) inclination to respond empathically and offer help to another child who feels sad.

The findings of the third study, focusing on kindergarten children, are particularly important because they are not based on retrospective offspring's self-reports, use a measure of PCR based on parents' reports, and include a performance measure of emotion recognition by children. These features suggest that the relations found in previous studies of PCR cannot be attributed only to offspring's retrospective reporting biases.

The link between PCR and rigid academic functioning was also demonstrated in a study by Tal and Assor (2006), who examined the relations between parental conditional regard in the academic domain and coping with academic challenges and failures. High school students (16-year-olds) completed questionnaires assessing the following variables: positive and negative PCR in the academic domain (i.e., perceptions of parents as providing more positive regard when the child works hard and achieves in school, and withdrawing regard when the child does not work or fail to achieve), shame following failure, grandiose and narcissistic feelings following

success, inclination to show a rigid pattern of over-striving (over-investment, compulsive investment), and a tendency to avoid challenging tasks.

Results showed that positive parental conditional regard predicted rigid over-striving, characterized by a tendency to invest a lot of time in studying also when one already knows the subject, which causes those students to unnecessarily give up activities which they really love to do. Interestingly, the effect of positive parental regard on over-striving was mediated by grandiose and narcissistic feelings following success, and to a lesser degree, also by shame following failure.

Another study conducted by Roth and Assor (2003) with Israeli college students in the domain of emotion regulation produced findings similar to those obtained by Roth et al. (2006). Although Roth and Assor (2003) did not distinguish between positive and negative conditional regard, they nevertheless demonstrated that perceived PCR was associated with a non-optimal style of emotion regulation for both males and females. Specifically, males who perceived their parents as using the practice of PCR to promote suppression of fear and sadness reported a poor ability to regulate their negative emotions (dis-regulation), whereas females who perceived their parents as using PCR to promote emotion suppression described themselves as using a suppressive, over-controlled regulatory style. Most important, while PCR did not predict the more flexible style of integrated emotion regulation, a parental approach termed "autonomy support" (see Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997) was associated with this more adaptive style.

The study by Roth and Assor (2003) also produced a number of additional relevant findings. It was found that in both males and females, PCR was negatively related to the capacity to recognize emotions in faces and in stories. Moreover, PCR also predicted poor ability to support a romantic partner, and this link was mediated by poor emotion recognition and one of the more rigid emotion regulation styles. Thus, it appears that, consistent with our theory, PCR not only leads to low-quality performance in the domain on which parents' regard was contingent, but also in related domains on which parents did not focus intentionally. Accordingly, in the Roth and Assor (2003) study, the use of PCR to suppress children's tendency to express fear and sadness appears to have undermined also children's general ability to recognize emotions and their capacity for intimacy. Findings similar to those reported by Roth and Assor (2003) and Roth et al. (2006) were obtained also by Eilat, Assor, and Roth (2006) in a study of styles of anger regulation among Israeli high school students. In

that study it was found that positive PCR was positively related to dis-regulation and to suppressive regulation, whereas negative PCR was positively related to dis-regulation.

The fourth study documenting the link between PCR and low quality socio-emotional functioning was conducted by Roth and Mendelson (2006) and focused on Israeli college students. All variables were assessed via students' reports. As expected, perceptions of parental conditional regard were associated with an introjected internalization of pro-social behaviors. Most important, conditional regard tended to be *negatively* related to empathic concern (as measured by Davis' (1983) scale). Thus, although PCR may drive offspring to help others (as found in Assor et al., 2004), the quality of the help is likely to be poor because the helpers might show little empathy and sensitivity to the person they feel compelled to help.

Overall, then, we have obtained considerable evidence suggesting that PCR leads to *rigid and low-quality performance in the domain on which parents' regard was contingent and in related domains*. The findings are particularly strong in the academic and socio-emotional domains, indicating that while PCR may cause offspring to act in line with parental expectations, the quality of the behavior is low and there are negative effects also on related domains of functioning.

PCR AND CHILDREN'S NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL STATE

Because PCR makes children's self-esteem and sense of love-worthiness dependent on the attainment of specific attributes, children exposed to this socializing strategy are likely to feel anxious and pressured. The dependence of one's self-esteem on the manifestation of specific behaviors or attributes is likely to lead to substantial fluctuations in self-esteem, and more generally to unstable self-esteem (see Kernis, Brown, & Brody, 1998). Thus, PCR is likely to lead to short-lived satisfaction after success in manifesting the desired attribute or behavior because the next demand is soon exerting its pressure, and to shame and guilt following failure to manifest the valued attributes because it carries the implication of being unworthy. Finally, the use of conditional regard to press the child to behave in parentally expected ways is likely to undermine children's sense of self-worth because it implies that their parents do not accept them for who they are, and also that they do not trust them to behave in desirable ways out of their own choice.

Evidence consistent with the notion that PCR contributes to negative affect and poor well-being was obtained in three studies. Assor et al. (2004) found that American college students who perceived their parents as linking their regard to academic success, achievement in sport, and suppression of negative emotions reported that after they succeed to attain the attributes valued by their parents they feel satisfied only for a short while. Moreover, the short-lived satisfaction they feel is soon followed by feelings of emptiness, dejection, or disappointment. In addition, when these students were not doing well in sports or did not succeed to suppress their negative emotions, they experienced shame and guilt.

The most striking finding of the Assor et al. (2004) studies concerning the relations between PCR and well-being involves fluctuations in self-esteem and general self-worth. Thus, it was found that perceived parental conditional regard in four different domains was invariably related to fluctuations in self-esteem (as measured by a scale developed by Assor et al., 2004). In addition, in another study reported in Assor et al. (2004), which focused only on the academic domain, PCR in this domain was related to poor self-esteem, as assessed by the Rosenberg Scale (1979), and poor coping skills, as assessed by the Rosenbaum Scale (1980).

Interestingly, the latter study also produced evidence suggesting that PCR is an approach that is transmitted across generations. Thus, mothers who perceived their parents as providing conditional regard in order to promote academic achievement were themselves perceived by their daughters to use the same socializing approach. The finding that, if grandparents attempted to promote academic achievement with conditional regard, the mothers tended, in turn, to do the same thing with their daughters is particularly striking because it appears that the mothers used the practice of conditional regard with their own children in spite of the practice having had negative effects on them.

In the Tal and Assor (2006) study (described in the previous section), both positive and negative parental conditional regard were associated with shame following failure. Thus, it appears that when children who experience PCR face academic achievement situations, they are already concerned with the shame they would feel if they would not succeed. As school and academic achievement occupy a central role in the life of many children, it appears that children experiencing PCR are often concerned with shame. Interestingly, shame mediated the effects of both positive and negative conditional regard on non-optimal modes of academic coping. However,

while in the case of positive PCR shame mediated the effect of positive PCR on both avoidance and over-striving, for negative conditional regard it mediated the effect of negative PCR only on avoidant behavior.

A third study bearing on the relations between PCR and offspring emotional state was the research carried out by Shavit-Miller and Assor (2003), which was partly described in the section focusing on effects of PCR on internalization. In that study, it was found that students who reported that their parents have often used the practice of conditional regard experienced frequent feelings of guilt, lack of self-worth, meaninglessness, and confusion regarding one's direction in life. As was already noted, this pattern was much stronger for females.

ANGER AND RESENTMENT TOWARD ONE'S PARENTS

Parents' use of conditional regard to pressure children to behave in specific ways can arouse strong negative feelings in relation to parents. Specifically, such pressure can cause anger and resentment toward parents because it undermines children's sense of autonomy or because it indicates that the parents do not trust their children and do not believe that they will behave in desirable ways out of their own choice. Moreover, the strong linkage of the parent's affection to specific child behaviors can easily be construed by children as indicating an underlying parental rejection or disapproval.

Empirical evidence supporting the link between PCR and negative affect toward parents comes from three studies. Assor et al. (2004) have found that American college students' perceptions of PCR in four different domains were related to perception of parents as disapproving and to resentment toward parents. They also showed that in all domains, the effects of PCR on resentment were mediated by the perception of parents as disapproving.

Roth et al. (2006), studying Jewish Israeli high school students, showed that perceived parental conditional regard in the domains of academic achievement and anger/fear regulation was related to offspring's anger and resistance mainly when the conditional regard was of a negative type (giving less regard than usual when the child does not comply with parental expectations).

A third set of findings bearing on the relations between PCR and affect toward parents is reported in a study by Shavit-Miller and Assor (2003).

In that study, it was found that women (and to a lesser extent men) who described their parents as using the practice of conditional regard tended to feel resentful or angry in relation to their parents. While men were more inclined to express their resentment and to openly voice their disagreements with parents, women often did not express their anger, yet, internally were often preoccupied with strong negative emotions and thoughts pertaining to unjust or harmful parental behavior.

CONCLUSION

Most of the studies reported in this article assessed PCR and offspring's outcomes using mainly offspring's reports. Although many of the studies focused on adolescents and one has focused on kindergarten children, we have no prospective longitudinal data, which can support more reliable causal inferences. To address these limitations, future research might assess the various variables (particularly PCR) using methods which do not rely only on offspring's reports and using longitudinal prospective designs.

A particularly controversial aspect of our approach is the claim that *positive PCR is harmful*. That is, the idea that verbal praise and conditional provision of attention might be almost as problematic as love withdrawal. Although the correlational research presented in this article supports this claim, there is a need for research that can provide more direct causal evidence.

There are still many open, theoretically interesting, questions. For example: Is positive parental conditional regard harmful also in hierarchical collectivist societies? What are the relations between the child's experiences of parental conditional regard and the parents' actual behavior? Is it possible that in many cases children magnify this experience in an attempt to preserve some hope that if they comply with parental expectations they would finally attain the missing regard? What are the relations between PCR and other parenting variables such as psychological control, contingent praise, and parental warmth and acceptance? And more generally, what kind of daily parental behaviors lead children to experience their parents as providing conditional regard?

In summary, the findings from the various studies suggest that while the use of conditional regard as a socializing practice might sometimes lead to the enactment of parentally expected behaviors, this practice has great psychological costs for both children and parents. Advocates of the use of

conditional regard as a socializing strategy might argue that the process of introjection is simply a step toward integration. However, the results of the studies surveyed in this article provide no support for that position. Specifically, participants in several studies were university students who displayed a pressured introjected pattern many years after the parental conditional regard experiences they were recalling from their years as children and adolescents. Moreover, the effects of PCR on behavior were always accompanied by negative emotional states, suggesting that such behaviors have never been integrated in a comfortable, growth-enhancing, way.

Together, then, the findings suggest that although the use of conditional regard may be an effortless and relatively convenient socialization approach, the negative psychological and relational consequences associated with it argue for the use of less controlling and more autonomy-supportive methods.

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