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Attributions and Attitudes of Mothers and Fathers in Colombia

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SYNOPSIS

Objective—The present study examined mean level similarities and differences as well as correlations between mothers' and fathers' attributions regarding successes and failures in caregiving situations and progressive versus authoritarian attitudes.

Design—Interviews were conducted with both mothers and fathers in 108 Colombian families.

Results—Fathers reported higher uncontrollable success attributions and higher authoritarian attitudes than did mothers, whereas mothers reported higher modernity of attitudes than did fathers; only the gender differences related to parental attitudes remained significant after controlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias. Medium effect sizes were found for concordance between parents in the same family for attributions regarding uncontrollable success and progressive attitudes after controlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias.

Conclusions—This work elucidates ways that parent gender relates to attributions regarding parents' success and failure in caregiving and to progressive versus authoritarian parenting attitudes in Colombia.

INTRODUCTION

Colombian Culture

Colombia is the third-most populous country in Latin America, after Brazil and Mexico. Ethnic diversity in Colombia is a result of the intermingling of indigenous peoples, Europeans, and Africans. The ethnic groups are Mestizo (the people of mixed Native American and European ancestry, 58%), white (20%), Mulatto (14%), black (4%), mixed black-Amerindian (3%), and Amerindian (1%) (Colombia, 2010).

On many dimensions Colombia can be considered to be a developing country. For instance, with a per capita Gross National Income of USD\$3,250, it ranks as the sixth Latin American country after Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, and Peru (UNICEF, 2007). There is a similar rank order when referring to indicators of national health such as infant mortality rate (17 per 1000 in Colombia), under-5 mortality rate (20 per 1000 in Colombia), and life expectancy at birth (73 years in Colombia; UNICEF, 2007). The illiteracy rate of people age

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15 or older was 6.9% in 2008 (down 0.8% since 2003; DANE, 2008). In 2008, individuals aged between 5 and 19 years had on average 5.1 years of education, individuals aged between 20 and 34 years had on average 10.3 years of education, and individuals aged over 35 years had on average 7.6 years of education (DANE, 2008).

As a result of mass rural–urban migration, the cities of Colombia have grown rapidly in the past 30 years and, as a consequence, densely populated settlements have grown in the periphery of the cities, concentrating the poorest sectors of the population (Klevens, Roca, Restrepo, & Martinez, 2001). During earlier decades, Colombia made substantial progress in improving the living standards of its population, with poverty (i.e., having an income below a commonly accepted subsistence level) declining steadily from an estimated 50% in 1964 to 19% in 1992. However, in 2002, poverty increased again to levels near 30% (Yepes, Ramírez, Cano, & Bustamante, 2008), and according to 2005 statistics, 15% of the population falls below the international poverty line of USD\$1.25 per day (UNICEF, 2007).

Colombia has a strict stratified social system in which individuals are classified on the basis of indicators such as family income, where they live, or the structural characteristics of the house in which they live (for further details on the Colombian stratified social system see Alzate, 2006). Accordingly, the national statistics related to socioeconomic status reveal that Colombian society is composed of: 22.3% of the families belonging to low classes (stratum 1), 41.2% of the families to low-middle classes (stratum 2), 27.1% belonging to the middle class (stratum 3), 6.3% of the families belonging to the upper-middle class (stratum 4), 1.9% belonging to the upper class (stratum 5), and only 1.2% belonging to the high-upper class (stratum 6) (DANE, 2003).

For more than four decades, Colombia suffered violent political conflict that involved left-wing guerillas, right-wing paramilitaries, and governmental armed forces (Chaux, 2009). Over the past 15 years, more than three million people have been forced to flee their homes, 83% of them children (Save the Children, 2006), so that Colombia is the second country in the world, after Sudan, in internal forced displacement (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Norwegian Refugee Council, 2008). In the last two decades, many of the original conflicts have been replaced by other violent social tensions related to the illegal drug trade (Díaz & Sánchez, 2004). After the 1993 death of Pablo Escobar, Medellín cartel leader (Colombia, 2010), and after frequent peace talks, new smaller, illegal, and often-competing trafficking organizations appeared, so that Colombia still is looking for a stable peace (Chaux, 2009).

However, with its more than 1,000 municipalities, Colombia varies greatly from one place to another in terms of cultural, socioeconomic, and political differences (Colombia, 2010), and also levels of violence (generated by the political war, the drug trade, and the urban street violence; Klevens et al., 2001). In some cities violence is still very prevalent, but in others, such as the cities of Bogotá and Medellín, recent trends indicate a significant decrease in violence (Chaux, 2009). These findings relied on nationally representative samples.

To our knowledge no previous studies have examined parenting-related constructs taking into account the stratified social system in Colombia (Ribas, 2009). However, given the strict social class stratification, one would expect some differences in parenting cognitions by class. Typically, within the social and developmental psychology literature, researchers who investigated the Colombian context have focused attention either on low-income samples (e.g., Abello Llanos, Madariaga Orozco, & Sierra García, 1999) or on clinical samples such as arrested males (Klevens et al., 2001) and aggressive children (Chaux, 2009) or on community samples not taking into account the social strata (e.g., Yepes et al., 2008).

Thus, no previous research can guide hypotheses about whether parental attributions and attitudes vary across the social strata in Colombia or if these cognitions are endorsed across social strata in the same way.

Suggestions to guide these hypotheses may come from studies examining parenting in contexts characterized by adverse circumstances, such as war. For example, in a Palestinian sample, Thabet, Ibraheem, Shivram, Winter, and Vostanis (2009) found that parental supportive style was a protective factor able to contrast the positive association between being exposed to stressful events and children's maladjustment. Although it is not our aim to compare Palestine and Colombia, in agreement with abovementioned findings, many Colombian parents and children have suffered from internal conflicts because, for example, they have been exposed to violence within both their families and their communities, witnessing or hearing about combat, shootings, bombs, or kidnapping (Chaux, 2009). Thus, we may hypothesize that the adverse socioeconomic circumstances to which Colombian families are exposed may have an impact on parental attributions in caregiving situations. In particular, parents who are exposed to uncontrollable and unstable daily life, especially those who belong to the lower social strata (who may be more affected by these negative circumstances), may be less prone to attribute success or failure in caregiving situations to either children's behavior or to their own success, whereas they may be more prone to attribute an outcome in a caregiving situation to luck. Future studies are needed to investigate parenting cognitions within the context of Colombia. These results can be then used in interventions with the aim of enhancing parenting capacities as stress buffers to face socioeconomic adversities.

Attributions and Attitudes within Colombia

Latino culture, and specifically Colombian culture, is characterized by collectivistic rather than individualistic values (Pilgrim & Rueda Riedle, 2002). Latino collectivist culture is represented by different values such as *familismo*, *simpatia*, *personalismo*, *respeto*, *marianismo*, and *machismo* (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). *Familismo* refers to attachment, loyalty, and reciprocity among members of the nuclear or extended family. These *familismo* values are in contrast with personal ambitions and autonomous accomplishment (Coohey, 2001; Santisteban, Muir-Malcolm, Mitrani, & Szapocznik, 2002). *Simpatia* refers to the high value attributed to positive and synchronized interpersonal relationships among family members to contain and avoid family conflicts (Griffith, Joe, Chatham, & Simpson, 1998; Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984). *Personalismo* refers to the high value placed on personal character and inner qualities within the same ethnic group (Flores, Eyre, & Millstein, 1998). The term *respeto* refers to the importance of adherence to authority (Antshel, 2002; Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio, & Miller, 2002). Finally, *Latina marianismo* and *Latino machismo* are gender-role constructs that refer to female submissiveness and male dominance within the family, respectively (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994). In particular, *machismo* refers to both positive (e.g., responsible, confident) and negative (e.g., risk taking, aggressive) attitudes and behaviors that accompany the role of the man as a leader in the community and in the home (Salyers Bull, 1998).

To date, there have been relatively few empirical studies of parenting cognitions among Latino families outside the United States. Some studies have noted that authoritarianism (i.e., being overly directive and disciplinarian) characterizes parenting in Latin American countries (Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox, 2000). In contrast, other studies have shown that Latina mothers are inclined to involve their adolescents in the decision-making process rather than making unilateral decisions. For example, Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2007) found that Latina mothers in their parent-adolescent relationships valued both warm and supportive relationships and obedience to parental authority. Thus, these mothers endorsed a balance in

the amount of power given to themselves and to their children in determining the well-being of family life.

In traditional Colombian families fathers were the main economic providers and mothers were the primary source of care for the entire family and had the responsibility for rearing younger children (Ripoll-Núñez & Alvarez, 2008). However, in the last 20 years, rural-to-urban migration has changed the structure of families from extended to nuclear, with an increase of single-parent families mostly headed by women (Klevens et al., 2001). In addition, women's increasing participation in higher education and involvement in the labor force is now producing significant changes in family relationships in Colombian society (Posada et al., 2002). Beyond the traditional role attributed to Latino fathers in dominating and controlling decision-making in the family (Heaton & Forste, 2008), recent studies have highlighted both increasing involvement of younger or more highly educated fathers in parenting (Gómez, 2006) and similarities between Colombian mothers and fathers in terms of adolescents' reported parental acceptance (Ripoll-Núñez & Alvarez, 2008) and self-reports of parenting quality (Gómez, 2006).

To our knowledge there are no studies examining the association between Latino values and parental cognitions. However, in agreement with the aforementioned arguments on similarities between some Colombian parental cognitions (Gómez, 2006; Ripoll-Núñez & Alvarez, 2008) and with the values of familismo and simpatía, we may hypothesize a convergence between mothers' and fathers' attributions regarding what predicts outcomes of caregiving situations and between mothers' and fathers' attitudes in rearing their children. In addition, in line with the value of respeto, we may speculate that Colombian parents are more prone to authoritarian attitudes rather than progressive ones. Taking into account values such as machismo and marianismo, gender roles may also influence parenting in Colombia (Parra-Cardona, Wampler, & Sharp, 2006), and more specifically the degree to which Colombian mothers or fathers are prone to authoritarian versus progressive attitudes. Thus, in agreement with the value of machismo, fathers may be expected to have more authoritarian attitudes than mothers. Finally, we note that the limited literature on parenting in Latin America has mainly focused on mothers (Cardona et al., 2000; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). To further understand the new Latino family system, it is becoming very important to investigate fathers' parenting cognitions as well.

The Present Study

The present study addresses two research questions. First, are there differences between mothers' and fathers' attributions and attitudes within Colombian families? Second, how highly correlated are the attributions and attitudes of mothers and fathers in Colombia?

METHOD

Context

Participants were recruited from Medellín, in the Aburrá Valley (located north of the Andes in South America), in the State of Antioquia, Colombia. Medellín is the second largest city in Colombia, after Bogotá, and it has a population of 2,219,861 (DANE, 2005). More than 80% of the city's residents belong to the lower three of Colombia's six official socioeconomic classes (Lowenthal & Rojas Mejía, 2010). These data are in agreement with national statistics attesting that about 10% of the Colombian population belong to the higher three of Colombia's six official socioeconomic classes (DANE, 2003). The sample examined in the present study comes from all six socioeconomic classes.

The main economic products in Medellín are coffee (Medellin makes the new brand of Starbucks instant coffee recently introduced to U.S. consumers), textiles, financial services,

and software development (e.g., Productora de Software, a local firm, recently became the first in the Spanish-speaking world to receive Carnegie Mellon University's Software Process Achievement Award) (Lowenthal & Rojas Mejía, 2010; Medellín, 2010). Thanks to its business successes, Medellín is now the second most competitive non-capital city in Latin America, behind only Córdoba in Argentina (Lowenthal & Rojas Mejía, 2010). According to Proexport Colombia, the city of Medellín alone contributes 55% of the GDP of the State of Antioquia and 8% of the national GDP of Colombia (Medellin, 2010).

Participants

After obtaining university IRB approval and approval from the appropriate elementary school authorities (research review board, school principals, school psychologists), the school principal invited parents of 8- and 9-year-old children to special meetings (with parents and children, separately) to meet the research team and let them know the aims of the research project. At the end of the meetings, interviews were scheduled with families who were willing to participate in the research. Taking into account the six social strata according to the socioeconomic characteristics in Colombia, 11 public schools, belonging to strata 1, 2, and 3, and 12 private schools, belonging to strata 4, 5, and 6 were contacted. Only three of the contacted schools (belonging to strata 3, 4, and 6) did not agree to participate in the research.

A total of 108 families (mothers, fathers, children) participated: 12 (11%) stratum 1 families, 38 (35%) stratum 2 families, 25 (23%) stratum 3 families, 14 (13%) stratum 4 families, 11 (10%) stratum 5 families, and 8 (7%) stratum 6 families. The recruited sample was from the urban area of Medellín and almost matched the Colombia socioeconomic profile (DANE, 2003). Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of the 108 participating families.

Procedures

Interviews were conducted in schools or at the University. Most of the time, interviewers traveled to children's schools in teams of three, and each family member was interviewed by a different interviewer in a place out of hearing of the other family members. They completed a demographic questionnaire, a measure of social desirability bias (Reynolds, 1982), and two parenting measures.

The analyses in this paper focus on constructs from two measures of attributions and attitudes (see Lansford & Bornstein, 2012). First, parents completed the short form of the Parent Attribution Test (Bugental & Shennum, 1984), which was developed to measure parents' perceptions of causes of success and failure in hypothetical caregiving situations. Parents are presented with a hypothetical scenario that involves either a positive or negative interaction with a child (e.g., "Suppose you took care of a neighbor's child one afternoon, and the two of you had a really good time together."). Parents then are asked to respond to a series of questions regarding reasons that the interaction was positive or negative. Parents rate on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all important*, 7 = *very important*) how important factors such as the child's disposition and the parent's behavior were in determining the quality of the interaction. The amount of power or control attributed to oneself versus children is the key dimension of interest. This measure yielded four variables: (1) attributions regarding uncontrollable success (6 items; e.g., how lucky you were in just having everything work out well); (2) attributions regarding adult-controlled failure (6 items; e.g., whether you used the wrong approach for this child); (3) attributions regarding child-controlled failure (6 items; e.g., the extent to which the child was stubborn and resisted your efforts); and (4) perceived control over failure (the difference between attributions regarding adult-controlled failure and attributions regarding child-controlled failure).

Second, parents completed the Parental Modernity Inventory (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985), which assesses parents' attitudes about childrearing and education. Each of 30 statements is rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). This instrument yielded three variables: (1) progressive attitudes (8 items; e.g., Children have a right to their own point of view and should be allowed to express it.); (2) authoritarian attitudes (22 items; e.g., The most important thing to teach children is absolute obedience to their parents.); and (3) modernity of attitudes (the difference between the progressive attitudes score and the authoritarian attitudes score). Alphas for each variable are shown in Table 2.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 2, both mothers and fathers reported higher attributions regarding uncontrollable success than attributions regarding adult- or child-controlled failure in terms of both the means and variability. Both mothers and fathers reported attitudes near the scale midpoints, on average, and there was low variability for both progressive and authoritarian attitudes. In addition, the range of the two deviation variable scores (i.e., perceived control over failure and modernity of attitudes) was limited, yielding low standard deviations across the two scores for both parents (the mean across these four standard deviations was .71). Moreover, a closer look at these scores suggests minor differences between the parental attributions and attitudes overall for both mothers and fathers.

Gender Similarities and Differences in Parents' Attributions and Attitudes

Repeated-measures linear mixed models with gender of parent as the within-subjects fixed factor tested for differences between mothers and fathers in attributions for success and failure in caregiving situations and progressive versus authoritarian attitudes. Test results are presented with and without controls for mothers' and fathers' ages, educations, and possible social desirability bias. As shown in Table 2, there were significant main effects of parent gender on three of the seven constructs of interest. Fathers reported higher uncontrollable success attributions than did mothers. Fathers reported more authoritarian attitudes than did mothers and less modernity of attitudes than did mothers. Only the differences related to the parental attitudes remained significant after controlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias.

Within-Family Correlations Between Parents' Attributions and Attitudes

The final columns of Table 2 present bivariate correlations of mothers' attributions and attitudes with fathers' attributions and attitudes. As shown, four of the seven analyses revealed significant concordance between parents within a family; two remained significant after controlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias. Significant positive correlations were found for mothers' and fathers' attributions regarding uncontrollable success, progressive attitudes, authoritarian attitudes, and modernity of attitudes.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined parenting attributions and attitudes among mothers and fathers in Colombia. Fathers reported higher uncontrollable success attributions and more authoritarian attitudes than did mothers, and mothers reported more modernity of attitudes than did fathers. Despite these gender differences, the overall means revealed that, on average, both parents (however, fathers more than mothers) did not attribute success in caregiving situations to themselves, but rather to external factors such as chance. Both parents similarly attributed failures in caregiving situations either to their personality and their behaviors or to their children's personality and behaviors. Within a family, mothers'

and fathers' attributions regarding uncontrollable success, progressive attitudes, authoritarian attitudes, and modernity of attitudes were also moderately correlated.

There are no previous studies on parental attributions in Colombian parent-child relationships. However, we can speculate that instability and unpredictability of the social context (Chaux, 2009; Klevens et al., 2001; Lowenthal & Rojas Mejía, 2010; United Nations, 2007) may affect the low power Colombian parents attribute to themselves in successfully managing parent-child relationships. This may especially be the case for fathers, who are the main economic providers (Heaton & Forste, 2008).

Moreover, results of this study revealed that, on average, both mothers and fathers held both authoritarian and progressive parenting attitudes; however, it emerged that fathers were more authoritarian than mothers, and mothers had higher modernity of attitudes than fathers. These results are in agreement with those studies that already have shown the authoritarian attitudes of Latina mothers (Cardona et al., 2000; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007) and confirm this authoritarian attitude also for fathers. These findings also are consistent with the value of *respeto*, for the adherence to authority (Harwood et al., 2002), and *machismo*, for the leading role of fathers in dominating and controlling the decision-making process within the family (Heaton & Forste, 2008).

In addition, the progressive attitudes of both parents may attest to the changing role of parenting attitudes within Latino families, especially in the case of the fathers (Gómez, 2006). However, despite these changes, we note that traditional roles continue to exist (Gómez, 2006; Ribas & Bornstein, 2005). In the present study, mothers' attitudes were more modern, whereas fathers' attitudes were more authoritarian.

No previous studies have examined agreement between mothers' and fathers' parenting attributions and attitudes in Colombia. In this study, medium effect sizes were found for agreement between parents for attributions regarding uncontrollable success and progressive attitudes after controlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias. As has been reported in other countries (see Lansford et al., this Special Issue), mothers and fathers may show similarities with respect to attributions and attitudes regarding their child because they either share the same environment or respond to the same child. However, in accordance with the values of Latin American culture, we may speculate that the significant and positive correlations between mothers' and fathers' parenting attributions and attitudes are in agreement with the value of *simpatía* and *familismo*. According to these values, it is important to achieve mutual accord, to avoid conflicts, and to have positive and smooth interpersonal relationships (Griffith et al., 1998; Triandis et al., 1984), and having in mind that the most important thing is to take care of one's own family (Coohey, 2001; Santisteban et al., 2002), respectively. Moreover, interparental agreement on uncontrollable success attributions in caregiving situations may mirror the adverse socioeconomic circumstances to which Colombian parents are exposed (Chaux, 2009). Specifically, the fact that Colombian mothers and fathers face the social and cultural changes in Colombian society (United Nations, 2007) may lead them to attribute more power to luck instead of to children or themselves in contributing to success in caregiving situations. Colombian parents may feel that there is a high probability that factors beyond their control can affect the outcomes that they want to achieve. Thus, Colombian fathers and mothers may have this in mind when thinking about what can predict positive parent-child interactions. Furthermore, the progressive attitudes held by both parents testify to the emerging tendency in Colombian mothers and fathers to grant their children more freedom to make their own choices and to express their own points of view than in the past.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Two limitations of this study are the low internal consistency of the progressive attitudes variable for fathers and the low variability for some measures (e.g., perceived control over failure and modernity of attitudes). Further investigations are needed that comprise a larger variety of items and include more samples from Colombia (beyond the city of Medellin).

Overall, similar results emerged after controlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias. This may suggest that our findings on parental cognitions in Colombia can be generalized across families belonging to different social strata. However, we did not include social strata in the set of variables we examined, thus future studies are needed to test this hypothesis. Although we matched the socioeconomic characteristics of our sample to the Colombian social strata classification system, the number of families per stratum included in the present sample was not sufficient to examine possible differences among families belonging to different social strata. Moreover, even though Colombia has different ethnic groups, we did not sample different ethnic groups but rather analyzed the Colombian families in our sample as a single group. Finally, the results presented here provide a description of the parenting attributions and attitudes of Colombian families in an urban setting. The reader is advised to cautiously apply these findings to Latino families residing in different parts of the country. It will be important for future research to examine the effects of belonging to a specific social stratum and of ethnicity on the attributions and attitudes in Colombian parents. Furthermore, in line with those studies that ascertained different parental attitudes with sons versus daughters (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007), an additional direction for future research will be to examine differences between mothers' and fathers' childrearing attributions and attitudes by child gender.

Conclusions

In Colombia there are differences in mothers' and fathers' authoritarian attitudes and modernity attitudes that cannot be accounted for by parents' age, education, or possible social desirability bias. Overall, there is moderate concordance between mothers' and fathers' attributions and attitudes. Our findings also highlight the importance of integrating Latino cultural values in the more accurate examination of parenting attributions, attitudes, and behaviors of Latino families. In conjunction with the other papers in this Special Issue, this work elucidates ways that parent gender and culture relate to attributions regarding parents' success and failure in caregiving situations and to progressive versus authoritarian parenting attitudes.

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TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics of Children and Families

Child's gender (% female)	56
Child's age in years	8.23 (.50)
Mother's age in years	36.53 (8.35)
Father's age in years	40.75 (8.78)
Mother's education in years	10.64 (5.60)
Father's education in years	9.89 (5.28)
Parents' marital status (% married)	67
Number of children in household	2.10 (1.14)
Number of adults in household	2.54 (1.23)

M (SD)

TABLE 2
Parenting Attributions and Attitudes: Alphas, Tests of Gender Differences, and Correlations for Mothers and Fathers

	Mothers α	Fathers α	Mothers <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Fathers <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>F</i>	<i>F</i> ^a	<i>d</i>	<i>d</i> ^a	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ^a
Attributions										
Uncontrollable success	.83	.84	5.09 (1.28)	5.42 (1.13)	6.49*	3.73	-.29	-.22	.32**	.31**
Adult-controlled failure	.75	.77	4.03 (.69)	3.89 (.79)	3.14	3.48	.25	.26	-.04	-.04
Child-controlled failure	.73	.78	3.88 (.56)	3.79 (.60)	1.45	1.22	.17	.16	-.04	-.08
Perceived control over failure	-	-	.16 (.87)	.11 (.98)	.44	.66	.09	.11	-.01	-.01
Attitudes										
Progressive attitudes	.64	.56	3.14 (.30)	3.09 (.32)	1.77	.81	.16	.11	.25**	.24*
Authoritarian attitudes	.87	.89	2.79 (.34)	2.94 (.41)	11.94**	8.27**	-.38	-.36	.36***	.17
Modernity of attitudes	-	-	.35 (.45)	.15 (.52)	14.51***	10.38**	.39	.40	.42***	.17

Note. *N*s range from 99–108. Repeated-measures linear mixed models with gender of parent as the within-subjects factor. Cohen's *d* was computed using Equation 3 for paired samples in Dunlap, Cortina, Vaslow, and Burke (1996).

^aControlling for parents' age, education, and possible social desirability bias.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.