Parents still matter: Patterns of parent-child shared agency predict college students’ academic motivation and achievement
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Introduction

- Despite a growing desire for independence, parents remain a strong and pervasive influence in the lives of adolescents and young adults, especially when important life decisions are involved, such as higher education.
- The current study investigated the role of shared and non-shared agency with parents in college students’ motivation and academic achievement.
  - **Shared agency** with parents refers to the perception that both parents and children share similar goals and that both are engaged in obtaining those goals (Chang, Heckhausen, Greenberger, & Chen, 2010).
  - **Non-shared agency** refers to parental directing (i.e., parents are in control of the child’s education and are over-involved) or parental uninvolvement (i.e., parents are disengaged in the child’s education; the child is independent in the pursuit of educational goals).

Thus, it was hypothesized that:
1. Shared-agency is positively related to academic achievement, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and mastery-approach and performance-approach goals, but negatively related to amotivation.
2. Non-shared agency (parental directing and parental uninvolvement) is negatively related to academic achievement and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, but positively related to amotivation, mastery-avoidance, and performance-avoidance goals.
3. Furthermore, it was expected that the positive relationship between shared agency and academic achievement would be mediated by motivation.

Methods

- 568 undergraduate students attending a large, public university in the United States
  - Gender: 77% female, 23% male
  - Ethnicity:
    - European Americans: 26%
    - East Asian Americans: 23%
    - Southeast Asian Americans: 15%
    - South Asian Americans: 8%
    - Hispanics: 1%

- Students completed a one-time online survey that measured:
  - **Shared and Non-shared Agency**: Shared and Non-shared Agency with Parents in Education Scale (Chang, 2008)
  - **Intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation**: Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al., 1992)
  - **Goal orientations**: Achievement Goal Questionnaire (Elliot & McGregor, 2001)
  - **Academic achievement**: GPA

- Data were analyzed using structural equation models (latent regression analyses and mediation analyses).

Results

- Data were analyzed using structural equation models (latent variable approach).
- Students completed a one-time online survey that measured:
  - Shared and Non-shared Agency:
  - Intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation:
  - Goal orientations:
  - Academic achievement: GPA

- **Figure 1**: Path diagram with shared and non-shared agency as predictors of GPA
- **Figure 2**: Path diagram with shared and non-shared agency as predictors of academic motivation
- **Figure 3**: Path diagram with shared and non-shared agency as predictors of goal orientations
- **Figure 4**: Path diagram with motivation as a mediator of the relationship between shared agency and GPA

Note: Intrinsic motivation, amotivation and performance/approach goals are significant mediators of the relationship between shared agency and GPA.

Discussion / Conclusions

- The model fits were better when including a 2nd order factor for shared agency, but not for non-shared agency (see figure 1). This is consistent with conceptualizations of non-shared agency.
- The results provide strong support for the hypothesis that shared agency benefited students in a number of domains.
  - Shared agency was positively related to GPA, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, mastery-approach goals, and performance-approach goals. It was negatively related to amotivation.
  - High levels of parental directing and parental uninvolvement had significant costs for students’ academic motivation and achievement.
  - Parental directing was negatively related to GPA. It was positively related to amotivation, mastery-avoidance goals, and performance-avoidance goals.
  - Parental uninvolvement was negatively related to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and mastery-approach goals. It was positively related to amotivation.
  - Interactions between shared agency and ethnicity predicting academic achievement and motivation were not significant.
  - Intrinsic motivation, amotivation, and performance/approach goals mediated the relationship between shared agency and GPA.
  - The findings demonstrate the importance of shared and non-shared agency with parents for college students’ academic motivation and achievement.
  - Parents may be an only partially tapped resource for improving college students’ motivation and academic achievement.

References


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