Authoritative and Authoritarian Mothers' Parenting Goals, Attributions, and Emotions Across Different Childrearing Contexts

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SYNOPSIS

Objective. The central goal of this study was to explore how childrearing contexts might moderate relations between parenting styles and mothers' parental beliefs and emotional responses. *Design.* Participants were 76 mothers of children (41 boys, 35 girls) ranging in age from 30 to 70 months. Mothers completed a global measure of parenting styles (authoritarian, authoritative). Self-reports of parental beliefs (parental goals, attributions) and emotional responses (angry, embarrassed, happy) were assessed in response to hypothetical vignettes depicting a variety of children's behaviors (aggression, misbehavior, shyness, prosocial behavior). *Results.* In situations depicting children's negative behaviors, authoritarian mothers were less focused on empathic goals and attributed child aggression and misbehaviors to less external sources than their more authoritative counterparts. Authoritarian mothers were also more likely to respond with greater anger and embarrassment across all childrearing scenarios. *Conclusions.* Results suggest that authoritarian and authoritative mothers differ in their affective response patterns consistently across childrearing contexts, but that more challenging childrearing situations accentuate differences in the cognitive reactions of authoritative versus authoritarian mothers. Implications for understanding how general parenting styles may be translated into specific parental responses are considered.

INTRODUCTION

A vast literature has emerged linking constructs related to parenting to a wide array of child outcomes. For example, some researchers have focused on parenting styles (e.g., Baumrind, 1971; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Holden, 1995; Robinson, Mandleco, Frost Olsen, & Hart, 1995), elucidating parents' global attitudes about childrearing and generalizable patterns of interacting with their children and managing the family. Other researchers

have studied parental belief systems (e.g., Dix, 1993; Hastings & Coplan, 1999; Mills & Rubin, 1990; Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1992), exploring constructs related to parenting goals and attribution across various contexts. Still other researchers have been interested in the affective component of parenting (e.g., Bugental, 1992; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998), investigating parents' emotional responses related to childrearing situations.

Parenting styles represent a macro-level construct and are assumed to reflect a parent's typical responses to childrearing situations. In contrast, parental beliefs and emotional responses are typically seen as more situation-specific, varying as a function of the childrearing context. To date, there is surprisingly little direct empirical evidence to support assumed conceptual associations between parental styles and beliefs or emotions. Moreover, almost no information is available in terms of how relations among parenting styles, parental beliefs, and emotional responses may vary as a function of childrearing context (i.e., different child behaviors). The main purpose of this study was to explore specific hypotheses relating global ratings of maternal disciplinary styles with more situation-specific parental beliefs and emotions across various hypothetical childrearing scenarios.

Parenting Style

A parenting style characterizes a constellation of parenting behaviors, which creates a pervasive interactional climate over a broad range of contexts and situations (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Mize & Pettit, 1997). As such, parenting styles can be conceptualized as representing general patterns of childrearing that characterize parents' typical techniques and responses. Baumrind's (e.g., 1971, 1978, 1989, 1997) typology of parenting styles has dominated research in this area for almost 30 years. Based on differences in terms of the constructs of parental warmth and control, Baumrind and others (e.g., Maccoby & Martin, 1983) identified multiple parenting typologies. Of particular interest for this study are the authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles. The authoritarian parenting style involves power assertion without warmth, nurturance, or two-way communication. In this respect, a parent who engages in this style is low in warmth, but high in control. Authoritarian parents attempt to control and evaluate the behaviors and attitudes of their children with an absolute set of standards. Above all, these parents value obedience, respect for authority, and preservation of order. Authoritative parents also set firm controls on the behavior of their children and make strong demands for maturity, but are willing to listen to their child's point of view and even to adjust

their behavior accordingly. Parents who engage in authoritative parenting exercise control in combination with warmth, nurturance, democracy, and open parent–child communication. Solicitation of children's opinions and feelings as well as explanations and reasons for punishment are common practices for the authoritative parent.

An authoritative parenting style is generally considered advantageous to many aspects of child development (Baumrind, 1978; Hart & Newell, in press; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). Results from past research have shown that children of such parents tend to be independent, self-assertive, friendly with peers, and cooperative with parents (Baumrind, 1971), as well as intellectually and socially successful with a strong motivation to achieve (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). In contrast, parents who tend to be coercive, harsh, and arbitrarily authoritarian or power assertive in their parenting practices are less likely to be successful than those who place substantial emphasis on reasoning in an attempt to be responsive to and understanding of their child's point of view (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Moreover, children of authoritarian parents report low self-esteem and spontaneity and varied levels of social withdrawal and antisocial and delinquent behaviors in childhood and adolescence (e.g., Coie & Dodge, 1998; Coopersmith, 1967; Schwartz, Dodge, Petit, & Bates, 1997).

Parenting styles are presumed to be fairly constant across time and contexts (Holden & Miller, 1999; Smetana, 1994). As such, most researchers have considered these constructs as trait variables, as opposed to state variables (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). In terms of empirical assessments, researchers have reported that both childrearing approaches are relatively stable in early childhood (e.g., Roberts et al., 1984) and over longer periods of time (McNally, Eisenberg, & Harris, 1991). For example, McNally et al. found moderate stability of self-reported parenting styles over an 8-year period from middle childhood (age 7–8 years) to adolescence (age 14–15 years). Smetana (1994) argued that because of their global characterizations, "the context of behaviors is not directly relevant to the evaluation of parenting orientation" (p. 22). Consistent with this position, Darling and Steinberg (1993) suggested that parenting style conveys to the child the parent's attitude toward the child, rather than the child's behavior (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

Many developmentalists have criticized the strict division between authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles, however, and have suggested that there is considerable fluidity in how so-called "authoritarian" and "authoritative" parents actually behave with their children. Moreover, parenting styles typologies have been criticized because of the difficulty associated with assigning a parent to a single style (Sternberg, 1994). Parents may employ different childrearing approaches at different times, under dif-

ferent circumstances, and with different children (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Both authoritarian and authoritative parents may also vary in their interpretations of the salience and meaning of child rearing situations, such that differences in their evaluations may be greater or smaller, depending on the situation in question (Smetana, 1995). Finally, in non-Western, collectivist cultures, parents may engage in behaviors that are consistent with authoritarian parenting styles without espousing beliefs or attitudes that are typical of authoritarian Western parents (Grusec, Rudy, & Martini, 1997). To understand how different parenting styles might be differentially manifested across varying contexts, it is necessary to explore the beliefs and emotional responses that are evoked in specific contexts and contribute to how a working model or schema of parenting is enacted.

Parental Belief Systems

Parental beliefs. Parental beliefs represent what parents think about their child, childrearing, and themselves as parents. Researchers exploring parental belief systems have sought to understand the characteristics, functioning, and sources of parents' cognitions about childrearing (e.g., Hastings & Coplan, 1999; Sigel et al., 1992). Some researchers conceptualize parental belief systems as incorporating the proximal and contextually experienced beliefs that a parent holds within a given parent–child interaction (e.g., Dix, 1992, 1993; Grusec et al., 1997; Hastings & Rubin, 1999; Holden & Edwards, 1989).[1] Moreover, Smetana (1994) argued that parental beliefs (i.e., parental goals) are more likely to be predictive when they are considered as situationally dependent as opposed to trait characteristics. In this regard, Bugental and Johnston (2000) argued that parental beliefs act as guides to differential response patterns in different contexts.

Defined in this manner, parental beliefs are prone to contextual effects, such as the nature of specific childrearing situations (Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980). For example, results from several studies have indicated that variations in children's behaviors seem to elicit different beliefs (e.g., Dix, Ruble, & Zambarabo, 1989; Grusec et al., 1997; Hastings & Coplan, 1999; Smetana, 1994). Consistent with this perspective, Rubin and colleagues (e.g., Hastings & Rubin, 1999; Rubin & Mills, 1900; Rubin, Mills, & Rose-Krasnor, 1989) described parental reactive strategies and beliefs in response to descriptions of different forms of children's maladaptive behaviors. Thus, different

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[1]This distinguishes parental beliefs from parental attitudes — thought to be relatively stable over time and invariant across situations — and demonstrated so far to be of limited use in parenting research (Holden & Edwards, 1989).

child behaviors can be conceptualized as representing different childrearing contexts. In this study, we attempted to expand on the extant literature by exploring maternal reactive beliefs and emotional responses in response to hypothetical vignettes describing both child maladaptive (i.e., aggressive, disobedient, shy) and adaptive (i.e., prosocial) behaviors.

There has been surprisingly little empirical research directly linking parenting style with aspects of parental belief systems. For this study, the focus was on the relations between general parenting styles and contextually specific parental beliefs (parenting goals and causal attributions for children's behaviors) and emotions (anger, embarrassment, and happiness).

Parenting goals. Parenting goals are the outcomes that parents have in mind and hope to achieve during specific interactions with their children (Dix, 1992). Researchers have theorized that the goals that parents bring to a parent–child interaction serve to organize behavior and psychological functioning (Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Pervin, 1989). Of particular interest for our research was the broad differentiation between parent-centered and empathic goals. A parent who is concerned with achieving parent-centered goals is primarily interested in meeting his or her own needs (Dix, 1992). These needs include establishing authority and obtaining child compliance and respect (Hastings & Grusec, 1998). In contrast, Dix (1992) and Grusec et al. (1997) used the term *empathic* goals to describe concern with addressing child needs and fostering a positive parent–child relationship. A parent pursuing empathic goals seeks to reach mutually acceptable outcomes, and build love, trust, and family ties (Hastings & Grusec, 1998).

Parents appear to prioritize different goals in response to different childrearing situations (e.g., Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986; Hastings & Coplan, 1999; Hastings & Grusec, 1998; Hastings & Rubin, 1999; Mills & Rubin, 1990; Smetana, 1994). We expected to replicate these findings with mothers being more likely to endorse parent-centered goals in scenarios depicting aggression and misbehavior, and empathic goals in response to prosocial behaviors. Aggression and misbehavior are child behaviors that extend beyond the range of normally acceptable actions, and necessitate that a parent impose structure and restrictions on the child (Grusec & Lytton, 1988). Even for an authoritative parent who is invested in providing rationales for rules, it would be necessary to stop the child's aversive actions to make it more likely that the child would attend to the subsequent message. Thus, a parent-centered goal of immediately stopping the child's behavior would be elicited by contexts involving aggression or misbehavior.

Conceptually, the more frequent use of parent-centered goals is consistent with an authoritarian parenting style. In contrast, authoritative parenting might be expected to be related to the use of empathic goals. There

is surprisingly little direct empirical support for these hypotheses. Parent-centered goals have been linked to more power-assertive parenting behavior, whereas empathic goals are reported to be associated with greater use of parental negotiation (e.g., Hastings & Grusec, 1998; Hull, 1943; Mazur, 1990; Pervin, 1989; Rubin et al., 1989). As well, Hastings and Rubin (1999) found that mothers who reported more authoritarian parenting styles were more likely, 2 years later, to express concern for attaining parent-centered goals in response to children's aggressive behavior.

Causal attributions. Parents' causal attributions are the explanations that parents provide to account for their children's behaviors or characteristics (Dix, 1993; Miller, 1995; Mills & Rubin, 1990; Scott-Little & Holloway, 1994). Attributions can be characterized along a number of related dimensions (Dix, 1993), which can be aggregated to reflect the degree to which parents make internal versus external attributions (Dix et al., 1989; Hastings & Rubin, 1999; Miller, 1995). Internal attributions reflect the constellation of perceptions that a child's misbehaviors are dispositional, intentional, stable, and typical. Alternatively, external attributions include the perceptions of children's misbehaviors as provoked, accidental, transitory, and unique.

It has been suggested that parents are likely to have positive attribution biases, or to be "developmental optimists" (Goodnow, Knight, & Cashmore, 1986), with respect to their explanations for their own children's behavior. Indeed, results from a few studies have shown that more internal attributions are made regarding children's positive behaviors (e.g., being helpful) than negative behaviors (e.g., fighting with peers), whereas the converse is true for parents' external attributions (Dix et al., 1986; Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). Similarly, mothers tend to make external attributions to explain young children's shyness (Mills & Rubin, 1990), although their attributions are more internal for older children's shy behaviors (Rubin & Mills, 1992).

Different parenting styles also have been linked to differences in parents' attributions for children's behaviors, and in particular, their misbehaviors. Internal attributions have been associated with angry affect and power assertive behavior (Dix et al., 1989; Miller, 1995; Slep & O'Leary, 1998). Similarly, more authoritarian mothers have been found to make more internal attributions for children's aggression and disobedience (Dix & Reinhold, 1991; Hastings & Rubin, 1999). However, less is known about the attributions that authoritarian and authoritative mothers might make for children's positive or shy behaviors. It can be speculated that authoritarian mothers might display a less pronounced developmental optimism than their authoritarian counterparts.

Parental emotional responses. Increasingly, there has been recognition of the importance of the affective components of parenting by researchers (see Bugental & Johnston, 2000; Eisenberg et al., 1998, for recent reviews). Bugental (1992) argued that parental emotions can act as both cause and consequence of cognitive processes. For this study, we defined parenting *emotions* as the affective experience that accompanies parent–child interactions, or the feelings that a parent has during specific childrearing situations. Not surprisingly, a child displaying positive versus negative behaviors will evoke different parental emotional responses (Grusec, Dix, & Mills, 1989; Rubin & Mills, 1990).

According to Dix (1993), parental negative mood precipitates the interpretation of children's negative behaviors as intentional, dispositional, and blameworthy. In turn, these biased interpretations increase the probability that parents will respond with power-assertive strategies. Similar links between parental anger and the use of high-powered strategies in response to antisocial behavior have been reported by Grusec et al. (1989), as well as Mills and Rubin (1990). Thus, authoritarian parents would be expected to respond to maladaptive child behaviors with negative emotions (i.e., anger, embarrassment).

Linking Parenting Styles With Beliefs
and Emotions Across Contexts

On first glance, it may be difficult to conceptualize how parenting styles, representing global descriptions of parental behaviors over many different contexts, might be systematically related to parental reactive beliefs and emotional responses, representing context-specific responses to different childrearing settings. However, understanding how beliefs and emotional responses vary within and across different parenting styles may help to account for why parenting styles sometimes appear to be manifested differentially across different contexts.

Different parenting styles might be more likely to evoke particular beliefs and emotional responses during specific childrearing contexts. In this same regard, Darling and Steinberg (1993) suggested that parenting styles are most indicative of parents' behaviors toward children during situations involving the potential for discipline. Extrapolating from these notions, it may be that these childrearing contexts serve to exaggerate differences in beliefs systems and emotional responses that would be expected between parents espousing different parenting styles. When children behave in aversive or undesired ways, it behooves parents to intervene without delay to address their children's transgressions. The demands of these encounters may challenge or stress parents, causing them to react in more

automatic ways that are rooted in their dominant parenting styles. When children's behaviors are of an ambiguous (i.e., shy) or desirable (i.e., prosocial) nature, parents may be less challenged and more capable of responding in a deliberative manner.

Thus, it was hypothesized that differences in the reactive beliefs and emotional responses of authoritarian and authoritative mothers would be most evident during childrearing contexts involving child aggression and misbehaviors, and least apparent in response to children's positive behaviors. Variations in parents' responses to shy behaviors are less well documented (although see Rubin & Mills, 1992). As such, the hypotheses explored in this childrearing scenario were predominantly exploratory in nature. In general, one could expect there to be only moderate differences between the reactions of authoritarian and authoritative mothers to children's shyness, compared to the differences in their reactions to clear transgressions.

This Study

To summarize, the aim of this study was to explore the effects of context and parenting style on mothers' parental beliefs and emotional responses across a variety of childrearing situations. A global measure of parenting styles (authoritarian, authoritative) was obtained, whereas parental beliefs (parenting goals, attributions) and emotional responses (anger, embarrassment, happiness) were assessed in response to hypothetical vignettes depicting children's aggression, shyness, misbehavior, and prosocial behavior. As compared to their more authoritative counterparts, authoritarian mothers were expected to demonstrate (1) greater espousal of parent-centered goals and less espousal of empathic goals, (2) a decreased tendency to attribute their children's misbehaviors to external causes, and (3) more negative emotional responses to aversive child behaviors. In addition, it was speculated that differences between the beliefs and emotional responses of authoritative and authoritarian mothers would be most pronounced in scenarios regarding misbehavior and aggression, because these more challenging child behaviors would elicit the more dominant and accessible response tendencies that comprise parenting styles.

METHODS

Participants

The participants in this study were 76 mothers and their preschool-aged children (41 boys, 35 girls), ranging in age from 30 to 70 months ($M = 47.80$,

SD = 9.95) at the start of testing. Parents were recruited by sending information letters home with their child from preschool. The families resided in a medium-sized city in Southwestern Ontario, were primarily European Canadian (88%), and generally had two parents living in the home (89%). Specific information regarding parental socioeconomic status was not available; however, the sample was drawn from predominantly middle-class neighborhoods.

Measures

Parental beliefs. To assess parental beliefs (goals and attributions) and emotional responses across different childrearing contexts, mothers completed the Child Behavior Vignettes (Hastings & Grusec, 1998; Mills & Rubin, 1990). Hastings and colleagues (Hastings & Coplan, 1999; Hastings & Grusec, 1998; Hastings & Rubin, 1999) demonstrated the factor structure, reliability, and convergent validity (i.e., relations between parental beliefs and parental behaviors) of this measure. Each mother is asked to read a series of vignettes instructing her to imagine that it was her child behaving in a prosocial, aggressive, shy, or disobedient manner (the texts of the vignettes are presented in the Appendix). Following Hastings and Coplan (1999), responses to the private and public disobedience situations (which were highly correlated) were averaged to create aggregate variables representing responses to child misbehaviors.

After each vignette, mothers rated how important each of five possible parenting goals would be for them in that situation on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very*). These included two *parent-centered* goals ("I would want my child to behave properly, right away"; "I would want my child to understand that I expect him/her to behave properly") and three *empathic* or *relationship-centered* goals ("I would want my child to feel good, or to be happy"; "I would want my child to know that I love him/her, and he/she can love and trust me"; "I would want my child and I both to feel good about this situation"). The mean correlation of the two parent-centered goals across the vignettes was r = .50 (ranging from rs = .42 to = .66, all ps < .05), and the mean coefficient alpha for the three empathetic goals across the vignettes was α = .76 (range from .68 to .81). Therefore, separate summary variables representing parent-centered and empathic goals were created for each of the four childrearing contexts. The summary variables were divided by the associated number of items so that scores would be reflective of the original 5-point scale.

Mothers' attributions for the behaviors described in the various childrearing scenarios were also assessed on 5-point scales. Mothers rated the extent to which the behavior depicted in each vignette was stable (*a*

stage that will pass to *will keep acting this way*), intentional (*did not mean to do this* to *did this on purpose*), typical (*never acts this way* to *just like how my child behaves*), and caused by dispositional factors (*due to the situation* to *due to my child's personality*). For each scenario, a summary variable was created where high scores represented external attributions (stage, unintentional, atypical, and due to situational factors) and low scores reflected internal attributions (stable, intentional, typical, and due to dispositional factors). Alpha coefficients for the attribution summary scores ranged from $\alpha = .71$ to .83. As previously, this summary variable was divided by the associated number of items so that scores would reflect the original 5-point scale.

Finally, mothers provided ratings of emotional responses to the different childrearing scenarios. For each scenario, mothers rated from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very strong*) how strongly she would feel "angry," "happy," and "embarrassed" in response to the behaviors described in each vignette. Emotions in each scenario were assessed by a single item. As such, findings for these variables should be interpreted with some caution.

Parenting style. Global parenting style was assessed by having mothers complete the Parenting Practices Questionnaire (PPQ; Robinson et al., 1995). The PPQ consists of 62 items rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Of particular interest for this study were the subscales related to authoritarian and authoritative parenting. The authoritative scale contains 27 items related to warmth/involvement (e.g., "gives comfort and understanding when child is upset," "responsive to child's feelings or needs"), reasoning/induction (e.g., "emphasizes the reasons for rules"), democratic participation (e.g., "allows child to give input into family rules"), and good natured/easy going (e.g., "shows patience with child"). The authoritarian scale has 20 items related to verbal hostility (e.g., "yells or shouts when child misbehaves"), corporal punishment (e.g. "uses physical punishment as a way of disciplining child"), nonreasoning/punitive strategies (e.g., "uses threats of punishment with little or no justification") and directiveness (e.g., "demands that child does things"). The PPQ has been found to have a reliable factor structure for the items that represent each subscale (authoritative, $\alpha = .91$ and authoritarian, $\alpha = .86$; Robinson et al., 1995). In our sample, alpha coefficients were $\alpha = .82$ for authoritative and $\alpha = .77$ for authoritarian. In terms of convergent validity, Hart and colleagues (Hart, Nelson, Robinson, Olsen, & McNeilly-Choque, 1998; Hart, Yang, Nelson, Jin, Bazarskaya, & Nelson, 1998) demonstrated links between parenting styles assessed using the PPQ and a variety of children's social behaviors in the United States, China, and Russia.

Based on scores on the authoritative and authoritarian subscales, two groups of mothers were created. Mothers who scored in the top 33% on the

authoritative scale and in the bottom 66% of the authoritarian scale were classified as authoritative (n = 20). Mothers who scored in the top 33% on the authoritarian scale and in the bottom 66% of the authoritative scale were classified as authoritarian (n = 21). The cutoffs employed in creating these groups were intended to identify mothers who primarily espoused authoritative versus authoritarian parenting styles.

RESULTS

To begin, a series of correlations was computed between child age and all of the measures related to parenting styles, parental goals, attributions, and emotional responses. No significant correlations emerged. As such, age was not controlled for in subsequent analyses.

Contextual Variations in Maternal Beliefs
and Emotional Responses

The purpose of these analyses was to explore how maternal beliefs and emotional responses varied as a function of childrearing Context (prosocial, shy, aggressive, misbehavior). To accomplish this goal, a series of repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) was computed with the entire sample (n = 76). Some missing data points resulted in slight reductions in sample size for certain analyses. ANOVAS were run initially including child gender as an additional independent variable. Results indicated no significant effects of gender; the main effect of gender for parent-centered goals approached significance, $F(1, 67) = 3.17, p < .09$. Because no significant interactions were indicated between Context and Gender for maternal goals, attributions, or emotional responses, results are presented without the inclusion of gender as an independent variable.

Goals. The first set of analyses explored the within-subjects effect of childrearing Context on maternal Goals. A 4 × 2 repeated measure ANOVA was conducted with Context (prosocial, shyness, misbehavior, aggression) and Goals (parent-centered, empathetic) both serving as within-in-subjects factors. Results indicated significant main effects of Context, $F(3, 195) = 31.66, p < .001$, and Goal, $F(1, 65) = 65.20, p < .001$. However, these main effects were superseded by a significant Context × Goal interaction, $F(3, 195) = 83.10, p < .001$. To explore the interaction, separate repeated measures ANOVAS were re-computed for parent-centered and empathic goals. Results indicated significant main effects of Context for both empathic goals, $F(3, 201) = 46.76, p < .001$, and parent-centered goals, $F(3, 204)$

= 73.79, p < .001. Relevant means and standard deviations are displayed in Table 1. Results from post hoc Tukey honestly significant difference tests (employing the MS_{error} term from the repeated measures ANOVA) indicated that as expected, empathic goals were endorsed most strongly in the prosocial and shyness scenarios, whereas parent-centered goals were most endorsed during the aggression and misbehavior scenarios.

Attributions. A one-way ANOVA was used to consider the within-subjects effect of childrearing Context on the summary score of maternal attributions. Results indicated a significant effect of Context, $F(3, 216) = 33.61$, p < .001. Follow-up comparisons indicated that parents attributed children's aggressive and shy behaviors to more external causes than prosocial behavior (see Table 1). Children's misbehaviors were seen as less externally caused than aggressive and shy behaviors, but more ascribable to external causes than prosocial behavior.

Emotions. The final set of analyses explored the within-subjects effect of Context on maternal emotional responses. A 4 × 3 repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with Context and Emotion (angry, embarrassed, happy) serving as within-subjects factors. Results indicated significant main effects of Context, $F(3, 207) = 93.47$, p < .001, and Emotion, $F(2, 138) = 33.54$, p < .001. However, these main effects were again superseded by a significant Context × Emotion interaction, $F(6, 414) = 375.10$, p < .001. To ex-

TABLE 1
Goals, Attributions, and Emotions Across Four Different Contexts
of Child Behavior

	Child Behavior Context							
	Aggression		Misbehavior		Shyness		Prosocial	
Parental Response	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Goals								
Parent-centered	3.96$_a$	0.57	3.73$_a$	0.58	2.39$_b$	1.12	3.49$_c$	0.88
Empathic	3.66$_a$	0.84	3.81$_a$	0.72	4.30$_b$	0.56	4.44$_b$	0.43
Attributions								
Attributions	3.32$_a$	0.56	3.09$_b$	0.43	3.32$_a$	0.59	2.62$_c$	0.41
Emotions								
Angry	2.96$_a$	0.96	2.66$_b$	0.78	1.12$_c$	0.40	1.04$_c$	0.26
Embarrassed	2.66$_a$	1.14	1.87$_b$	0.62	1.18$_c$	0.45	1.00	0.00
Happy	1.19$_a$	0.52	1.23$_a$	0.38	1.51$_b$	0.67	4.46$_c$	0.67

Notes: Means in each row not sharing a common subscript differ significantly at the .05 level. Scores could range from 1 to 5.

plore the interaction, three separate repeated measures ANOVAS were conducted for maternal angry, embarrassed, and happy emotional responses. Results indicated a significant main effect of Context for angry, $F(3, 216) = 194.48, p < .001$, and happy responses, $F(3, 213) = 530.15, p < .001$. A significant effect of Context was also found for embarrassed responses, $F(2, 146) = 86.24, p < .001$, although responses in the prosocial scenario were not included because no mothers rated any embarrassment in response to this behavior. Results are summarized in Table 1. Mothers responded with the most anger and embarrassment to the aggression episode, followed by the misbehavior vignettes. Mothers felt most happy in response to the prosocial scenario, followed by the shy vignette.

Styles, Beliefs, and Emotional Responses
Across Childrearing Contexts

The primary aim of this study was to explore the effects of parenting style and childrearing context (and their interaction) on mothers' parental beliefs and emotional responses. To accomplish this goal, a series of mixed repeated-measures ANOVAS was computed with the subsample of mothers who had been previously classified as either authoritative ($n = 20$) or authoritarian ($n = 21$). Although these analyses also included tests of the main effects of context, these findings are not reported, as they are described in the previous section as they pertain to the entire sample. As before, some missing data points resulted in slight reductions in sample size for certain analyses. A summary of all F values is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Summary of Analyses of Variance Assessing Effects of Style
and Context × Style Interactions for Maternal Goals, Attributions,
and Emotional Responses

Dependent Variable	Main Effect Of Style	Context × Style Interaction
Goals		
Parent-centered	$F(1, 35) < 1$	$F(3, 105) < 1$
Empathic	$F(1, 36) = 11.50$***	$F(3, 108) = 2.71$*
Attributions		
Attributions	$F(1, 38) < 1$	$F(3, 114) = 4.90$**
Emotions		
Angry	$F(1, 39) = 10.09$**	$F(3, 117) < 1$
Embarrassed	$F(1, 38) = 4.08$*	$F(2, 76) < 1$
Happy	$F(1, 37) < 1$	$F(3, 111) < 1$

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Goals. The first set of analyses consisted of two Context by Style (4 × 2) mixed-design ANOVA examining mothers' goals in the various vignettes. Context (prosocial, aggressive, misbehavior, shy) served as a within-subjects factor and Style (authoritative, authoritarian) as a between-subjects factor. Separate ANOVAS were conducted for parent-centered and empathic goals. For *empathic* goals, results indicated a significant main effect of Style (with authoritative mothers being more likely to endorse empathic goals) and a significant Context × Style interaction. Relevant means for the interaction are displayed in Table 3. Results from follow-up simple effects analyses indicated that authoritative mothers endorsed the use of empathic goals significantly more than their authoritarian counterparts in the aggression, $t(36) = 3.05$, $p < .01$, and misbehavior scenario, $t(37) = 3.70$, $p < .01$, and this difference approached significance in the shyness scenarios, $t(38) = 1.98$, $p < .06$. The groups did not differ in terms of empathic goals in the prosocial scenario. For *parent-centered goals,* no significant effects of Style were observed.

Attributions. The next analysis was a Context by Style (4 × 2) mixed-design ANOVA examining mothers' attributions in the various vignettes. Results indicated a significant Context × Style interaction. Relevant means for the interaction are displayed in Table 3. Results from follow up analyses indicated that during the prosocial scenario, authoritarian mothers attributed children's behavior to significantly more external causes than authoritative mothers, $t(38) = 3.58$, $p < .001$. In contrast, in the aggression scenario, authoritative mothers tended to attribute children's behavior to more external causes than authoritarian mothers, $t(39) = 1.79$, $p < .09$.

TABLE 3
Authoritative and Authoritarian Mothers' Goals and Attributions
in Four Different Contexts of Child Behavior

| | Child Behavior Context | | | | | | | |
| | Aggression | | Misbehavior | | Shyness | | Prosocial | |
Parental Response	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Empathic goals								
Authoritative	4.20	.76	4.16	.54	4.44	.60	4.47	.48
Authoritarian	3.46	.72	3.42	.67	4.06	.61	4.29	.52
Attributions								
Authoritative	3.58	.69	3.17	.53	3.30	.58	2.41	.37
Authoritarian	3.25	.52	3.01	.44	3.48	.52	2.88	.45

Note: Scores could range from 1 to 5.

Emotions. The final set of analyses consisted of three Context × Style (4 × 2) mixed-design ANOVAS examining mothers' emotional responses in the various vignettes. For *angry* responses, results indicated only a significant main effect of Style. Across scenarios, authoritarian mothers were significantly more likely to respond with anger ($M = 2.17, SD = .36$), than their authoritative counterparts ($M = 1.80, SD = .39$). A similar pattern emerged for *embarrassed* responses, with a significant main effect of Style. Across scenarios, authoritarian mothers were significantly more likely to respond with embarrassment ($M = 1.76, SD = .44$) than their authoritative counterparts ($M = 1.50, SD = .34$). For *happy* responses, no significant effects involving Style were observed.

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study was to explore variability across childrearing contexts in the relations between parenting styles and mothers' parental beliefs and emotional responses. For mothers' beliefs, differences between the parenting goals and causal attributions of authoritative and authoritarian mothers were found to be most pronounced in response to scenarios related to negative child behaviors. For maternal emotional responses, independent main effects of context and parenting style were evident. Results concerning the contextual variations in mother's parental beliefs and emotional responses are discussed briefly to begin with, followed by a more detailed interpretation of the interactive effects between parenting style and childrearing context.

It should be noted that the nature of the data collected in this study does not allow us to draw conclusions regarding the direction of effect and the causal nature of the relation between parenting styles and beliefs. Moreover, a clear limitation of the current data set is that assessments of parenting style, parental beliefs, and parental emotional responses were all self-report measures. It is likely that associations between variables have been heightened because of shared-method variance. As such, our findings should be interpreted with caution.

Contextual Variations in Maternal Beliefs and Emotional Responses

Results concerning contextual variations in maternal beliefs and emotional responses replicated and extended previous research findings in this area. The present findings reinforced the previously reported notion that social climates dominated by transgressions (i.e., aggressive acts and

misbehaviors) are more likely to direct parental beliefs toward "strict" parental responses (e.g., Hastings & Coplan, 1999; Hastings & Rubin, 1999; Nucci & Smetana, 1996; Smetana, 1994) than less aversive child behaviors (i.e., shyness and prosocial behavior). Thus, mothers reported being more likely to feel upset (i.e., angry, embarrassed) and to focus on behavior modification (i.e., parent-centered goals such as obtaining compliance) when children were described as being more disruptive. In addition, our findings provide some of the first explicit evidence for the "other side of the coin," namely that positive child behaviors are more likely to evoke a focus on empathic goals (i.e., building trust and love) and positive maternal affect.

However, the pattern of differences across contexts also highlighted the fact that mothers' affective and cognitive reactions to children's behaviors were not uniformly negative or positive. Results concerning attributions replicated previous research suggesting that, overall, parents are "developmental optimists" (Dix et al., 1986; Goodnow et al., 1986; Gretarsson & Gelfand, 1988). Our findings reflect a pattern of explanations for behaviors in which children were "credited" for their positive behavior and held least responsible for socially incompetent actions. It is interesting to note that, despite attributing aggressive behavior to more external factors, mothers were also more likely to focus on parent-centered goals and respond with anger during this scenario. Conversely, in the shyness scenario, mothers attributed child behavior to external causes to the same degree as for aggression, but reported a greater focus on empathic goals, less priority to parent-centered goals, and less anger and embarrassment. These findings are consistent with Rubin and Mills (1992), who reported that child aggression elicited more parental anger and punitively controlling behavior, as compared to social withdrawal.

The findings for the aggression scenario were somewhat contradictory with the positive associations among internal attributions, angry affect, and power assertive behavior that have been reported by some authors (Dix et al., 1989; Miller, 1995). Typically, this constellation of parental reactions is considered undesirable and likely to contribute to more conflicted parent–child interactions. However, it has also been argued that, at times, it is appropriate for parents to be moderately upset and focused on compliance in conjunction with socializing desirable outcomes (Grusec & Lytton, 1988). That is, a modest increase of parental negative affect may be necessary for obtaining children's attention when they have misbehaved, to ensure that children will attend to the parental socialization message. Given this perspective, the tendency to attribute young children's aggression to more external sources may protect mothers' belief that they actually are able to influence and improve their children's behavior. If aggression was viewed as dispositionally caused, intentional, and stable, parents would

have little hope of being able to intervene effectively in order to steer their children toward more desirable paths of development (Mills & Rubin, 1992). However, this may not hold true beyond early childhood if negative child behaviors persist. There is some indication of decreasing maternal optimism in response to consistent, undesired child characteristics (Hastings & Hersh, 1999; Mash & Johnston, 1983; Rubin & Mills, 1992).

Parenting Styles and Variations
in Beliefs Across Childrearing Contexts

Compared to their more authoritative counterparts, mothers who espoused a more authoritarian parenting style had a very different perspective on their children's behaviors. Authoritarian mothers did not demonstrate the "developmental optimism" in their attributions that characterized other mothers; in fact, their tendency to see positive child behaviors as externally caused, and negative child behaviors as more internally caused, could lead one to describe them as "developmental pessimists." As well, they emphasized the attainment of empathic goals less strongly, particularly in response to less desirable child behaviors. Finally, authoritarian mothers reported that they would experience more negative emotions across all childrearing contexts.

Dix and colleagues (1989, p. 1389) suggested that authoritarian parenting can be conceptualized as an information processing *schema* that

> Makes constructs of competence and blame highly accessible, promotes a readiness to process information in terms of the schema, sensitizes parents to schema-consistent information, or promotes the tendency for negative child behavior to serve as a retrieval cue for schema-consistent information in memory.

Aversive child behaviors that contribute to more challenging or stressful childrearing situations may be more likely to activate a more "automatic" authoritarian schema, and thus evoke the specific parental cognitions associated with authoritarianism. Child behaviors that are desirable or less disruptive do not challenge a parent's ability to cope, and therefore do not activate this schema (see also Bugental, 1992).

Thus, it can be speculated that authoritative and authoritarian mothers possess different parenting schemas, and the extent to which either group's schema is activated depends on the stress or challenge of the childrearing situation. When maximally activated, these schemas will contribute toward maximal differences in parental responses. Alternatively, it is also possible that all parents have multiple parenting schemas, and each specific childrearing context activates a different parenting schema. In this

regard, authoritative and authoritarian mothers may share relatively more similar schemas for easy-to-manage contexts, but may hold more discrepant schemas for handling difficult contexts. Future research is required to further explore these possibilities.

We found that authoritarian mothers attributed negative child behaviors to more internal causes and were less focused on empathy-related goals (i.e., emphasizing the child's needs or promoting the quality of the parent–child relationship) during these same scenarios. Previous research has shown that internal attributions for misbehaviors are associated with more punitive parental responses (Dix et al., 1989; Miller, 1995), and that maintaining a focus on empathic goals decreases the likelihood that parents will resort to power assertion to resolve disagreements with their children (Hastings & Grusec, 1998). In effect, the authoritarian mothers in this study evidenced a pattern of cognitive reactivity that was most consistent with, or likely to contribute to, highly controlling and punitive parental behavior when they were trying to deal with the most difficult childrearing demands. In this regard, results from this study provided empirical support for the suggestion that parenting styles are most reflective of parents' behaviors toward children during situations involving the potential for discipline (Bugental, 1992; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Phrased more generally, the features of a given childrearing situation moderate the associations between a global parenting style and the specific manifestations of that style in that situation.

Although authoritarian and authoritative mothers differed in their relative endorsements of empathic goals, they did not differ in their concern for attaining parent-centered goals. This is consistent with the conceptualization of both authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles as involving high motivations to exercise control over children, but differing in terms of warmth and responsiveness (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The parent-centered goals assessed in this study were primarily concerned with obtaining immediate or lasting obedience, goals that are conceptually related to parental control and empirically predictive of directive behavior (Hastings & Grusec, 1998). Conversely, the empathic goals could be seen as reflecting a desire to maintain warmth, responsiveness, and a focus on the child's needs. Again, childrearing context was seen playing a moderating role in terms of calling forth the authoritative schema. The greater emphasis on empathic goals evidenced by authoritative mothers was manifested particularly during situations involving negative child behaviors.

It can be speculated from these findings that authoritative parents recognize that instances of children's negative behaviors also provide opportunities for building and strengthening the parent–child relationship. Thus, when a child has misbehaved, authoritative parents are focused on

setting firm limits for undesirable behaviors (i.e., obtaining child obedience), but are also aware of the importance of meeting the child's needs and maintaining the quality of their relationship with their child. This dual focus on both control and fostering the parent–child relationship, in concert with the tendency of authoritative mothers to experience only mild to moderate affective arousal in the face of children's transgressions, likely contributes to the difference between appropriately firm parenting and inappropriately harsh parenting. Thus, an authoritative parenting style seems to be more conducive to an interaction climate marked by the desire to maintain close dyadic relationships and to meet the needs of the child, even in the face of behavioral transgressions.

Conversely, one could characterize authoritarian mothers as more singular, or less flexible, in their reactions to children's transgressions. These mothers see such situations as calling for only discipline and control. Presumably then, authoritarian mothers might have access to a narrower range of behavioral options to deal with their children's aggression and misbehavior; specifically, they may resort to a limited number of harsher techniques.

Parenting Styles and Consistency
in Emotions Across Childrearing Contexts

Although childrearing context moderated the links between parenting style and mothers' parental beliefs, context did not appear to moderate the relations between style and maternal affect. Across childrearing scenarios, authoritarian mothers reported that they would respond with more anger and embarrassment, compared to authoritative mothers. This provides additional support for previous reports that authoritarian parents are more upset, angry, and disapproving in response to child misbehaviors (Dix et al., 1989). Mothers with authoritarian styles value obedience, respect for authority, and socially appropriate behavior from their children (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Behaviors that compromise these values (i.e., aggression and defiance) are likely to cause anger, because they suggest the parent is failing to achieve desired outcomes, and embarrassment, because the parent may believe that others will interpret the child's aversive behaviors as indications that the parent has failed to do her job well (i.e., to rear an obedient and respectful child).

From this perspective, the primary focus of the mother is not on what the situation or the behavior means for her child; nor is the situation informing her about emotional or developmental needs of her child that might need to be addressed. Rather, the mother's own skills, self-esteem, and social status are paramount, and are in danger of being compromised. Thus, embarrass-

ment may be more likely to promote efforts on the part of the mother to "save face" or protect her own interests (i.e., by putting an immediate stop to her child's aversive actions). This would help to demonstrate that indeed she does have control of the situation and of her child. In this regard, embarrassment could function as an affective trigger that activates the strictly controlling schema of authoritarian mothers, and would be a continued reflection of authoritarian mothers' more parent-centered focus.

However, it was somewhat surprising to note that authoritarian mothers responded with more anger and embarrassment than authoritative mothers when children's behavior was not disruptive (social withdrawal), even in the scenario depicting children behaving in a prosocial manner. Although perhaps shy behaviors could be interpreted as deviating from normal expectations, and thus could contravene an authoritarian parent's expectations, one would expect helpfulness and consideration for others to be child behaviors that authoritarian and authoritative parents alike would hold as desirable.

The consistency with which authoritarian mothers reported more negative affect than authoritative mothers could be interpreted as evidence that an authoritarian parenting style functions as a lens through which all children's behaviors are perceived and evaluated. In this case, the "default" emotional response appears to be negative, regardless of child behavior. This is also consistent with the typological distinction between authoritarianism and authoritativeness; the latter is characterized as reflecting more warmth and affection, and less anger and rejection, than the former (Baumrind, 1989; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Consistent and Variable:
Integrating Styles, Beliefs, and Emotions

It is very intriguing that mothers with a given parenting style, be it authoritative or authoritarian, showed variations in their reported goals and attributions across childrearing contexts while maintaining a consistent state of affective arousal. These results could be seen as paralleling the larger body of research on parenting styles and behaviors that show parents can be highly variable in their responses in different childrearing situations, and yet have a general tendency to maintain a given style over time. Whereas the correlational and contemporaneous nature of the current data set requires that we must be cautious with our interpretations, one could speculate that our findings have implications for unraveling the complicated associations among style, emotion, belief, and behavior.

To the extent that a given parenting style is a global and stable trait for a parent, it may be that specific affective biases underlie the consistency

with which a style is evident or manifested. As such, predominant emo-
tions may set the general tone or overall "flavor" of the relationship be-
tween a mother and child. Specific childrearing interactions then con-
tribute to how that background character actually will be enacted, at
least partially by the extent to which the details of the interactions acti-
vate cognitive schemas and lead mothers to focus on attaining certain
parenting goals or attributing children's behaviors to internal or external
causes. Faced with circumstances that are not challenging, mothers' cop-
ing skills are not taxed and their schemas are not called into play as di-
rectly. Thus, differences between authoritarian and authoritative mothers
are minimized with regard to their cognitive reactions and the behaviors
those promote. Under more stressful and difficult childrearing demands,
however, parenting schemas are activated and mothers focus on goals
and make attributions that are consistent with their parenting style, re-
sulting in more divergent parental behaviors. Still, across these specific
contexts and whether authoritarian and authoritative mothers are behav-
ing similarly or differently, differences in the affective quality of their
childrearing interactions may be maintained. The relative lack of warmth
and predominance of negative affect may be the consistent features that
children of authoritarian mothers come to recognize as characteristic of
their caregivers, and that they incorporate into their own working mod-
els of family relationships.

As a final note, the results from this study provide some preliminary in-
sights that may give cause for optimism to practitioners who work with
parents[2]. Our findings suggest that the cognitions of authoritarian mothers
do vary to a certain degree across different childrearing contexts. As com-
pared to scenarios depicting child aggression and misbehaviors, authori-
tarian mothers more strongly endorsed empathic goals in situations re-
lated to child shyness and prosocial behaviors. It may be possible to
expand these more positive responses to include a wider range of
childrearing contexts.

Future research should continue to explore other factors that may influ-
ence relations among parenting styles, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors.
For example, child characteristics may play an important role in the devel-
opment of parental schemas. With an especially difficult child, a parent is
more likely to be thrust into challenging childrearing situations more fre-
quently. It is possible that repeated activation could make their response
schema more automatic or powerful, even allowing it to generalize to
other contexts as well. Thus, an authoritarian parent of a very difficult

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child would be more likely to react especially strongly, and the harshness of her responses would increase with time and over multiple interactions.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX A

Text of Hypothetical Scenarios Described in the Child Behavior Vignettes

Story 1: Prosocial Behavior

Your child is out front of your home, playing with a few other children. You are watching them from one of your windows. They are having fun, playing a game like "tag," and your child seems to be one of the leaders. One of the other children trips over something, and starts crying. Your child goes to the crying child, helps him/her to sit up, and sits together with the other child until he/she stops crying. Your child has done this kind of thing before.

Story 2: Aggression

One afternoon, you go to pick up your child from his/her day care center or preschool. When you get there, your child is in the playground with some other children. One of the other children has a toy your child wants, and you see your child grab the toy and push the other child down. You have seen your child do this a few times before.

Story 3: Shyness

One morning, you have dropped your child off at his/her daycare center or preschool. After you say good-bye, you decide to stay and watch the children for a little while, and find a spot where you can see your child, but he/she doesn't know you're watching. You see your child standing against the wall, watching some of the other children playing with a fun toy. Your child looks interested, but stays against the wall and keeps his/her chin down. You have seen your child act like this at other times.

Story 4: Misbehavior (Public)

You and your child are in the local grocery store. Your child asks for a very sugary cereal. You tell him/her it's not very good for him/her. Then, your child sees some stuffed animals and says he/she wants one. You tell him/her that he/she has toys at home, and you can't buy another one today. Then, your child grabs a candy bar, and when you try to put it on the shelf, your child screams, "I want it!" People turn and look.

Story 5: Misbehavior (Private)

One day, you and your child are at home and you are expecting some friends to drop by soon. You look in the front room of your home, and your child's toys are all over the floor. Your child is watching TV. You ask your child to pick up his/her toys, and your child says, "Later, when this show is over." You ask your child to pick his/her toys up now, and your child says, "You're not being fair."