Parental Psychological Control: Revisiting a Neglected Construct

Brian K. Barber
Brigham Young University

BARBER, BRIAN K. Parental Psychological Control: Revisiting a Neglected Construct. CHILD DEVELOPMENT, 1996, 67, 3296–3319. This article argues for the value in socialization research of focusing explicitly on the construct of parental psychological control of children—control that constrains, invalidates, and manipulates children's psychological and emotional experience and expression. The article traces the history of the construct and distinguishes psychological control theoretically and empirically from more behaviorally oriented control. Two new measures of psychological control are developed. Data from three separate studies are presented which indicate that psychological control can be adequately measured across demographically varied samples and modes of measurement. In both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, psychological control, particularly as perceived by preadolescents and adolescents, is consistently predictive of youth internalized problems (depression) and, in some cases, externalized problems (delinquency). In contrast, behavioral control is related primarily to externalized problems.

The research literature investigating the nature and effects of parental control of children and adolescents is broad and complex. It contains numerous different conceptualizations of control, and findings are often inconsistent or equivocal (see Barber, 1992; Barber, Olsen, & Shagle, 1994; Rollins & Thomas, 1979, for reviews). This literature has benefited from attempts to provide some conceptual organization to parental control of children, such as the distinction between coercive, inductive, and undifferentiated control attempts (Rollins & Thomas, 1979) and the two-fold classification of responsiveness and demandingness (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

This article provides additional clarity to the complex nature of parental control by extending work that distinguishes specifically between psychological control and behavioral control. Psychological control refers to control attempts that intrude into the psychological and emotional development of the child (e.g., thinking processes, self-expression, emotions, and attachment to parents). Behavioral control, in contrast, refers to parental behaviors that attempt to control or manage children's behavior. While some forms of psychological intervention by parents appear to be positive, as in the use of reasoning to encourage awareness and sensitivity to consequences (see review by Gruere & Goodnow, 1994), psychological control as a parenting dimension has almost exclusively been conceptualized as a negative form of control. This article maintains this position.

Although psychological control was included in some of the earliest conceptualizations of parenting and continues to be implicit in much of the major work, focused attention to the construct has been lacking. This article reviews the history of the construct, argues its viability theoretically, and presents findings from three studies designed to (1) demonstrate that the construct can be measured accurately, (2) provide evidence for its salience to aspects of youth psy-

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chological and social functioning, and (3) test hypotheses about its specialized associations with youth internalized problems. Throughout the article, behavioral control and its effects are used as a point of contrast to illustrate the properties of psychological control.

History of the Psychological Control Construct

Explicit attention to the construct of psychological control emerged in the 1960s, particularly in the work of Becker (1964) and Schaefer (1965a, 1965b). Becker (1964) drew from work by Allinsmith (1960) and Mackinnon (1938) in defining psychological discipline as parental behavior that, for example, appeals to pride and guilt, expresses disappointment, withdraws love, isolates the child, and involves shaming. For these scholars, psychological discipline was an example of negative, love-oriented discipline; discipline that involved the manipulation of the love relationship between the parent and the child as a means of controlling child behavior. This negative, love-oriented discipline stood in contrast to positive, love-oriented discipline (i.e., praise and reasoning) and to power assertive discipline techniques, such as physical punishment, yelling, forceful commands, and verbal threats.

Schaefer's (1959, 1965a, 1965b) factor analyses of child and parent report on his Child Report of Parent Behavior Inventory (CRPBI) revealed three replicated factors: Acceptance versus Rejection, Firm Control versus Lax Control, and Psychological Autonomy versus Psychological Control. Parental behavior scales that primarily defined this latter factor were Intrusiveness, Parental Direction, and Control through Guilt. Other scales with significant loadings on this factor (but also had cross-loadings on one of the other two factors) were Possessiveness, Protectiveness, Nagging, Negative Evaluation, Strictness, and Punishment. Schaefer (1965b, p. 555) labeled this factor Psychological Autonomy vs. Psychological Control because “the defining scales describe covert, psychological methods of controlling the child’s activities and behaviors that would not permit the child to develop as an individual apart from the parent.”

These early efforts converged in the view that psychological control is a rather insidious type of control that potentially inhibits or intrudes upon psychological development through manipulation and exploitation of the parent-child bond (e.g., love-withdrawal and guilt induction), negative, affect-laden expressions and criticisms (e.g., disappointment and shame), and excessive personal control (e.g., possessiveness, protectiveness). Yet, the psychological control construct received very little research attention in the years following Becker’s and Schaefer’s work, and this despite Schudsonmann and Schudsonmann’s (1970, personal communication, 1988) successive refinements of the CRPBI. Several major reviews in subsequent decades (Maccoby & J. Martin, 1983; B. Martin, 1975; Rollins & Thomas, 1979) either ignored the psychological control construct or mentioned it without elaboration or development, and the construct long was neglected in empirical analyses of the socialization process. Recently, however, Steinberg (Steinberg, 1990; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991) has consistently found psychological control/autonomy to be distinct from behavioral control and parental acceptance (as did Schaefer, 1965b), but to this point he has aggregated these into typologies. Other researchers have begun to focus on the independent contributions of psychological control to youth functioning (Barber, 1992; Barber et al., 1994; Barber & Shagle, 1992; Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990).

Theoretical guidance for further research on this distinction comes from several formulations of the idea that parents can intrude upon the psychological and emotional development of their children. Diana Baumrind’s (Baumrind, 1965, 1966, 1968, 1978) discussions of parental control consistently endorse parental styles that encourage the child’s expression of opinions, verbal give and take between parents and children, and autonomous expression of children’s individuality. She also underscores the importance of recognizing the child’s individual interests and affirming the child’s qualities (Baumrind, 1978), and she warns specifically against guilt-inducing techniques and the manipulation of the love relationship with the child (Baumrind, 1966). In her recent analyses of her subjects as adolescents, Baumrind (1991) labeled one of the four control scales that emerged from cluster analyses Intrusive.

This work has not facilitated clear progress in understanding the precise nature and
effects of psychological control, however, because of two limitations of the typological approach to parenting. First, the authoritarian prototype has typically included both psychologically and nonpsychologically oriented forms of control. As will be discussed later, the effects of these types of control could be quite different, a difference that is undetectable if both forms of control are aggregated. (This changed in the 1991 report when high scores on the Intrusiveness variable were used to distinguish authoritarian-directive from nonauthoritarian-directive families. Thus, psychological control was separated from nonpsychological [assertive] control.) Second, despite this recent disaggregation of psychological and nonpsychological control, the authoritarian typology has always included elements of still other dimensions of parenting, such as rejection (Baumrind, 1967) and responsiveness (Baumrind, 1991). This combination also precludes the identification of any unique effects of the individual forms of parenting.

In a separate line of research, Hauser has also emphasized parenting behaviors that are very consonant with psychological control (Hauser, 1991; Hauser et al., 1984). For Hauser (building on Stierlin, 1974), moment-to-moment exchanges between parents and children can either facilitate (enable) or restrict (constrain) interactions that are critical to the child’s ego development. Enabling interactions enhance individuality by way of explaining, expressing curiosity, and engaging in joint problem solving. On the other hand, constraining interactions undermine a child’s participation in family interactions and discourage involvement with perceptions, ideas, and observations (Hauser et al., 1984).

Support for the salience of the psychological control construct is also available in clinical literatures. Depressed persons recall their parents to have been psychologically intrusive and inhibit psychological autonomy. Examples include undifferentiated and fused relationships (Bowen, 1978; Sabatelli & Mazor, 1985), enmeshed relationships (Minuchin, 1974), and closed and synchronous family paradigms, both of which emphasize the individuality of family members in favor of the group (Constantine, 1986).

This present article extends recent attempts to validate the construct of psychological control and advance understanding of its role in the socialization process (Barber, 1992; Barber & Shagle, 1992; Barber et al., 1994). In theorizing about the role of psychological control in the socialization process it is useful to focus on two related issues: (1) if and how psychological control differs from other types of control and (2) if and how it is related uniquely to aspects of children’s development. In addressing the former, my approach, consistent with Steinberg’s (1990) admonition, has been to contrast psychological control with behavioral control. Historically, this distinction has deep roots in the sociopolitical experience of Western civilization. This is seen particularly in the conflict between individualism—maximizing individual freedom and autonomy—and collectivism—the submission to the general will of society (see Peterson, 1995, for a discussion). The paradox has been equally recognized at the level of individual personality and social competence, with repeated distinctions between the psychological (e.g., psychological/emotional autonomy) and behavioral (e.g., conformity to rules and regulations) dimensions of a child’s experience. Baldwin (1948, p. 131) wrote: “Socialization by definition demands the development of contradictory aspects of the personality. Conformity to cultural demands is not easily obtained without robbing the child of that personal integrity which gives him a mind of his own and which supports him in his attempts to satisfy his curiosity and to carry out his ideas and phantasies in his dealing with the real world.” Similarly, Baumrind (1978, p. 248) spoke of the “eternal contradictions of social living” when contrasting the other-oriented/rule-following and autonomous/agentic aspects of instrumental competence. Empirically, Schaefer (1965b) made the same distinction by separating psychological control from firm control.

Distinguishing between psychological and behavioral control facilitates an important shift in understanding the nature of control. The focus of much socialization research is the quantity of control that is
exercised over a child, with specific concerns over issues such as the absolute level of control, critical thresholds of control, and the linear versus curvilinear nature of control (e.g., Miller, McCoy, Olson, & Wallace, 1986; Rollins & Thomas, 1979). Separating psychological control from behavioral control emphasizes where the control is located or focused. Thus, the question is less one of how much control is good or bad for a child than asking in what areas of a child's life is control facilitating or inhibiting. Referring specifically to this distinction between psychological and behavioral control, Steinberg (1990, p. 274, n. 6) wrote: "Some readers may find it inconsistent, or perhaps confusing, that the two forms of control [psychological and behavioral] appear to have opposite effects on the adolescent. . . . Adolescents appear to be adversely affected by psychological control—the absence of 'psychological autonomy'—but positively influenced by behavioral control—the presence of 'demandingness.'"

The paradox that Steinberg referred to—that control can be both inhibitive (psychological control) and facilitative (behavioral control) of human development—parallels the earlier posed distinction between human tendencies toward both autonomy and conformity. In short, psychological control is different from behavioral control because in each the control is focused on different aspects of the child's development. Social science literatures are replete with reference to the need for regulation and conformity, both at the theoretical (e.g., social control theories, Hirschi, 1969; Reckless, 1967; Reiss, 1951) and empirical levels (e.g., Patterson, 1982; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984). Far less attention, however, has been given to the need for personal autonomy and the role that control processes play in inhibiting it.

The second issue is whether psychological control uniquely affects aspects of child functioning. For example, are behavioral and psychological control differentially related to existing distinctions (Achenbach, 1985; Cicchetti & Toth, 1991) between internalized behaviors (inhibited, overcontrolled problems that are manifest privately or internally) and externalized problems (undercontrolled problems that tend to be more aggressive and socially disruptive)? I have focused specifically on depression as a measure of internalized problems and antisocial behavior (as measured by standard delinquency scales) as a index of externalized problems. Existing literatures imply that psychological control should have particular effects on internalized problems in children and that behavioral control should have more prominent associations with externalized problems. Psychologically controlling processes involve socialization pressure that is nonresponsive to the child's emotional and psychological needs (Maccoby & Martin, 1983), that stifles independent expression and autonomy (Baumrind, 1965, 1978; Hauser, 1991; Hauser et al., 1984), and that does not encourage interaction with others (Baumrind, 1965, 1978; Hauser, 1991; Hauser et al., 1984). Such an environment makes it difficult for a child to develop a healthy awareness and perception of self for several reasons: the implied derogation of the child, the lack of healthy interaction with others that is required for adequate self-definition (Youniss & Smollar, 1985), limited opportunities to develop a sense of personal efficacy (Seligman & Peterson, 1986), and, particularly for adolescents, interference with the exploration needed to establish a stable identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). Psychological control has consistently been found to be correlated with patterns marked by feelings of guilt, self-responsibility, confession, and indirect or nonexpression of aggression (see Becker, 1964), dependency (Baumrind, 1978; Becker, 1964), alienation (Baumrind, 1968), social withdrawal (Baumrind, 1967; Baumrind & Black, 1967), low ego strength (Hauser, 1991; Hauser et al., 1984; Siegelman, 1965), inability to make conscious choice (Baumrind, 1966), low self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967), passive, inhibited, and overcontrolled characteristics (Beavers, 1982), and depressed affect (Allen, Hauser, Eickholt, Bell, & O'Conner, 1994; Barber et al., 1994; Burbach & Bourdin, 1986; Fauber et al., 1990).

In contrast, behavioral control is more directly linked to externalized problems. Substantial research documents a consistent relationship between insufficient behavioral control and undercontrolled behavior problems in children of all ages. Behaviors associated with inadequate behavioral regulation include impulsivity, aggression, delinquency, drug use, and sexual precocity (Baumrind, 1971, 1991; Dishion & Loeber, 1985; Dornbusch et al., 1985; Loeber & Dishion, 1984; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; McCord, 1979, 1990; Miller et al., 1986; Olweus, 1980; Patterson, Capaldi, & Bank, 1989; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Pulkinnen, 1982; Volk, Edwards, Lewis, &
3300 Child Development

Sprelle, 1989). Under-controlled environments do not foster self-regulation in children, often leaving them more impulsive, reckless, and more willing to take risks and violate social norms. In unregulating family environments, adolescents in particular would be likely to be more responsive and susceptible to peer influence, which could include negative influence toward deviant behavior. Finally, it would also be possible that some unregulated adolescents intentionally “misbehave” in order to define for themselves the limits of acceptable behavior.

Initial empirical tests of these ideas have been encouraging (Barber et al., 1994). Second-order factor analysis of several measures of control—measured at both the dyadic, parent-child level and the family systems level—distinguished psychological control from behavioral control, and the contrasting effects of these on internalized (depression) and externalized (delinquency) problems among pre-, early, and mid-adolescents were confirmed. Among the limitations of that study were the concentration on middle-income, white families and limited measures of the criterion variables.

The purpose of this article is to present results from three separate studies involving a variety of samples to test the measurement properties of psychological control and to explore its associations (compared to behavioral control) with adolescent problem behaviors. Particular emphasis is given to the theorized specialized association with internalized problems.

Study 1

Method

Subjects.—Data for this study came from the Tennessee Adolescents in Families Project (TAIFS), a 1990 school-based survey study of 875 fifth-, eighth-, and tenth-grade students from 14 schools in the Knox County, Tennessee, school system. The sample included 581 middle-income students and 221 low-income students. Income status was classified according to participation in subsidized lunch programs as reported by school officials. For the purposes of this study, students paying for lunch were considered middle income and students receiving reduced costs for lunch or free lunch were considered low income. Twenty-six percent of low-income students reported living with both parents; 46% reported living with mother only. Sixty-four percent of middle-income families reported living with both parents; 13% reported living with mother only. The middle-income sample was 90% white ($N = 523$) and 10% black ($N = 58$). The low-income sample was 42% ($N = 93$) white and 58% ($N = 128$) black. The sample was roughly equally distributed by sex and grade level. Ninety percent of youth reported themselves to be Baptist. A survey on many aspects of family interaction and youth behavior were administered in classrooms.

Measures.—The 10-item psychological control subscale from the revised Children’s Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (CRPBI; Schaefer, 1965b; Schludermann & Schludermann, personal communication, 1988) was employed to measure psychological control (see Appendix A). The CRPBI has been the only existing parent-child assessment instrument that includes a specific measure of psychological control. The scale is typically considered single dimensional indexing such components as guilt induction, love withdrawal, and excessive pressure for change. However, some of the items appear ambiguous as to the extent to which they measure control of psychological processes per se versus control of behavior, such as “is always telling me how I should behave” and “only keeps rules when it suits her/him.” Because of this conceptual ambiguity and because an intent of this study is to define a measure of psychological control that is generalizable across diverse populations, the subscale was submitted to factor analysis using oblimin rotation to allow for correlation among factors.

Analyses were conducted separately for youth reports of mother and father psychological control on successive subsamples of Whites, Blacks, middle-income, and low-income youth, in every case with separate analyses for male and female adolescents (16 separate analyses). Criteria for item retention were that items must have a primary loading of at least .50 and that the spread between a primary and secondary loading must be at least .20. The two ambiguous items mentioned above did not survive this procedure. Further, two items measuring guilt induction (Items 1 and 2, Appendix A) loaded consistently apart from the others and were removed. The remaining six items defined one factor when the full data set was analyzed as well as in a majority of the subsample analyses. In the few cases that a dual factor solution was achieved, it was the love withdrawal items (Items 8-10, Appendix A)
which loaded separately. Table 1 presents the item text, factor loadings, Cronbach’s alpha, means, and standard deviations for the four parent-child dyads using the full sample. Alphas for scales computed on the subsamples ranged from .69 (fifth-grade females) to .81 (White males) for perceived psychological control from mothers, and from .69 (fifth-grade females) to .82 (tenth-grade males) for perceived psychological control from fathers. The response pattern for these items was a three-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, “Not like her (him),” to 3, “A lot like her (him).” Thus, higher scores indicated greater perceived control.

Behavioral control was measured with a five-item monitoring scale often used in family research with adolescents (e.g., Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993). Students responded on a three-point Likert-type scale from 1, “Doesn’t know,” to 3, “Knows a lot,” relative to how much their parents “really know”: (a) “Where you go at night,” (b) “Where you are most afternoons after school,” (c) “How you spend your free time,” and (e) “Who your friends are.” As with psychological control, higher scores indicated higher levels of behavioral control. Monitoring was used as the measure of behavioral control because it appears to be a particularly reliable and powerful index of family management and regulation (Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984). Cronbach’s alpha for the full sample was .81 for males’ reports of parents and .80 for females’ reports of parents. Subsample alphas ranged from .75 (Black females) to .82 (middle-income males). Correlations between behavioral control and psychological control were consistently negative, ranging from −.17 (mother-son dyad) to −.26 (mother-daughter dyad).

The Anxious/Depressed and Delinquent subscales scores of the Child Behavior Checklist—Youth Self-Report (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1987) were used to measure internalized and externalized problem behaviors, respectively.

Results

Analysis of variance.—Analysis of variance was used to test variations in mean levels of psychological control and behavioral control across the population subgroups. For youth reports of mothers’ psychological control, main effects were found for race, $F = 10.95$, $p = .001$, with Black youth reporting more control ($M = 1.73$, SD = .53) than White youth ($M = 1.59$, SD = .51), and income level, $F = 29.26$, $p < .001$, with poorer youth ($M = 1.80$, SD = .54) reporting more control than higher-income youth ($M = 1.55$, SD = .50). Also, an interaction between sex and grade was found, $F = 4.33$, $p = .013$, showing fifth-grade males reporting more control ($M = 1.82$, SD = .56) than fifth-grade females ($M = 1.59$, SD = .53). For youth reports of fathers’ psychological control, the same main effect for income level was found, $F = 6.25$, $p = .013$, with poorer youth reporting more control ($M = 1.67$, SD = .53) than higher-income youth ($M = 1.57$, SD = .51). In addition, an interaction between income and grade was discerned, $F = 2.74$, $p = .065$, where low-income fifth ($M = 1.79$, SD = .54) and eighth graders ($M = 1.65$, SD = .54) reported more control from fathers than did middle-income fifth ($M = 1.60$, SD = .48) and eighth graders ($M = 1.52$, SD = .52), but with middle-income tenth graders ($M = 1.62$, SD = .52) reporting more control than low-income tenth graders ($M = 1.50$, SD = .45).

Regression.—Hierarchical regression analyses were used to test for the associations between psychological and behavioral control and youth depression and delinquency. So that obtained results would be net of the effect of membership in one or more of the study’s subsamples, youth grade, social class, and race were included as control variables. Also, because of strong correlations between subscale scores of the CBC, the opposing problem behavior type (i.e., internalized and externalized) was used as a control variable in the regression analyses to partial out this comorbidity and isolate the more purely internalized and externalized aspects of each measure of problem behaviors. Further, the opposing form of control was added to the list of independent variables in order to determine the unique effect of the two forms of control. Thus, when depression was the dependent variable, grade (fifth, eighth, tenth), social class (low income, middle income), race (White, Black), delinquency, and behavioral control were entered first. In the next step, psychological control was entered to determine the extent to which it explained unique variance after partialing out the effects of behavioral control and all control variables. The next model entered the control variables and psychological control in the first step and then behavioral control in the second step to determine its unique contribution to depression. The theory postulated that psychological control
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Control (Child Report of Parent Behavior Inventory)</th>
<th>Mother/ Son</th>
<th>Mother/ Daughter</th>
<th>Father/ Son</th>
<th>Father/ Daughter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is always trying to change me</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Wants to control whatever I do</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Would like to be able to tell me what to do all the time</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is less friendly with me if I do not see things her (his) way</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Will avoid looking at me when I have disappointed her (him)</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If I have hurt her (his) feelings, stops talking to me until I please her (him) again</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent variance</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach's alpha</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(compared to behavioral control) would be the strongest predictor of depression. Therefore, it was expected that psychological control would explain more unique variance in depression than would behavioral control.

This procedure was then repeated with delinquency as the dependent variable. In the first run, depression was entered with behavioral control and the control variables, then psychological control. In the second run, behavioral control was entered in the second step. Since the theory postulated that behavioral control would be the stronger predictor of delinquency, it was expected that these analyses would show that it explained more unique variance in delinquency than in psychological control.

Table 2 reports the findings of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses for the four parent-child dyads. The table includes the bivariate and standardized regression coefficients for psychological control and behavioral control as predictors of depression and delinquency, the change in $R^2$ (and the corresponding $F$ and $p$ values) for psychological and behavioral control when each was entered last in the equation, and the overall $F$, degrees of freedom, and adjusted $R^2$ when all independent variables (control and predictor) were present.

Coefficients for the control variables are not included in the table for ease of presentation. With depression as the criterion variable, neither income level nor grade were significant predictors for any of the four parent-child dyads. Race was consistently negatively related to depression (higher for Blacks), but only reached significance for the mother-daughter dyad ($\beta = -0.23$). Delinquency was significant for all dyads (average $\beta = 0.25$). With delinquency as the criterion variable, neither income level nor race was predictive in any dyad. Grade level (average $\beta = 0.16$) and depression (average $\beta = 0.23$) were positively significant for all dyads.

It was hypothesized that psychological control, compared to behavioral control, would demonstrate unique predictive power for internalized behavior such as depression, and the reverse for externalized behavior such as delinquency. Evidence relating to these propositions is found by comparing values in column 3 (unique variance explained by psychological control) with values in column 7 (unique variance explained by behavioral control). When evaluating these findings, it should be kept in mind that it is the relative variance explained (i.e., unique variance explained by psychological control compared to unique variance explained by behavioral control) rather than the absolute amount of variance explained by either form of control that is most informative. Large amounts of unique variance explained were not expected because the variance explained by the alternative form of control, the opposing problem behavior type, and the demographic variables had already been partialled out.

Both hypotheses were supported. Significant unique variance in depression was explained in all four dyads by psychological control (average across dyads = 0.033) and in no case by behavioral control. (The higher the reported psychological control, the higher the depression.) Further as expected, behavioral control explained substantially more unique variance in delinquency (average across dyads = 0.085) than did psychological control, which explained significant variance (0.02) only for the mother-son dyad. (The higher the reported behavioral control, the lower the delinquency.)

Study 2

There are good reasons to believe that self-reports from children may be the most valid way to measure psychological control since feeling controlled, devalued, manipulated, and criticized is very much a subjective experience. However, it is also of interest to determine if such controlling behaviors can be observed. The purpose of the second study was to develop and test an observational coding scheme for psychological control.

Method

Subjects.—Subjects were participants in the Adolescent Transitions Program, an intervention program conducted by the Oregon Social Learning Center beginning in 1988 which was designed to provide preventative interventions for high-risk families with a child facing the transition to adolescence (see Dishion & Andrews, 1995). Families ($N = 158$) were self-referred and selected based on a telephone screening for the presence of several dimensions of child risk (e.g., relationship with parents, emotional adjustment, family substance abuse, stress, etc.). The average age of the children ($N = 83$ males, 75 females) was 12. Ninety-five percent of the families were European American.
TABLE 2

Hierarchical Regressions of Youth Criterion Variables on Psychological Control and Behavioral Control, by Sex of Parent and Sex of Youth (Controlling for Youth Delinquency, Age, Race, SES, and Religious Affiliation) (Tennessee)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Problems</th>
<th>Psychological Control</th>
<th>Behavioral Control</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$r$ (1)</td>
<td>Beta$^a$ (2)</td>
<td>$\Delta R^{2b}$ (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-son</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.19***</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-daughter</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-son</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-daughter</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.19***</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-son</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-daughter</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-son</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-daughter</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Standardized regression coefficient when all independent variables are present.
$^b$ Change in $R^2$ when entered last.
$^c$ $F$ for change in $R^2$. 
$^* p < .05$.
$^{**} p < .01$.
$^{***} p < .001$. 

### Table 3

Factor Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, Means, and Standard Deviations for Psychological Control Scale—Observer Report (PCS-OBS), by Sex of Youth and Parent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Control Scale—Observer Report</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Constrain verbal expressions</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Invalidating feelings</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Personal attack</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Guilt induction</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Love withdrawal</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Erratic emotional behavior</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent variance</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Measures.**—The videotaped family problem-solving task (Forgatch, 1989; Robin & Foster, 1989) was used to assess parent-child interactions. Before the videotaped interaction, parents and children identified potential conflict topics and rated the emotional valence of the topic. Topics rated by the parent and child as the “hottest” were selected and randomly ordered for discussion in each of two 10-min problem-solving sessions. The Family Process Code (FPC; Dishion, Gardner, Patterson, Reid, & Thibodeaux, 1983) was used to code interactions. The FPC is a micro social coding system that records family interaction in real time and captures the content and affective valence of the interaction. For the current analysis, the existing code for Family Management was used as the measure of behavioral control. This is a composite variable made up of coder impressions on monitoring, limit setting, relationship quality, problem solving, and positive reinforcement. The standardized item alphas were .73 for mothers and .73 for fathers.

It was necessary to create an observational measure of psychological control since none has existed to this point. This turned out to be a very valuable exercise because it demanded careful thinking about the behavioral components of the construct. Children can report on feeling controlled, but it is also important to know what parents specifically do that may fuel these perceptions. In developing this measure, I consulted the literature and colleagues from various related disciplines as well as students who described their experiences with their parents. This resulted in the formation of a macro-rating scale to assess the parent’s behavioral display of six theoretically relevant identifying characteristics of psychological control: constraining verbal expression, invalidating feelings, personal attack, guilt induction, love withdrawal, and erratic emotional behavior. The measure is labeled the Psychological Control Scale—Observer Rating (PCS-OBS). The full text of the descriptions given to coders for each of the dimensions is reported in Appendix B. Factor analysis of the six identifying characteristic scores with oblimin rotation produced a single factor solution for mothers’ psychological control and a two-factor solution for fathers’ psychological control, with love withdrawal, erratic emotions, and invalidating loading separately from attack, constraining, and guilt induction. Nevertheless, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were strong for both parents (.83 for mothers, .81 for fathers) when using the full set of items, and for the sake of consistency all items were retained for both parents. Results of the factor analysis (forcing one factor for fathers) are depicted in Table 3. Correlations between psychological control and family management were -.42 for mothers and -.38 for fathers.

Youth criterion variables were measured 1 year following the videotaped family interaction. Depression was measured by way of the Depressed Mood score from the parent version of the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children (DISC; Fisher, Shaffer, Wicks, & Piacentini, 1989). Delinquency was measured with the Delinquent subscale of the Child Behavior Checklist (parent report; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983).

**Results**

Means for observer reports of mother and father psychological control were the
same (see Table 3), and there were no demo-
graphic variables available to test subsample
variation. The regression procedure from
Study 1 was replicated separately on each
parent-child dyad. Results are shown in Ta-
ble 4. The expected unique association be-
tween psychological control and depression
was evident in the mother-daughter dyad,
but for the other dyads, psychological con-
trol was unrelated to depression, even at the
bivariate level. Contrary to expectations, be-
behavioral control had a unique association
with depression for the father-son dyad. As
for delinquency, the expected unique associ-
ation between behavioral control and del-
inquency was evident for the mother-son and
mother-daughter dyads but not for the
father-child dyads.

Study 3

Study 3 returned to a survey methodol-
ogy. This study had several purposes: (a) to
test a newly created self-report measure of
psychological control, one that is more be-
aviorally specific than the CRPBI and com-
patible with the observer ratings in Study 2,
(b) to vary the sample and the measurement
of the criterion variables to provide a validat-
ing test for the findings of Study 1, and (c)
to test the model with longitudinal data.

Method

Subjects.—Data come from an ongoing
4-year longitudinal study of 933 families
with adolescent children from Ogden, Utah.
A stratified random sample (Hispanic eth-
nicity) was drawn of fifth- and eighth-grade
classrooms in the Ogden school district in
1994. The sample was split equally between
male and female students and grade, and
was 71% White (16% Hispanic), 84% middle
income, and 46% Mormon. Income status
was determined by student response to the
question, “Compared to other kids your age,
how well-off do you think your family is?”
Responses ranged from 1, “We are a lot
poorer than most,” to 5, “We are a lot richer
than most” (see Pearlin, Lieberman, Men-
eghan, & Mullan, 1981). Categories 1 and 2
were collapsed to represent low-income
youth. Categories 3–5 were collapsed to rep-
resent middle-income youth. Forty-five per-
cent of low-income youth reported living
with both parents, 29% with mother only.
Fifty-seven percent of middle-income youth
reported living with both parents, 19% with
mother only. An extensive survey on family
interaction, personality, youth behavior, and
peer, school, and neighborhood experiences
were administered to the students in class.

Measures.—Items written to tap the
specific aspects of psychological control are
found in Appendix C. Items 1–3 measured
Constraining Verbal Expression; items 4–6
measured Invalidating Feelings; items 7–9
indexed Personal Attack; items 10–11 were
taken from the CRPBI to measure Guilt In-
duction; items 12–14 were also taken from
the CRPBI to measure Love Withdrawal;
and items 15–16 indexed Erratic Emotional
Behavior.

These 16 items were submitted to factor
analysis with oblimin rotation. Separate
analyses were conducted for sex of parent,
sex of youth, income level, race, and reli-
gious affiliation (a total of 24 separate analy-
ses). The same logic and criteria for item re-
tention from Study 1 was used with the
intent of defining a single-dimensional scale
of psychological control. With this proce-
dure, eight items were retained that formed
a single factor when utilizing the full data
set and on the majority of subsamples. As
was the case in Study 1, in a few exceptional
cases the love withdrawal items tended to
factor separately. Item content, factor load-
ings, and Cronbach’s alpha for the eight-
item scale are reported in Table 5. Alphas
for the individual subsamples ranged from
.72 (Hispanic females) to .85 (eighth-grade
males) for reports of psychological control
from mothers, and from .74 (low-income
males) to .86 (Hispanic males) for reports
of psychological control from fathers. The scale
retained the identifying characteristics of in-
validating feelings (Item 1), constraining
verbal expressions (Items 2–3), personal at-
tack (Items 4–5), and love withdrawal (Items
6–8). The scale has been labeled the
Psychological Control Scale—Youth Self-
Report (PCS-YSR).

Behavioral control was measured in the
same manner as in Study 1 except that stu-
dents reported separately on their mothers
and fathers. Alphas ranged from .64 (His-
panic females) to .80 (eighth-grade males)
for mother’s monitoring and from .81 (Mor-
mom males) to .90 (low-income males) for fa-
ther’s monitoring. As in the previous two
studies, correlations between behavioral
control and psychological control were con-
sistently negative, ranging from −.17 for the
mother-son dyad to −.37 for the mother-
daughter dyad.

Also in contrast to Study 1, Study 3 used
the Child Depression Inventory (CDI; Ko-
vacs, 1992) as a measure of depression. De-
linquency was measured by the Delinquent
subscale of the CBCL-YSR as in Study 1.
TABLE 4
HIERARCHICAL REGRESSIONS OF YOUTH CRITERION VARIABLES ON PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTROL AND BEHAVIORAL CONTROL, BY SEX OF PARENT AND SEX OF YOUTH (Oregon)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOUTH PROBLEMS</th>
<th>PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTROL</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>BEHAVIORAL CONTROL</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r (1)</td>
<td>Beta* (2)</td>
<td>ΔR^2b (3)</td>
<td>Fc (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>r (5)</td>
<td>Beta* (6)</td>
<td>ΔR^2b (7)</td>
<td>Fc (8)</td>
<td>F (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-son</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>4.37**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-daughter</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>4.84**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3, 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-son</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>-.39*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>4.87*</td>
<td>5.80**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-daughter</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>3.67*</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>5.25**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3, 36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delinquency:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-son</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>4.66*</td>
<td>6.45***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-daughter</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>4.02*</td>
<td>7.00***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3, 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-son</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>3.50*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-daughter</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>4.02*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3, 36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Standardized regression coefficient when all independent variables are present.

b Change in R^2 when entered last.

c F for change in R^2.

* p < .10.

** p < .05.

*** p < .01.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Control (Psychological Control Scale—Youth Self-Report)</th>
<th>Mother/ Son</th>
<th>Mother/ Daughter</th>
<th>Father/ Son</th>
<th>Father/ Daughter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is always trying to change how I feel or think about things</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Changes the subject whenever I have something to say</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Often interrupts me</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Blames me for other family members’ problems</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Brings up past mistakes when she (he) criticizes me</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Is less friendly with me if I do not see things her (his) way</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Will avoid looking at me when I have disappointed her (him)</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. If I have hurt her (his) feelings, stops talking to me until I please her (him) again</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent variance</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Anova.—Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations for the PCS-YSR for the four parent-child dyads. Analysis of variance was used to test for differences by sex of youth, sex of parent, grade (fifth, eighth), income (low, middle), race (White, Hispanic), and religious affiliation (non-Mormon, Mormon). For youth reports of mothers’ psychological control, main effects were found for race, \( F = 8.36, p = .004 \), and sex, \( F = 10.52, p = .001 \), with Hispanics (\( M = 1.60, SD = .49 \)) reporting more control than Whites (\( M = 1.46, SD = .46 \)), and males (\( M = 1.54, SD = .49 \)) reporting more control than females (\( M = 1.44, SD = .46 \)). An interaction between race and sex, \( F = 5.63, p = .018 \), indicated that Hispanic males (\( M = 1.74, SD = .54 \)) reported more control than White males (\( M = 1.49, SD = .47 \)) with no difference between groups of females. Further, a three-way interaction between grade, income, and religion was discerned, \( F = 4.21, p = .04 \), revealing that Mormon youth reported less control than non-Mormon youth overall; for the case of poorer Mormon families, but not less poor Mormon families, less control was reported by the older cohort (eighth grade).

For youth reports of fathers’ psychological control, the same main effects for race, \( F = 12.72, p < .001 \), and sex, \( F = 3.92, p = .048 \), were found. In addition, two three-way interactions were found for grade, race, and sex, \( F = 4.41, p = .036 \), and income, race, and religion, \( F = 3.95, p = .047 \). The first interaction revealed that in addition to the fact that Hispanic youth reported more control overall than did non-Hispanic youth, they were further distinguished by a reverse age pattern for males and females, with reported control by females increasing from fifth to eighth grade but decreasing for males. The second interaction showed that the equivalent reported control from both poor and less poor Mormon youth was the only exception to the pattern of higher reported control by poorer families.

The same procedure for the regression analyses from the previous studies was followed. The same control variables from Study 1 were used (grade, income, race) with the addition of religious affiliation (non-Mormon, Mormon). As for the control variables, income level was a significant negative predictor of depression (average beta = -.13, \( p < .01 \)) for all dyads. Delinquency was a consistent positive predictor of depression (average beta = .33, \( p < .001 \)).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Problems</th>
<th>Psychological Control</th>
<th>Behavioral Control</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
<td>Beta&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ΔR&lt;sup&gt;2b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-son</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-daughter</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-son</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-daughter</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delinquency:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-son</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-daughter</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.19***</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-son</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father-daughter</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.21***</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Standardized regression coefficient when all independent variables are present.
<sup>b</sup> Change in R<sup>2</sup> when entered last.
<sup>c</sup> F for change in R<sup>2</sup>.
* p < .05.
** p < .01.
*** p < .001.
TABLE 7
BETAS, t, AND p VALUES FOR INTERACTION TERMS AND SUBSEQUENT
REGRESSION ANALYSES

Youth Problems | Standardized Beta | t  | p   |
----------------|-------------------|----|-----|
**Delinquency:** |                   |    |     |
Mothers:        |                   |    |     |
Psychological control × grade | -0.07 | -2.39 | 0.02 |
Psychological control—fifth grade | 0.27 | 5.94 | 0.00 |
Psychological control—eighth grade | 0.17 | 5.59 | 0.00 |
Fathers:        |                   |    |     |
Psychological control × grade | -0.07 | -2.34 | 0.02 |
Psychological control × grade × sex | 0.06 | 1.85 | 0.06 |
Psychological control: |                   |    |     |
Fifth boys | 0.25 | 4.13 | 0.00 |
Fifth girls | 0.30 | 4.19 | 0.00 |
Eighth boys | 0.14 | 1.81 | 0.07 |
Eighth girls | 0.16 | 2.65 | 0.01 |
**Depression:** |                   |    |     |
Mothers:        |                   |    |     |
Psychological control × grade | 0.06 | 2.18 | 0.03 |
Fifth | 0.30 | 6.65 | 0.00 |
Eighth | 0.34 | 8.25 | 0.00 |
Fathers:        |                   |    |     |
Psychological control × grade | 0.06 | 1.96 | 0.05 |
Fifth | 0.25 | 5.48 | 0.00 |
Eighth | 0.29 | 6.08 | 0.00 |

Not presented here in detail are analyses utilizing the CRPBI as a measure of psychological control as was done in Study 1. All analyses were repeated to provide a comparison between the CRPBI and the new PCS. Using Study 3 data the CRPBI factored the same as in Study 1 and was reduced to the same six-item subset. Other analyses were essentially comparable with alphas for the CRPBI across subgroups marginally lower than the PCS and the predictive power of the CRPBI to the criterion variables somewhat less as well.

Finally, with data from the second wave just in it was possible to test the model across time. Data were collected from youth by mail in the second year. Eighty-three percent of the original sample provided data. All constructs were measured with the same items in both years. Structural equation analysis (LISREL VII; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989) was used to test the model over time. Figure 1 depicts the model using Year 2 parenting predicting Year 2 problem behaviors, controlling for Year 1 problem behaviors. The model replicated the findings from the regression analyses with psychological control significantly associated with both forms of problem behavior and behavioral control predicting delinquency only. These longitudinal findings contribute meaningfully to the understanding of the relations among parental control and youth difficulty in two ways. First, they provide important validation for the link between parental control...
and problem behaviors. Unlike the cross-sectional analyses, the longitudinal test controlled for the stability of problem behaviors from Year 1 to Year 2 and for the effect of previous problem behaviors on subsequent parenting. The fact that parental control still evidenced a significant association with Year 2 problem behaviors after these controls were implemented is important confirming evidence for the salience of psychological and behavioral control in the development of youth difficulty. The age and sex differences found in the regression analyses were no longer evident, however, when testing over time with the multiple group test function within LISREL.

The second contribution of the longitudinal findings is that they provide an indication of the reciprocal relations that may exist among these variables. As the figure shows, Year 2 psychological control was significantly predicted by Year 1 depression and delinquency. Parents of youth who were more depressed and delinquent the previous year employed higher levels of psychological control. Year 2 behavioral control was significantly predicted by Year 1 delinquency, such that parents exercised less behavioral regulation of youth who were more delinquent the previous year. Taken together, these findings hint that parents of troubled youth are more likely to increase their efforts to psychologically control their children while at the same time relaxing their behavioral control (of delinquent children), which in this case means less awareness (monitoring) of their children’s social networks and day-to-day activities. In addition to providing indications of child effects on parenting, this portion of the model also supplied further evidence of the particular associations between the types of control and problem behaviors. In these data, it appears that psychological control is associated with (predicts and is predicted by) both forms of youth difficulty, whereas behavioral control is uniquely related to (predicts and is predicted by) delinquency.

General Results: Summary and Discussion

In refocusing attention on the psychological control construct, this set of studies had three basic purposes: (1) to demonstrate that psychological control could be reliably and generally measured, (2) to verify its salience to aspects of youth development, and (3) to test the hypothesis that psychological control would have specialized associations with youth internalized problems, in con-
trast to the proposed specialized associations between behavioral control and externalized problems.

All three studies provide evidence that the construct of psychological control can be reliably measured. In the survey studies (Studies 1 and 3), care was taken to demonstrate reliability across samples, variety of measurement, sex of parent and youth, age, race, social class, and religious affiliation. The existing CRPBI was refined in both studies to a six-item measure useful for all subgroups. The eight-item PCS-YSR from Study 3 improves upon the CRPBI primarily because of the greater behavioral specificity of the items, rendering it more directly useful for intervention and prevention efforts. That it is compatible with the observational measure (PCS-OBS) from Study 2 is an additional advantage should the PCS-OBS be found useful in future studies. The PCS-YSR will be used in future work on this project.

The survey studies also showed that psychological control is a significant predictor of youth problem behaviors. These associations, whether with depression or antisocial behavior (delinquency), are noteworthy because they are net of the effects of the youth’s position in social strata, many of which themselves affect the level of problem behavior. More particularly, however, the associations illustrate the unique contribution of psychological control compared to behavioral control. Thus, beyond any variance shared by these two forms of control, psychological control was consistently found to be a salient factor in predicting problem behaviors. The longitudinal analyses also provided initial indications of reciprocal relations between psychological (and behavioral) control and youth problem behaviors.

The fact that psychological control was only salient for the father-daughter dyad in the observational data of Study 2 raises questions about potential sex differences and/or the eventual usefulness of observer rated psychological control. Perhaps psychological control is only influential to the extent that it is perceived as such by the child. Clarification requires larger and more varied data sets than the present one. Once broken down by sex of child, the sample sizes were quite small, which may have had an effect on the stability of the coefficients. It should be noted, also, that the analyses of these data represented a particularly demanding test: observer-rated psychological control predicting youth depression as reported by parents 1 year later.

There was mixed support for the hypothesized specialized effects of psychological versus behavioral control. As expected, psychological control explained unique variance in depression in Studies 1 and 3. Further evidence of its relation to internalized forms of functioning is appearing in analyses in which psychological control has been found to uniquely predict loneliness (Freeman & Barber, 1996) and eating disorders (Jensen & Barber, 1995) in adolescents. Further, in all three studies the proposed unique association between behavioral control and externalized problems was evident (only for the mother-child dyad in Study 2). This confirms and complements much past work on the risks for externalized behavior problems of inadequate behavioral regulation. However, the findings were not consistent for the proposed specialized association between psychological control and internalized problems. Psychological control was uniquely related to depression in Study 1, not predictive in Study 2, and equally predictive of both criterion variables in Study 3.

Because there is little research specifically measuring psychological control and its covariates, there is little to guide an explanation of this inconsistency. Post hoc analyses of a developmental effect demonstrated that the unexpected association with externalized problems does attenuate with age. This finding, paired with the increased association between psychological control and depression with age (Study 3), support the notion that psychological control has more general effects until which time that the controlled subject has achieved an identity sufficiently well formed to be threatened. However, this view can serve as a partial explanation at best because the interaction between psychological control and age did not fully account for the direct association between psychological control and delinquency in Study 3. The explanation is further limited by the failure to find developmental effects in the longitudinal analyses.

Why psychological control predicted delinquency in Study 3, therefore, remains an open question. Analyses not reported
here which used the same measures (CRPBI and CBC) for the predictor and criterion variables in Study 3 that were used in Study 1 eliminate the possibility of difference due to measurement variability and raise the question of sample differences. Although demographic variability was controlled in the studies presented here, there is the possibility that the model will function differently among the different subgroups that varied across the two studies (e.g., Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, Baptists, Mormons). Future analyses also will begin to focus on individual differences (e.g., child and parent personality, self-esteem, etc.) and contextual factors (e.g., levels of family stress and conflict) in an attempt to more precisely clarify the link between psychological control and youth characteristics, a link that is apparently more complex than that between behavioral control and youth problems.

At a more general level, a contribution of this set of studies has been to demonstrate the usefulness of disaggregating parenting typologies that have so predominated in much of the parenting literature. Although typological work, particularly that of Baumrind, has made very important contributions, merging constructs at the analytical level loses potentially valuable information. The analyses presented here suggest that psychological and behavioral control, common components of prevailing typologies, are meaningfully different. When measured independently, it becomes apparent that not only are they negatively related to each other as shown in all three studies, but they appear to function differently vis-à-vis discrete youth characteristics. With replication, such findings may benefit theory building and intervention/prevention efforts. This specificity may also aid in resolving some perplexing patterns of findings from past work. For example, the question of why some children of authoritarian parents are "subdued" and others "out of control" (McCoby & Martin, 1983, p. 44) may be partly explained by variations in the predominance of psychological control versus behavioral control in the families of the two sets of children.

Finally, three points are important to set this work on psychological control in the broader context of current work on parent socialization and child development. The first has to do with the distinction between parenting styles and parenting practices recently put forth by Darling and Steinberg (1993). Although the items measuring psychological control (at least in the PCS measures) index specific behaviors of parents, the self-reported construct would best be defined according to Darling and Steinberg's conceptualization as a parenting style and not a parenting practice. This is so because the construct is not measured in the context of a specific interaction; rather, it represents the extent to which the youth reporter perceives the controlling behaviors to describe his or her parent generally. This contrasts substantially, for example, from other work interested in describing parenting behaviors that occur during a specific interaction (e.g., where one family member tries to control another, as in Baumrind, 1967, 1971) or in response to a discrete event (e.g., a child's misdeed, as in Grusec & Goodnow, 1994).

Though Darling and Steinberg's (1993) conceptualization becomes somewhat unclear when they credit a parenting style (compared to a parenting practice) with parental beliefs, values, and emotions—even though little work actually measures these aspects of the parent—it is still easier to infer such from a construct that is measured as a general representation of parenting compared to a tactical behavior occurring in a specific context. In the end, then, the concept of style is useful potentially, as it may set a stage on which parenting practices take their meaning as Darling and Steinberg contend, but also because it signals a different direction in which explanations for parental behavior are sought. To the extent that psychological control represents a generalized pattern of behavior (style) that involves (endorses) constraining, invalidating, and emotionally manipulative behavior toward a child, then explanations of the source of such behavior lie more likely in the parent's own historical and emotional experience than in any specific event or interaction that may precipitate it. Thus, it would be of interest to investigate how the parent was reared, parental beliefs about child development and personal autonomy, as well as the parent's level of ego integration, self-esteem, and satisfaction in other interpersonal relationships.

The second point is to reinforce the finding that psychological control appears to be a consistently negative and inhibiting experience for children. The cross-sectional analyses in Study 3 showing that the associations between psychological control and problem behaviors vary as a function of age should not be misunderstood to mean that at some point this form of control is neutral or...
positive. To the contrary, there appears to be no compelling evidence for a positive function of such intrusive behavior. Some confusion on this point can arise when psychological control is not carefully distinguished from other forms of psychologically oriented parental behavior such as induction, which has been shown to enhance psychological and social development (see Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Hoffman, 1970; and Rollins & Thomas, 1979, for reviews). The one area that could be construed as controversial in this regard is love withdrawal, a defining characteristic of psychological control as measured here and previously. Yet, although at least one study has suggested a positive effect of love withdrawal for compliance (Chapman & Zahn-Waxler, 1981), it is not clear whether this is just a short-term effect, and there are more studies that suggest negative effects (see Maccoby & Martin, 1983). At best, perhaps, love withdrawal can be viewed in discrete interactions as a means to get a child to pay attention to the message to be communicated through the positive intervention of induction (Hoffman, 1994).

The last point has to do with the developmental relevance of psychological control. This set of studies has focused on youth approaching and proceeding through adolescence. It seems that psychological control is particularly relevant at this stage of the life course given the autonomy-oriented processes occurring in the form of identity development (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980) and transformations in family and peer relationships (Collins & Repinski, 1990; Steinberg, 1990; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Thus as young people more firmly define themselves as connected to—their significant others, it would be expected that intrusions into this process of self-formation would have negative consequences. Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that psychological control is only relevant to children at this advanced psychological and emotional age. If, in order to be sensitive to age-specific tasks and capacities of children, psychological control is conceptualized at a more abstract level as intrusion into the developing child's self-expression—whatever the form of that expression might be—then the construct becomes useful across the life course. Thus, a parent who regularly curtails an infant's attempts at motor movements, forbids the toddler's exploratory forays, or interferes with the beginning of reasoning capacities in the older child might be serving the same negative function as the parent who constrains, invalidates, or manipulates the adolescent's more clearly articulated expressions of psychological experience.

In sum, though there is more work to be done on psychological control, there appears to be good reason in future socialization research to include specific attention to parenting practices that constrain, invalidate, and manipulate a child's psychological and emotional experience and expression. The construct differs notably from more behaviorally oriented control, it is measurable across a broad spectrum of families, and it appears, at least when subjectively experienced and reported, to have consistently negative associations with youth competence.

**Appendix A**

**Psychological Autonomy versus Psychological Control (CRPBI; Schaefer, 1965b; Schludermann & Schludermann, personal communication, 1988)**

1 = Not like her (him); 2 = Somewhat like her (him); 3 = A lot like her (him)

My Mother (Father) is a person who . . .

1. tells me of all the things she (he) had done for me.
2. says, if I really cared for her (him), I would not do things that cause her (him) to worry.
3. is always telling me how I should behave.
4. would like to be able to tell me what to do all the time.
5. wants to control whatever I do.
6. is always trying to change me.
7. only keeps rules when it suits her (him).
8. is less friendly with me, if I do not see things her (his) way.
9. will avoid looking at me when I have disappointed her (him).
10. if I have hurt her (his) feelings, stops talking to me until I please her (him) again.

**Appendix B**

**Psychological Control Scale—Observer Report (PCS-OBS)**

Use the following scale for items below:
0 = Not true; 1 = Somewhat true; 2 = True; 3 = Very true

1. Constraining Verbal Expressions

Family members prevented or interfered with another family member's talking by behaviors such as: changing the subject, interrupting, speaking for the other, lecturing, switching topics, dominating the conversations, asking leading ques-
tions, or answering their own questions. Family members showed disinterest in what another family member had to say by ignoring the other's comments or by physical postures that communicate disinterest (e.g., looking or facing away from the child).

2. Invalidating Feelings
Family members invalidated the feelings of another family member by discounting, misinterpreting, or assigning a value (e.g., good/bad, right/wrong) to the feelings that were being expressed. Family members engaged in mind reading (e.g., say they know what the other is thinking or feeling). Family members were sarcastic or teasing when responding to the feelings being expressed.

3. Personal Attack on Child
Family members attacked the worth or place in the family of another family member by reminding the other of his or her responsibilities to the family, saying the other is not a responsible family member, or questioning the other's loyalty to the family. Family members brought up another member's past mistakes or embarrassing behaviors as evidence of the accused member's lack of worth. Family members blamed another for the other's own or the family's problems. Family members spoke in a very condescending or patronizing way to another member or acted as if they were a therapist to the other member.

4. Guilt Induction
Family members laid guilt trips on another family member by pointing out that another's behavior had a negative emotional impact on a family member, such as making them worry, feel sad or depressed, or lose self-esteem. Family members tried to evoke sympathy from another by enumerating all of the things they have done for the other. Family members played the role of martyr or continually blamed themselves for the other's problems. Family members said that if the other really cared for them, she or he would do or be what the family member expected.

5. Love Withdrawal
Family members threatened the withdrawal of their love or attention if another family member did not do or become what the other expected. Family members diverted their gaze, turned away, made a displeased facial expression, or physically left the interaction when another family member expressed something contrary to their expectations.

6. Erratic Emotional Behavior
Family members showed erratic emotional behavior in interaction with another family member by vacillating between caring and attacking expressions.

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Appendix C
Psychological Control Scale—Youth Self-Report (PCS-YSR)

1 = Not like her (him); 2 = Somewhat like her (him); 3 = A lot like her (him)

My Mother (Father) is a person who...

*1. changes the subject, whenever I have something to say.
*2. finish's my sentences whenever I talk.
*3. often interrupts me.
*4. acts like she (he) knows what I'm thinking or feeling.
*5. would like to be able to tell me how to feel or think about things all the time.
*6. is always trying to change how I feel or think about things.
*7. blames me for other family members' problems.
*8. brings up my past mistakes when she (he) criticizes me.
9. tells me that I am not a loyal or good member of the family.
10. tells me of all the things she (he) had done for me.
11. says, if I really cared for her (him), I would not do things that cause her (him) to worry.
12. is less friendly with me, if I do not see things her (his) way.
13. will avoid looking at me when I have disappointed her (him).
14. if I have hurt her (his) feelings, stops talking to me until I please her (him) again.
15. often changes his (her) moods when with me.
16. goes back and forth between being warm and critical toward me.

References

* Items retained after factor analysis and therefore constituting the final version of the PCS-YSR to be used in future work.


