VU Research Portal

The effect of quality of family interaction and intergenerational transmission of values: The case of sexual permissiveness

Taris, T.W.; Semin, G.R.; Bok, I. A.

published in

Journal of Genetic Psychology
1998

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1080/00221329809596148](https://doi.org/10.1080/00221329809596148)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Taris, T. W., Semin, G. R., & Bok, I. A. (1998). The effect of quality of family interaction and intergenerational transmission of values: The case of sexual permissiveness. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 159, 237-250.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00221329809596148>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

The Journal of Genetic Psychology: Research and Theory on Human Development

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vgnt20>

The Effect of Quality of Family Interaction and Intergenerational Transmission of Values on Sexual Permissiveness

Toon W. Taris^a, Gün R. Semin^a & Inge A. Bok^a

^a Department of Social Psychology, Free University, Amsterdam

Version of record first published: 30 Mar 2010.

To cite this article: Toon W. Taris, Gün R. Semin & Inge A. Bok (1998): The Effect of Quality of Family Interaction and Intergenerational Transmission of Values on Sexual Permissiveness, *The Journal of Genetic Psychology: Research and Theory on Human Development*, 159:2, 237-250

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00221329809596148>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

The Effect of Quality of Family Interaction and Intergenerational Transmission of Values on Sexual Permissiveness

TOON W. TARIS

GÜN R. SEMIN

INGE A. BOK

*Department of Social Psychology
Free University Amsterdam*

ABSTRACT. Quality of family interaction as a moderator of the relation between mothers and their adolescent children's sexual permissiveness was examined. Mothers were expected to be able to influence their children's sexual standards, but this effect was expected to be stronger when the family interaction was characterized by mutual understanding and respect. This hypothesis was tested by means of multiple-group structural equation modeling, with a sample of 323 adolescent–mother pairs that were representative of the Brighton and Hove (UK) area. The adolescents were 14 to 18 years old. The results supported our hypothesis that intergenerational transmission of values benefits from good mother–child relations. In addition, we found that socioeconomic status was less strongly related to adolescent permissiveness and age was more strongly related in high quality of interaction groups than in low quality of family interaction groups. Implications of the study are discussed.

HOW ADOLESCENTS' ATTITUDES toward sexual permissiveness vary as a function of their parents' attitudes on that issue and quality of family interaction was examined in this study. More specifically, the underlying assumptions were that (a) parents fulfill an important function as socializing agents by providing norms and values to their offspring and (b) transmission of parental norms and values to children is facilitated or inhibited by the quality of the parent–child interaction, which, in turn, is assumed to be strongly dependent on the style of parenting (Rueter & Conger, 1995; Steinberg, 1990).

The authors thank Shaun Dugan, who took a major responsibility for the data collection and compilation.

Address correspondence to T. W. Taris, Free University Amsterdam, Department of Social Psychology, Van der Boechorststraat 1, NL-1081 BT Amsterdam, The Netherlands; e-mail: AW.Taris@psy.vu.nl.

Although several studies have identified links between parenting styles and incidences of adolescent problem behavior (Barnes & Farrell, 1992), timing of sexual initiation (Taris & Semin, 1997a), and educational achievement (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991), the precise nature of those links is not well understood. For instance, Grolnick et al. (1991) argued that particular parenting styles promote the development of "inner sources of achievement" in children (such as achievement motivation and control orientation); however, it is unclear precisely what that source involves and where those motivations come from. In the present study, we assumed that parents, in their role of educators, exert a socializing influence on their children (cf. Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994) and are a primary source from which children obtain their norms and values. For example, in the context of sexual permissiveness, DeLamater and MacCorquodale (1979) stated that parental sexual standards are the earliest to which the child is exposed and thus "provide the foundation for subsequent sociosexual development" (p. 25). Similarly, Fisher (1986) suggested that if parents can affect their children's sexual activities, then it is likely that such an effect works via the transmission of attitudes and values.

Although many researchers accept the notion that parents may influence their teenager's sexual standards, it is still unclear under which circumstances such a process of intergenerational value transmission flourishes. Some studies indicate that intrafamily disagreements tend to occur less frequently and are less severe in families where parent-child communication is characterized by behaviors and attitudes of accessibility, affection, sensitivity, cooperation, and care, than in other families (cf. Rueter & Conger, 1995; Steinberg, 1990; Taris & Semin, 1995). On the one hand, intergenerational problems seem to be more flexibly and effectively handled in families where the quality of family interaction is good; on the other, however, such problem-solving strategies do not seem to account fully for the negative association between quality of family interaction and amount of intrafamily disagreement (Rueter & Conger, 1995), suggesting that other factors mediate this relationship as well.

One such factor is the degree to which parents' and children's standards correspond to each other. It is likely that parents' and children's standards correspond more closely if their relationship is characterized by openness and warmth (cf. Burgess, 1973; DeLamater & MacCorquodale, 1979), because having good relationships with parents makes it easier for adolescents to see the reasons for their parents' standards and, consequently, to accept those standards ("internalization" of parental standards; see, e.g., Inazu & Fox, 1980; Jessor & Jessor, 1974). Thus, in families with a high quality of interaction, not only is intrafamily disagreement handled more flexibly and effectively, but there is also less reason for disagreement, because parent-adolescent standards correspond to each other more closely.

In the context of sexual permissiveness, this reasoning leads to the general expectation that a parent's influence on his or her teenager's sexual attitudes is especially pronounced when parent-child communication is good. This expecta-

tion can be further specified in terms of two related hypotheses. We expected the following: (a) The concordance between the parent's and adolescent's sexual attitudes is greater in families with a high quality of interaction than in those with a low quality of interaction. That is, comparison of mothers' and adolescents' mean scores should reveal that the difference between those scores increases with decreasing quality of family interaction. (b) The relation between the parent's and adolescent's sexual attitudes is stronger in families with high (vs. low) quality of interaction. Thus, on this issue we examined the correlation between mothers' and children's attitudes as a function of the quality of their interactions. Although these hypotheses present two faces of the same general hypothesis, they focus on different aspects of the mother-child relationship. Therefore, we believed it was appropriate to explicitly distinguish between the two.

We developed a model for the relations between adolescent and parental sexual permissiveness and parenting styles (see Figure 1). This model is based on the theoretical notions outlined previously. In principle, we expected a positive effect of parental sexual standards on adolescent standards (denoted by a + sign in Figure 1). However, we expected that the strength of this effect would vary positively with the quality of intrafamily interaction: the better (more open, warmer, and so forth) the interaction, the stronger the relation between parental and adolescent sexual standards should be.

Transmission of Values From Mother to Child: Other Relevant Factors

We needed to control several variables in the present study, because they seem important in the process by which mothers' sexual attitudes affect the attitudes of their children as a function of the quality of their interaction. More specifically, the effects of background variables such as the adolescent's age, religion, and gender, and the family's socioeconomic status were controlled for in this study.

Socioeconomic status (SES). Families are members of particular class or status groupings, which are the sources and transmitters of differing sexual standards (e.g., Reiss, 1967). Thus, parents will transmit to their children sexual values that are congruent with those of their social groupings. Social status is also likely to influence whom the adolescent has for peers, the types of adult models they are exposed to, and their consumption patterns, including use of mass media. Thus, the variables subsumed under SES constitute a potentially considerable influence on adolescent sexual attitudes. This notion has been supported in a number of studies reporting a negative relation between measures of SES (e.g., family income, parental education, and place of residence) and adolescent sexual experience (e.g., Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985; Leigh, Weddle, & Loewen, 1988; Taris & Semin, 1995). Fewer studies have found relations between SES and sexual attitudes; however, when an effect was found, more permissive attitudes were negatively related to SES (e.g., Chilman, 1983; Harris & Associates, 1986; Reiss, 1967).

In addition, researchers (e.g., Taris & Bok, 1996) have reported that parenting practices are dependent on SES, such that in low-SES families, parents seem to show less understanding, affection, and the like than parents in high-SES families. Although this relation is usually not very strong, SES must be controlled to exclude alternative interpretations of our findings regarding the effects of quality of family interaction.

Background variables: Gender, religious commitment, and age. One consistent finding is that boys are generally more permissive than girls (e.g., Carrol, Volk, & Hyde, 1985; Taris & Semin, 1997b). Thus, we expected that the individual's gender would predict the degree to which permissive attitudes are held, with boys being more permissive than girls. Similarly, one common finding has been that religiously committed persons tend to be less sexually permissive than others (Sheeran, Abrams, Abraham, & Spears, 1993) because of the traditional prohibitive stance of the major religions on this issue (e.g., Nelson, 1983).

Finally, older people tend to be more permissive than younger people (Taris & Semin, 1995, 1997a). Taris and Semin (1997a) suggested that this tendency results from a process of "becoming ready" to experience a first sexual intercourse. As Hagestad and Neugarten (1985) argued, many life events occur only

when one is ready—events occurring during the life course can take place at times that are considered normal (“on-time”)—but they also can occur too early or too late (“off-time”). This theory leads to the emergence of age-specific expectation patterns, based on the “average” behavior within a certain reference group (Marini, 1984). Clearly, with increasing age it becomes more desirable to be sexually experienced. Thus, if it is indeed the case that individuals prepare themselves for the transition from sexual inexperience to experience, this should become manifest in an increase in sexual permissiveness with age. In addition, the quality of family interaction may depend to some degree on the person’s age—for instance, Taris and Bok (1996) found that older adolescents tend to judge their relation with their parents as slightly less good than younger adolescents do.

Method

Sample

The data were collected during a study conducted in 1989 in the Brighton and Hove area, Sussex, England. A sample of 333 adolescent–mother pairs completed a structured questionnaire administered individually in the presence of an interviewer. The adolescents were 14 to 18 years old ($M_{\text{age}} = 15.80$, $SD = 1.08$); 51% were girls. Fathers were not interviewed, because mothers seem considerably more involved in sex education and discussions about sexual matters than fathers are (Fox, 1981; Inazu & Fox, 1980).

We used random location sampling to obtain a sample that had socioeconomic characteristics similar to the population of Brighton and Hove. Within this particular area, there were 603 enumeration districts, of which 594 usually contained a resident population. Each of those areas could be characterized by particular types of housing stock or neighborhoods (CACI, 1989), which aggregated into 11 neighborhood groups. We used the ACORN classification system, which takes into account 40 different variables in the census, including age, sex, and socioeconomic status, and allows researchers to categorize people according to the type of residential area they live in. A comparison of the ACORN characteristics of the sample with data on the characteristics of all households in Brighton and Hove revealed no major differences between the two. Thus, the sample seemed representative of the target population.

Our questionnaire addressed, among other things, sexual behavior, attitudes toward sex-related issues, intimate relationships, and background variables such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status. Because some values were missing on some of the variables, the final sample size was 323 adolescent–mother pairs. On the basis of their scores on the Quality of Family Interaction Scale (see below), the sample was broken down into three groups that were approximately equally sized—low ($n = 104$), intermediate ($n = 108$), and high ($n = 111$) quality of family interaction groups.

Regarding religion, the mothers reported Church of England/Protestant (69%), Catholic (10%), and none (9%); the adolescents reported Church of England/Protestant (54%), Catholic (11%), and none (28%). A cross-tabulation of mothers' and adolescents' religions showed that the children of Catholic mothers more often said they had no religion at all.

To examine the degree to which quality of family interaction was influenced by possible differential religious practices, we tested whether there was a significant association between religious denomination and assignment to the three quality of interaction groups. Cross-table analysis, however, revealed no significant interactions between those variables. Thus, there was no reason to assume that the quality of family interaction differed across religious denominations.

Measures

The concept of sexual permissiveness was tapped via two scales that were used for both mothers and children. The Morality in Having Sex Scale is a six-item scale with reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) of .70 for adolescents and .75 for mothers. Typical items are "It is all right to have sex before marriage if the partners love each other." "It is o.k. to have sex with somebody you have met recently and don't know very well, as long as both of you are attracted to each other." "Adultery is sinful under all circumstances" (reverse scored). The items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from *disagree strongly* (1) to *agree strongly* (7).

Importance of loving the partner before having sex was rated on a six-item scale that tapped the degree to which the respondent felt that in an intimate relationship, particular conditions had to be fulfilled before it was permitted to have sex. For the mothers' version, three examples are the following: "They would have to be married to the person." "They would have to be in a long-term, committed relationship with the person." "They would have to be in love with the person" (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*). For the adolescents, the items were slightly reworded—for example, the first item became "I would have to be married to the person." The mothers were explicitly asked to keep in mind the son or daughter who was participating in the study and not to consider any of their other children. This scale was shown to constitute a good Guttman scale with reliabilities (*r*) of .80 for the mothers and .83 for the adolescents. We refer to this scale as the Need to Love Scale.

Mother-adolescent interaction style: Quality of family interaction. A set of seven items was designed to tap the way mother and child interacted with each other. Because those items were measured for mother and child separately, a total of 14 responses per adolescent-mother pair were available. Typical items were (for the mothers): "I always listen to what my son/daughter has to say." "My son/daughter tells me most of the things that he/she does." "I try hard to understand my son/daughter." For the adolescents, the items were slightly reworded; for instance,

the first item became "My parents always listen to what I say" (1 = *disagree strongly*, 7 = *agree strongly*). Summing these 14 responses resulted in a Quality of Family Interaction Scale, with reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of .81 ($M = 5.37$, $SD = .80$, range from 2.57 to 7.00). The scores on this scale were used to divide the sample into three, roughly equally large groups characterized by low ($n = 104$), intermediate ($n = 108$), and high ($n = 111$) quality of family interaction. The mean scores for quality of family interaction were 4.45 ($SD = .46$) for the low group, 5.40 ($SD = .21$) for the intermediate group, and 6.22 ($SD = .32$) for the high group.

This operationalization of the quality of interaction concept has the advantage that it assigns equal weights to mothers' and adolescents' feelings about their interactions. However, other operationalizations can be noted as well. For instance, one might consider only the mother's or the adolescent's judgments. However, apart from the fact that there seems to be no a priori reason to prefer the mother's to the adolescent's judgments or vice versa, the resulting classification proved to be very similar to ours: the cross-classifications with our classification yielded $\chi^2(4, N = 646) = 140, p < .001$. A third approach would assign families to low or high quality of interaction groups only if mother and child agreed that their interaction was below or above average; in case of different judgments, the family would be assigned to the intermediate group. Again, the resulting classification was very similar to ours, $\chi^2(4, N = 646) = 335.51, p < .001$, with only the extreme groups being slightly smaller in the alternative operationalization. Thus, although we acknowledged that adolescents and their mothers could differ in their judgments regarding the quality of their interactions, different operationalizations of this concept seemed to lead to very similar results.

Other variables. In addition, we included age and sex (high = male) of the adolescent and his or her religious commitment (1 = *not at all committed*, 7 = *highly committed*) in the analysis because these variables have been shown to be important biographic predictors of adolescent permissiveness. Finally, we included a measure of socioeconomic status (SES) as a control variable.

The differences between the three groups were generally very small and insignificant, with the exception of need to love and quality of family interaction. (See Table 1 for the means and standard deviations for the variables, for each of the three groups separately.) Because quality of family interaction was used to create the three groups, it was not surprising that the groups differed on this variable. With respect to the other variables, no significant differences were found.

Procedure

We used structural equation modeling (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) to analyze the data. The variables in such models can be latent (i.e., they are functions of two or more indicator variables) or manifest (there is only one indicator for a

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations for All Variables, by Low, Intermediate,
and High Quality of Family Interaction

Variable	Low (<i>n</i> = 104)		Intermediate (<i>n</i> = 108)		High (<i>n</i> = 111)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Morality (A)	4.51	1.13	4.41	1.11	4.23	1.23
Need to love (A) ^a	2.96	1.53	3.50	1.53	3.50	1.57
Morality (M)	3.72	1.34	3.83	1.31	3.64	1.37
Need to love (M)	4.07	1.37	3.81	1.54	3.97	1.51
SES	2.25	1.23	2.41	1.33	2.66	1.29
Age	16.65	1.06	16.78	1.03	16.95	1.14
Religious commitment	2.60	2.23	2.33	2.26	2.67	2.14
Gender	.49	.87	.54	.80	.48	.86

Note. A = variable measured for adolescent. M = variable measured for mother.

^aSignificant difference among the means of the group, $F(2, 320) = 3.67, p < .05$.

particular construct). Structural equation modeling joins factor analysis to regression analysis, in that the model allows for a simultaneous estimation of a measurement (factor) model (for the latent variables) as well as a structural (regression) model (for the relations among the variables).

Structural equation modeling offers a range of tests to assess the goodness of fit of a particular model to the data. In principle, one would expect that a model that accurately reflects the mechanism that generated the data would be able to reproduce these data reasonably well—that is, if the parameters that were estimated for the model as tested are close to the parameters of the “true” model, the covariance matrix for the variables as reproduced on the basis of the first set of parameters should be close to the observed covariance matrix. The difference between both covariance matrices can be assessed using a chi-square test, with a high chi-square value indicating that the model that was fitted to the data is far from the true model. If, however, the chi-square value is small, the model cannot be rejected empirically.

In addition to the chi-square statistic, we used Bentler and Bonett’s (1980) non-normed fit index (NNFI) to evaluate model fit. Unlike many other fit indices (including the chi-square test), NNFI is largely independent from sample size (Marsh, Balla, & MacDonald, 1990). Bentler and Bonett (1980) recommended that the NNFI be .90 or higher in order to conclude that a particular model fits the data acceptably well.

In the present study, we used the multiple-group option available in most structural equation modeling programs. The fit of a model can be computed across several groups simultaneously, indicating how well that model fits the data

obtained from more than just one sample. In addition, the values of particular parameters can be fixed (constrained) across groups, meaning that the value of these parameters must be the same for all groups. Thus, the fit of a model without any across-group constraints might be compared with the fit of a model in which some parameters are constrained to be the same. This feature is especially useful in the present study, because Hypothesis 2 pertains to the differential strength of the relation between parental and adolescent permissiveness in low, intermediate, and high quality of interaction groups.

Testing/fitting the model. After preliminary analyses of the measurement models of the two latent variables (namely, mother and adolescent permissiveness), we tested the full model, including the structural relations among the variables (cf. Figure 1). The loadings of the indicator variables on the latent variables were constrained to be equal across all three groups, ascertaining that the meaning of the latent variables was the same in all groups (Taris, Bok, & Meijer, 1998). No other across-group constraints were imposed. This model (the null model) fitted the data acceptably well, $\chi^2(31, N = 323) = 82.96, p < .001$, NNFI = .98. However, the effect sizes and corresponding standard errors indicated that some effects might be the same across the three groups. Thus, we proceeded by testing a series of models in which particular sets of parameters were constrained across groups.

First we examined whether the assumption that the effects of gender were equal across groups could be retained. This test resulted in a nonsignificant chi-square increase and a NNFI that did not change, $\chi^2(33, N = 323) = 85.76, p < .001$, NNFI = .98. The same was the case when the effect of religious commitment was held constant for all three groups, $\chi^2(35, N = 323) = 90.64$, NNFI = .98.

When the effect of age was constrained across groups, however, a major chi-square increase of some 150 points with only 2 *df* extra resulted, $\chi^2(37, N = 323) = 248.85, p < .001$, NNFI = .95. Clearly, the groups differed strongly regarding the strength of the effect of age on adolescent permissiveness. Similar results were obtained when the effects of SES and mother's permissiveness were constrained across groups, $\chi^2(37, N = 323) = 100.00$, NNFI = .98, and $\chi^2(37, N = 323) = 183.80, p < .001$, NNFI = .96, respectively. Thus, it appeared that the effects of religious commitment and gender were the same across groups but that the effects of the other variables were rather different.

Finally, the model that corresponded with those notions contained several effects that were not significantly different from zero. These were omitted, resulting in a final model, $\chi^2(37, N = 323) = 93.69, p < .001$, NNFI = .99.¹

¹In preliminary analyses, the effects of marital status of the mother, age of the mother, number of siblings, mother's religious commitment, and so forth were examined. None of these other variables turned out to have significant effects on the dependent variables. They were therefore omitted from the model.

Results

Comparison of Means

We expected the mothers' and children's sexual permissiveness (as measured by two scales, Need to Love and Morality; see Table 1) to correspond more closely as quality of family interaction increased. We conducted two analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) to test this hypothesis and examine the differences between the low, intermediate, and high quality of interaction groups. In the first ANCOVA, the adolescents' and mothers' attitudes toward morality were the dependent variables (a within-subject factor). In the second, attitude toward need to love was the dependent variable. Finally, the background variables (sex, age, SES, and religious commitment) were entered as covariates.

The first ANCOVA (focusing on parent-child attitudes toward morality) revealed no significant effects. However, the second ANCOVA (parent-child differences regarding need to love) showed the expected quality of family by adolescent-parent interaction, $F(2, 318) = 5.50, p < .01$. Subsequent analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between the groups for the mothers; a main effect of quality of family interaction was found only for the adolescents, $F(2, 316) = 4.90, p < .01$. Scheffé range tests revealed that this main effect occurred because the adolescents in the low quality of interaction group were considerably less likely to feel that love was a necessary prerequisite for having sex than the adolescents in the other two groups, $M = 2.96$ ($SD = 1.53$) versus 3.50 ($SD = 1.53$) and 3.50 ($SD = 1.57$), respectively. Thus, our first hypothesis regarding the difference between mothers' and adolescents' sexual attitudes was supported for need to love only.

Structural analysis. The fully standardized least squares estimates for the final model are reported in Table 2. First, adolescent's gender was not significantly different from zero, irrespective of whether this effect was constrained across groups. Thus, we failed to replicate the often reported finding that males and females differ regarding their permissiveness, and this effect was not moderated by quality of family interaction. Second, the effect of religious commitment was equal across all three groups ($-.39$), indicating that highly committed respondents were less permissive than others.

Regarding the effects of the other three variables, we found important differences between the groups. In general, older participants seemed more permissive than others. This effect was relatively large in the high quality of interaction group (.19), whereas in the low and intermediate groups, considerably lower effects were obtained (.10 and .07, respectively). In a similar vein, the effects of mother's permissiveness on adolescent's permissiveness became stronger when the quality of family interaction increased. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, we found that in low quality of interaction families, the attitudes of the mother hard-

TABLE 2
Fully Standardized Least Squares Effects on Adolescent Permissiveness
(Final Model)

Variable	Quality of interaction		
	Low (<i>n</i> = 104)	Intermediate (<i>n</i> = 108)	High (<i>n</i> = 111)
Permissiveness–mother	.07*	.40**	.39**
Socioeconomic status	–.26**	–.12**	—
Age–adolescent	.10**	.07**	.19**
Religious commitment–adolescent ^a	–.39**	–.39**	–.39**
Gender–adolescent (high = male)	—	—	—
<i>R</i> ²	.28	.51	.35

Note. $\chi^2(37, N = 322) = 93.69, p < .01$, NNFI = .99.

^aEffect constrained to be equal across groups.

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

ly affected the adolescent's attitudes (a standardized .07), as contrasted with a very considerable effect of .40 in the intermediate and high quality of interaction families. Clearly, this finding provides strong support for our contention that intergenerational transmission of values benefits from a good family climate.

In contrast, the effects of SES became increasingly weaker when family interaction became better. Although we found a moderately high negative effect of SES of –.26 on adolescent permissiveness in the low quality of interaction group, the corresponding parameter was not significantly different from zero in the high-quality group.

Discussion

In this study, we examined the relations between maternal and adolescent attitudes in the context of sexual permissiveness. We argued that the concordance between the two would be stronger when the quality of family interaction—operationalized as the degree to which mothers tried to understand/listen to their child, and the degree to which the child felt understood/listened to—improved. To this end, we performed two ANCOVAs and a structural equation analysis, in which quality of family interaction was included as a variable that moderated the relation between mother's and adolescent's permissiveness.

The results provide strong support for the hypotheses under examination. Regarding Hypothesis 1 (the correspondence between mother's and child's attitudes as a function of quality of family interaction), we found that in the low quality of interaction group, the correspondence between parents' and adolescents'

attitudes was indeed considerably larger than in the other two groups. This correspondence occurred because the adolescents in the low quality of interaction group were more permissive than the adolescents belonging to the other two groups; the mothers seemed to hold similar attitudes across all groups.

Regarding Hypothesis 2 (the strength of the relationship between mothers' and children's sexual attitudes), the structural analyses demonstrated that the relation between mother's and child's permissiveness was very weak for the low quality of interaction group, whereas this relationship was significantly stronger in the moderate and high quality of interaction groups. The latter two groups did not differ regarding the impact of mother's values on the adolescent's permissiveness. Thus, in general, parents indeed seem to be able to transmit their sexual standards to their children, except where there is no mutual understanding, openness, or respect. We feel that this conclusion is warranted, even though the study has some obvious limitations (a design that is correlational, not longitudinal; the findings rely exclusively on questionnaire data and were not validated using other, more objective measures). Replication with a longitudinal sample and more objective measures would therefore be desirable.

One of the unexpected but intriguing findings of this study was that the effect of age on sexual permissiveness increased with the quality of family interaction. Thus, although we found a moderately strong, positive association between age and permissiveness for the high quality of interaction group, this association was significantly weaker for the other two groups. Thus, sexual permissiveness seems to be age-graded in families characterized by openness and mutual understanding, but less so in other families.

Another interesting finding was that the effect of SES on adolescent sexual permissiveness decreased when the quality of family interaction increased. Although the sexual attitudes of the adolescents in the high quality of interaction group were mainly determined by the mother's permissiveness and not at all by SES, the reverse applied for the low quality of interaction group, in which the attitude of the mother was hardly relevant, whereas SES was relatively important. This result suggests that the mother's attitude is of primary importance in determining adolescent permissiveness. Nonetheless, when circumstances (such as a poor mother-child interaction) prevent mothers from socializing their children, then factors other than parental attitudes seem to replace those variables. As noted earlier, SES is a rather broad concept that captures many different types of variables, such as the influence of peers and mass media consumption patterns. Thus, it is difficult to pinpoint the precise source and interpretation of this effect. One conclusion that follows from this finding, however, is that even when parents are not successful in imposing their own values on their children, their offspring will hold attitudes that more or less conform to the dominant values in their own social class. Therefore, children who belong to a particular social class should not be expected to show sexually deviant behavior compared with other teenagers belonging to the same socioeconomic class.

The present results are in accord with our initial hypothesis that the degree to which parents can impose their own values on their children depends on the quality of family interaction. Sexual permissiveness, however, represents just one instance of a process of intergenerational transmission of values. Further research is needed to understand the generality of this phenomenon, as well as the age at which it occurs.

REFERENCES

- Barnes, G. M., & Farrell, M. P. (1992). Parental support and control as predictors of adolescent drinking, delinquency, and related problem behaviors. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 54, 763–776.
- Bentler, P. M., & Bonett, D. G. (1980). Significance tests and goodness of fit in the analysis of covariance structures. *Psychological Bulletin*, 88, 588–606.
- Burgess, J. (1973). *Influence of family relationships on the sexual behavior of college students in Norway and the United States*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois–Champaign.
- CACI. (1989). *ACORN user's guide*. London: CACI Marketing Services.
- Carrol, J. L., Volk, K. D., & Hyde, J. S. (1985). Differences between males and females in motives for engaging in sexual intercourse. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 14, 131–139.
- Chilman, C. S. (1983). *Adolescent sexuality in a changing American society: Social and psychological perspectives for the human services professions*. New York: Wiley.
- Darling, N., & Steinberg, L. (1993). Parenting style as context: An integrative model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 113, 487–496.
- DeLamater, J., & MacCorquodale, P. (1979). *Premarital sexuality: Attitudes, relationships, behavior*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Fisher, T. D. (1986). An exploratory study of parent-child communication about sex and the sexual attitudes of early, middle, and late adolescents. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 147, 543–557.
- Fox, G. L. (1981). The family's role in adolescent sexual behavior. In T. Ooms (Ed.), *Teenage pregnancy in a family context: Implications for policy* (pp. 128–141). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Grolnick, W. S., Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (1991). Inner resources for school achievement: Motivational mediators of children's perceptions of their parents. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 83, 508–517.
- Grusec, J. E., & Goodnow, J. J. (1994). Impact of parental discipline methods on the child's internalization of values: A reconceptualization of current points of view. *Developmental Psychology*, 30, 4–19.
- Hagestad, G. O., & Neugarten, B. L. (1985). Age and the life course. In R. H. Binstock & E. Shanas (Eds.), *Handbook of aging and the social sciences* (Vol. 2, pp. 35–61). New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Harris, L., & Associates. (1986). *American teens speak: Sex, myths, TV, and birth control*. New York: Planned Parenthood Federation of America.
- Hogan, D. P., & Kitagawa, E. M. (1985). The impact of social status, family structure, and neighborhood on the fertility of Black adolescents. *American Journal of Sociology*, 90, 825–855.
- Inazu, J. K., & Fox, G. L. (1980). Maternal influence on the sexual behavior of teenage daughters. *Journal of Family Issues*, 1, 81–102.
- Jessor, S., & Jessor, R. (1974). Maternal ideology and adolescent problem behavior. *Developmental Psychology*, 10, 246–254.

- Jöreskog, K. G., & Sörbom, D. (1993). *LISREL-8* (computer manual). Chicago: Scientific Software.
- Leigh, G. K., Weddle, K. D., & Loewen, I. R. (1988). Analysis of the timing of transition to sexual intercourse for Black adolescent females. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 3, 333-344.
- Marini, M. M. (1984). Age and sequencing norms in the transition to adulthood. *Social Forces*, 63, 229-244.
- Marsh, H. W., Balla, J. R., & MacDonald, R. P. (1990). Goodness-of-fit indexes in confirmatory factor analysis: The effect of sample size. *Psychological Bulletin*, 103, 391-410.
- Nelson, J. B. (1983). Religiosity in American religious groups: An update. *Marriage and Family Review*, 6, 35-46.
- Reiss, I. (1967). *The social context of premarital permissiveness*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Rueter, M. A., & Conger, R. D. (1995). Antecedents of parent-adolescent disagreements. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 435-448.
- Sheeran, P., Abrams, D., Abraham, C., & Spears, R. (1993). Religiosity and adolescents' premarital sexual attitudes and behaviour: An empirical study of conceptual issues. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 23, 39-52.
- Steinberg, L. (1990). Interdependency in the family: Autonomy, conflict, and harmony in the parent-adolescent relationship. In S. S. Feldman & G. R. Elliot (Eds.), *At the threshold: The developing adolescent* (pp. 255-276). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taris, T. W., & Bok, I. A. (1996). Parenting environment and scholastic achievement during adolescence: A retrospective study. *Early Child Development and Care*, 121, 67-83.
- Taris, T. W., Bok, I. A., & Meijer, Z. (1998). On assessing stability and change of psychometric properties of multi-item concepts across different situations: A general approach. *The Journal of Psychology*, 132(3), 301-316.
- Taris, T. W., & Semin, G. R. (1995). Affects adolescent sexual behaviour their attitudes concerning sex? *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 5, 139-156.
- Taris, T. W., & Semin, G. R. (1997a). Parent-child interaction during adolescence, and the adolescent's sexual experience: Control, closeness, and conflict. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 26, 373-398.
- Taris, T. W., & Semin, G. R. (1997b). Gender as a moderator of the effects of the love motive and relational context on sexual experience. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 26, 159-180.

Received September 8, 1997