

Parents, Task Values, and Real-Life Achievement- Related Choices

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Why does a child who is equally talented in mathematics and tennis decide to join the tennis team instead of the mathematics club? When time and resources are limited, what leads children to choose one activity instead of another? What role do parents play in children's activity choices? Numerous theories dealing with competence, expectancy, and control beliefs provide explanations for performance on different kinds of achievement tasks; however, many of these theories do not systematically address another important motivational question: What makes the individual *want* to do the task? Even if people are certain they can do a task, they may not want to engage in it. According to some of the modern expectancy-value theories (e.g., Eccles [Parsons] et al., 1983; Feather, 1982; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992), an individual's values for particular goals and tasks can help explain *why* a child chooses one activity over another.

Eccles (Parsons) and her colleagues have elaborated and tested an expectancy-value model of activity choice (e.g., Eccles, 1987; Eccles

[Parsons] et al., 1983; Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984; Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Meece, Eccles-Parsons, Kaczala, Goff, & Futterman, 1982; Meece, Wigfield, & Eccles, 1990) that focuses on the social psychological influences on choice and persistence (Figure 14.1). According to this model, the key determinants of choice will be the relative value and perceived probability of success of each available option. Expectancies and values are assumed to directly influence performance and task choice and to be influenced by task-specific beliefs such as self-perceptions of competence, perceptions of the task demands, and the child's goals (both short and long term) and self-schemas. These social cognitive variables, in turn, are influenced by the child's perceptions of other people's attitudes and expectations for them, by gender roles and activity stereotypes, and by their own interpretations of their previous experiences with achievement outcomes. Finally, the child's perceptions are influenced by the greater cultural milieu, socializers' beliefs, their own aptitudes or talents, and their previous achievement-related performances.

As can be seen by the arrows in Figure 14.1, socialization experiences and previous history are expected to influence children's perceptions and expectations of the world, which, in turn, inform their self-beliefs; these self-beliefs ultimately lead to future expectancies and task values that will guide their task choices. However, we are well aware that the relations between these constructs are not unidirectional, and we discuss bidirectional influences in some detail later in this chapter.

In the model, expectancies for success are defined as children's beliefs about how well they will do on upcoming tasks, either in the immediate or longer-term future. We have emphasized the distinctive contributions made by competence beliefs, expectations for success, and task values to achievement and choice in different domains (e.g., mathematics, English, sports). Various aspects of this model have been confirmed (e.g., Eccles, 1987; Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984; Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993; Meece et al., 1982; Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991), and our findings make it clear that task values play an important role in future plans and activity choices. For example, we find that even after controlling for prior performance levels, task values predict course plans and enrollment decisions in mathematics, physics, and English and involvement in sport activities (Eccles [Parsons] et al., 1983; Eccles et al., 1984; Eccles & Harold, 1991; Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Wigfield, 1994). In addition, we have found that parents' values and perceptions of their children's abilities play a role in socializing the children's self-perceptions and activity values (e.g., Eccles [Parsons] et al., 1983; Jacobs, 1991; Jacobs & Eccles, 1992). Thus, for the remainder of this chapter, we focus on the importance of subjective task values and the role parents play in shaping them.

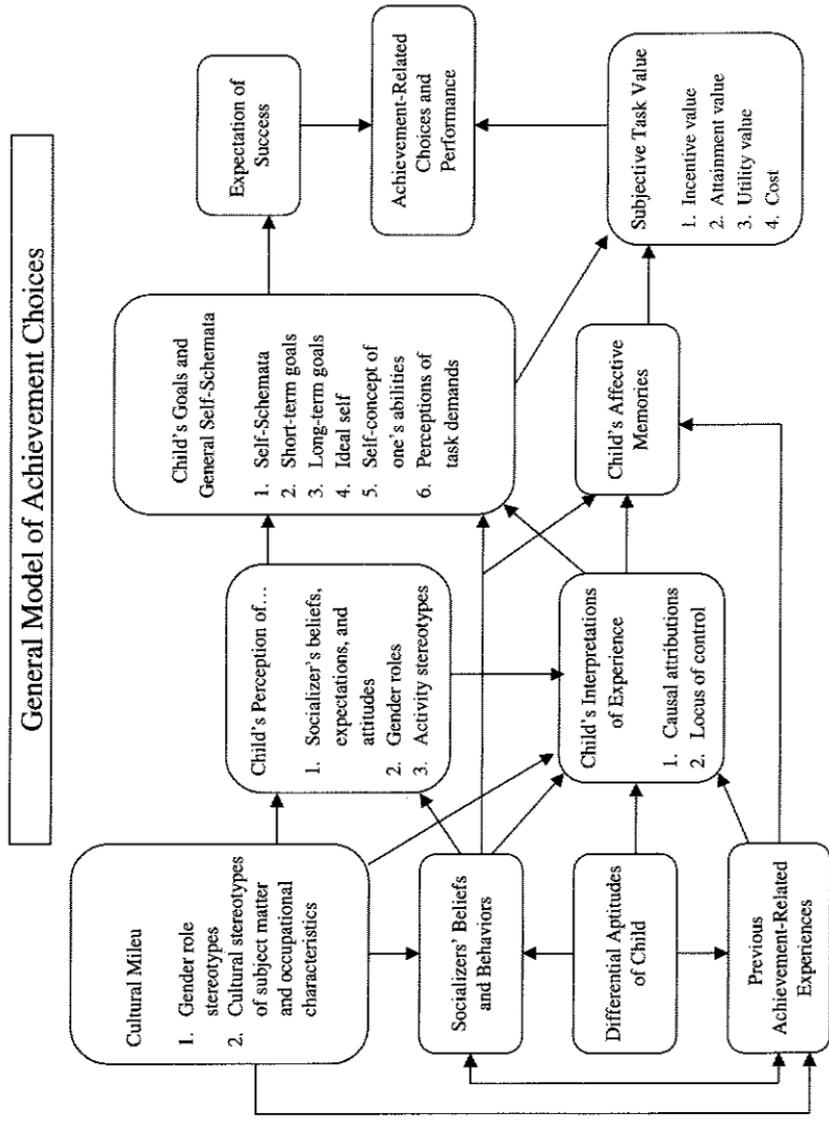


FIGURE 14.1
 General model of achievement choices.

IMPORTANCE OF VALUES

Our empirical findings and those of others highlight the importance of values, interest, and engagement in activities, in addition to other constructs that are traditionally featured in theories of motivation, such as expectancies for success, attributions, or locus of control. This slight change in focus is tantamount to changing the question from "Can I do this task?" to "Do I want to do this task?" Several theorists have begun to expand the value construct to answer the second question.

Feather (e.g., 1988, 1992) broadened Atkinson's (1964) conceptualization of value by defining values as a set of stable, general beliefs about what is desirable. He integrated Rokeach's (1979) approach to values by arguing that they are a class of motives that affect behavior by influencing the attractiveness of different goals and, consequently, motivation to attain these goals. He confirmed these ideas by showing that values and expectancies are positively related for academic decisions and decisions to join political groups, suggesting that such decisions are influenced by more than the perceived difficulty of the task (Feather, 1982, 1988). However, his work was with college students and shed little light on the origins of task values.

Closely related to the work on values is the upsurge in the 1990s in research on the concept of *interest* (Alexander, Kulikovich, & Jetton, 1994; Hidi, 1990; Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 1992; Renninger & Wozniak, 1985; Schiefele, 1991; Tobias, 1994). These researchers differentiate individual and situational interest. Individual interest is a relatively stable evaluative orientation toward certain domains; situational interest is an emotional state aroused by specific features of an activity or a task. Two aspects or components of individual interest are distinguishable (Schiefele, 1991, 1996): feeling-related valences and value-related valences. *Feeling-related valences* refers to the feelings that are associated with an object or an activity itself—feelings such as involvement, stimulation, or flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, 1990). *Value-related valences* refers to the attribution of personal significance or importance to an object.

We have included the concept of task value in our model by building on earlier work on attainment values (e.g., Battle, 1965, 1966), intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (e.g., Deci, 1975), and Rokeach's view (1979) that values are shared beliefs about desired end states. We have outlined four motivational components of task value: attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost (Eccles [Parsons] et al., 1983). Like Battle (1965, 1966), we define *attainment value* as the personal importance of doing well on the task. We also link attainment value to the relevance of engaging in a task for confirming or disconfirming salient aspects of one's self-schema (see Eccles, 1984, 1987). This component is similar to the perspectives on values espoused by Feather (1982, 1988), Rokeach (1979), and Harackiewicz and Elliot (1998).

Intrinsic value is the enjoyment the individual gets from performing the activity, or the interest the individual has in the subject. This component of value is similar to the construct of intrinsic motivation as defined by Harter (1981) and by Deci and his colleagues (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan, Connell, & Deci, 1985). It is also akin to the constructs of interest and flow as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1990), Renninger (1990), and Schiefele (1991), although distinctions between interest and engagement while working on the task and general interest over time have since been discussed and tested by Sansone and her colleagues (Sansone & Harackiewicz, 1996; Sansone, Weir, Harpster, & Morgan, 1992). We have typically measured intrinsic value by using attitudinal items assessing general interest or liking for a task, similar to the "enjoyment scales" used to measure intrinsic motivation by others (e.g., Epstein & Harackiewicz, 1992; Harackiewicz & Elliot, 1993). However, it should be noted that although the measures are similar, intrinsic values in our model are considered a predictor of achievement outcomes (such as grades or activity choice), rather than the outcome measure of intrinsic motivation.

Utility value is determined by how well a task relates to current and future goals, such as career goals. A task can have positive value to a person because it facilitates important future career goals, even if she or he is not interested in the task for its own sake. For instance, students often take classes that they do not particularly enjoy but that they need in order to pursue other interests, to please their parents, or to be with their friends. In one sense, this component captures the more "extrinsic" reasons for engaging in a task. Indeed, Lepper and Gilovich (1982) suggested that the perceived instrumentality of a task can be a source of extrinsic motivation. An important question to explore, however, is how activity involvement that is extrinsically motivated in the beginning becomes intrinsically motivated over time.

Finally, we have identified *cost* as a critical component of value (Eccles [Parsons] et al., 1983; Eccles, 1987). Cost is conceptualized in terms of the negative aspects of engaging in the task, such as performance anxiety and fear of both failure and success, as well as the amount of effort that is needed to succeed and the lost opportunities that result from making one choice rather than another.

Before we proceed, it is important to discuss the relations among the four proposed components of task value, as well as developmental changes in task values. To determine whether the hypothesized components were empirically distinct, Eccles & Wigfield (1995) subjected responses from an adolescent sample representing all aspects of value (except cost) to a factor analysis. They were able to distinguish three clear task value factors: (1) perceived attainment value or importance, (2) intrinsic interest value, and (3) perceived utility value or usefulness. They also found no differences in the factor structure for younger (5th through 7th graders) versus older students

(8th through 12th graders), indicating that the distinctions between these dimensions of value exist at an early age and remain stable. In another study, however, Wigfield & Eccles (1992) found that children's subjective task values are less differentiated during early elementary school than later, with only two factors (interest and utility value) emerging for the younger children in mathematics, reading, and sports. This is consistent with Harter's proposition that children's achievement beliefs become more differentiated as they get older (Harter, 1990).

Wigfield and Eccles (1992) suggested that during the early elementary school grades, the subjective value of a task may be primarily characterized by children's interest in the task; thus, young children's choice of different activities may stem from their interest in those activities. At young ages, interests may shift fairly rapidly, so that children may try many different activities for a short time before deciding which activities they enjoy the most. During the early and middle elementary school grades, children's sense of the usefulness of different activities, especially for future goals, may not be very clear, and so this component may be understood only later. If such a shift in values for the same activity occurs, it would be tantamount to engaging in a task because of the intrinsic value of the task (interest) in childhood but staying engaged over time because of utility values (perceived usefulness). This might be seen as a shift from internal to external reasons for activity involvement. However, research with adults and with high school students suggests that interest or intrinsic value may continue to play an important and unique role in achievement choices and persistence (e.g., Jacobs, Finken, Griffin, & Wright, 1998; Sansone & Harackiewicz, 1996).

Despite the fact that these components of task value can be differentiated, the relations between each of them are not as easily distinguished. Eccles and Wigfield (1995) found that the correlations between intrinsic interest, importance, and utility values ranged between .51 and .79 in a sample of adolescents. They also found that the relations between each of the components of task values and self-perceptions of ability, effort required to succeed, and task difficulty were similar across constructs, although utility value had somewhat lower correlations with these constructs than did the other two. These findings suggest that although the components of task value are distinctive, they play similar predictive roles in our model.

In addition to the developmental changes in factor structure already noted, we have found that children value certain tasks less as they get older (see Eccles & Midgley, 1989, and Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, for reviews). For example, utility values (usefulness) and attainment values (importance) for mathematics, reading, instrumental music, and sports decrease across the elementary school years, and children's intrinsic values (interest) for reading and instrumental music show similar decreases over time whereas their intrinsic values for mathematics and sports do not

(Wigfield et al., 1997). In a follow-up study reporting on the same children but examining patterns for attainment values between 1st and 12th grades, we found that the declines for mathematics and sports values continued through high school. We also tracked similar declines in values for language arts through elementary school but found a slight leveling off or increase in attainment values for language arts in high school (Jacobs et al., 2000). These studies show the importance of examining children's subjective valuing of activities in different domains.

CONTEXTS IN WHICH CHILDREN LEARN TO VALUE ACTIVITIES

Task values can develop only within the contexts of children's lives; thus, as developmentalists, we believe that it is important to consider the conditions under which children begin to value one set of activities over another. For example, children are unlikely to begin to value activities that do not match either their social identities or their personal identities. Similarly, they are unlikely to develop task values in contexts in which they feel incompetent, have no control, or feel unsupported. Research on each of these contextual considerations, as well as the importance of a good "fit" between the child's developing values and the environment, is discussed in this section.

Social Identity

Examples of social identities that we know influence children's and adolescents' task values are gender, race, ethnicity, and peer group membership in adolescence. A major focus of our work has been gender differences in children's values in different domains. We have found gender-role stereotypic differences for sports, social activities, English, and music (Eccles et al., 1989; Eccles et al., 1993; Jacobs et al., 2000; Wigfield et al., 1991) across age groups. As a child, one of the ways to express one's gender identity is by participating in and valuing gender-appropriate activities. Data reported in 1999 from our longitudinal study on childhood and beyond (Altenburg-Caldwell, Jacobs, & Eccles, 1999) suggested that participation in activities during elementary school is highly gender typed. Girls participate significantly more than do boys in art activities, hobbies, clubs, and individual competitive sports; however, boys participate in team sports significantly more than do girls. Not surprisingly, this behavioral instantiation of their social identities is related to children's intrinsic values. For example, those children who participate the most in team sports not only value sports the most but also value the arts the least, and those who participate in the arts have the lowest values for sports.

Although little research on ethnic and racial differences in task values across a variety of domains is available, research on the value of education suggests that there are few differences between the values that minority and majority children place on education; everyone has high education aspirations (e.g., Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990). However, several researchers have suggested that when minority children are confronted with barriers within the schools, they protect their self-esteem by lowering the value of academic competence. For example, self-concept of academic ability has been found to be less predictive of general self-esteem for some African American children than for other groups (Bledsoe, 1967; Winston, Eccles, & Senior, in press). In addition, ethnic minority families may differ in how much they discuss or use the categories of ethnicity or race. In some families, ethnicity may be very salient and may form the backdrop for decisions and discussions, whereas in other families, such topics may seldom be raised. Okagaki, Frensch, and Dodson (1996) reported that Mexican American parents' beliefs about racial barriers to their children's success were related to children's perceptions of barriers. In turn, children's perceptions of barriers were related to their attitudes toward school. This work suggests that a number of "social address" variables, like gender, race, and social class, contribute to children's task values via their links to social identity.

Personal Identity

In addition to social identity, individuals are constructing their personal identities as they move through childhood and adolescence. Unlike social identity, which is based on ascribed social categories, this is the part of the self-system that is typically thought of as "earned" on the basis of competence and interests, and the competence component is often labeled *self-competence* or *self-esteem*. An important consideration is the way in which values are related to perceptions of self-competence. Building on the work of James (1982/1963), Harter (1998) has suggested that self-esteem and motivation are enhanced when one values those activities at which one is competent. Extending this idea to the choices made between activity domains suggests the importance of considering the hierarchy of individuals' subjective task values and competence perceptions. According to this view, the ability to form congruent hierarchies of task values and competence beliefs should lead to higher self-esteem and continuing motivation, whereas incongruent hierarchies of beliefs will lead to negative self-esteem and lowered motivation. For example, individuals may cope with being incompetent in baseball by lowering the value they attach to it and by enhancing the value they attach to another sport or another activity domain. Harter (1990) found support for this view. In her study, those who valued activities at which they did not feel competent had lower self-esteem than did those who showed congruent patterns of values and competence.

Our research has shown that children's competence and expectancy beliefs relate positively to their subjective task values (e.g., Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). When Eccles and Wigfield (1995) examined the relations between competence beliefs and values in 5th through 12th graders, they found that children's beliefs about the importance and utility of different tasks correlated more highly with their competence beliefs as they got older. Wigfield (1994) asserted that children's competence beliefs may not relate to their valuing of different activities in the early years, leading children to pursue some activities in which they are interested, regardless of their competence during that period.

Universal Characteristics of Competence, Autonomy, and Relatedness

Although competence has been the focus of much research on the self-system, Connell and his colleagues (e.g., Connell, 1990; Connell & Wellborn, 1991) suggested that people have three universal and fundamental needs as they develop their self-systems: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Their model defined *competence* as the need to experience oneself as capable of producing desired outcomes and avoiding negative outcomes, *autonomy* as the need to experience a choice in activities, and *relatedness* as the need to feel securely connected to the social world and to see oneself as worthy of love and respect. Connell suggested that the self-system will be organized around one's appraisal of these three components and that one's sense of self will lead to further engagement in a task or disaffection with a task.

We would echo the importance of these components, but we suggest that although they are necessary for long-term engagement in a task, they may not be sufficient. The child may feel competent, autonomous, and emotionally connected about a given task but not necessarily see the task as highly valued. We see competence, autonomy, and relatedness as critical for creating contexts in which task values might develop. The values, in turn, are related to self-perceptions and to long-term engagement in particular tasks.

Many researchers have emphasized the importance of the development of *autonomy* in adolescence (e.g., Hill & Holmbeck, 1986; Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986); however, it may be important for the development of task values at a much earlier age. Having the autonomy to choose some tasks and to discard others seems critical for the development of task values. Ryan and his colleagues have argued that one of the most important dimensions of autonomy is self-regulation (e.g., Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1993; Ryan & Lynch, 1989). They defined *self-regulation* as the degree to which children feel that their actions are autonomous and self-initiated versus controlled by others (Ryan & Connell, 1989). Perceptions of autonomy related to regulating one's own behaviors to reach personal goals are expected to be related to higher value for the activity and greater engagement in it over

time. This pattern has been found for academic achievement (e.g., Connell & Ryan, 1987; see Ryan, Connell, & Deci, 1985, for review), showing that children who experience clear expectations, feel that they have choices about how to reach their goals, and receive consistent feedback from teachers understand what it takes to be successful in school and have higher perceived competence for academic tasks. When teachers do not provide support for students' needs for autonomy, interest and liking for the subject matter decline (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989); in addition, during the transition to junior high school, young adolescents are more likely to feel competent and to value schoolwork if they have some autonomy about choosing the activity (e.g., Midgley & Feldlaufer, 1987).

Another of the components listed as universal by Connell and colleagues and the one we have researched the most is perceived *competence*. Perceptions of competence have been linked to activity choice and achievement in numerous studies, so it is clear that a child who does not feel competent at an activity is not likely to want to continue to be involved in that activity. We know from our longitudinal analyses that children's beliefs about their own competence and the value they place on activities in most domains decrease with increasing grade level in school (Eccles et al., 1993; Jacobs et al., under review; Wigfield et al., 1997). In addition, stereotypic gender differences in competence beliefs and task-value perceptions are also apparent, but these neither interact with grade level nor change much over time. Thus, by the first grade, boys have a more positive view of their mathematics, computer, and sports abilities than do girls and girls rate their tumbling, social, and language arts abilities higher than do boys. Despite mean-level declines with age, children's self-perceptions of competence become more stable as they proceed through elementary school (Yoon, Wigfield, & Eccles, 1993) and their perceptions become more highly related to actual performance (Nicholls, 1979; Parsons & Ruble, 1977; Stipek, 1981).

The last part of the supportive context that we discuss here is the child's access to positive *relationships* with others. Researchers have often emphasized the importance of relatedness (Connell & Wellborn, 1991), emotional support (Deci & Ryan, 1985), or connectedness (Barber, Olsen & Shagle, 1994) for children's mental health, self-esteem, and achievement motivation. It is clear that most researchers find that an emotionally warm and caring tie to others is critical for healthy development, beginning in infancy with attachment to parents (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) and continuing into older adulthood (Carstensen, 1992). Our work has focused on the nature of children's emotional relationships with their parents and how these connections may be related to developing values and activity choices. As might be expected, perceptions of high levels of connectedness and emotional support from parents are related positively to both psychological and behavioral indicators of successful development (Eccles, Early,

Frasier, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1996). This relationship holds in adolescence, even when children begin to establish other strong relationships with peers and to gain some independence from parents (Ladd & Le Sieur, 1995).

Person–Environment Fit

A major feature of contexts in which task values develop is the goodness of fit between the individual and the environment—children are likely to value tasks and to engage in them only when the opportunities found in their environments match their interests, competencies, and developmental level. The concept of person–environment fit has typically been used in the achievement literature to refer to the match between an individual's needs and talents and the particular education environment that is available. The concept has been refined further to focus on the importance of the education environment's match to the developmental needs of the child. For example, Hunt (1975) suggested that a teacher not only needs to take a student's current needs into account when providing classroom structure but should also view these needs on a "developmental continuum along which growth toward independence and less need for structure is the long-term objective" (Hunt, 1975, p. 221). Drawing on this work but focusing on the fit between changes in school organization and academic motivation, several researchers have used the term *stage–environment fit* to explain declines in motivation and performance that occur after the transition to middle school or junior high (e.g., Eccles, 1993; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Eccles and Midgley (1989) have provided evidence on the importance of stage–environment fit during the transition to junior high school, showing that a mismatch between early adolescents' needs and the structure of junior high and middle schools affects their self-perceptions of competence and perceptions of the school environment.

Person–environment fit may also be applied to the child's fit within the family. Just as the school environment needs to be developmentally appropriate, the home environment needs to be structured to allow for developmental differences in the formation of activity choices and values. As children mature, parents' roles in activity choice may change and they may begin to "react" to children's ideas about activity involvement rather than to initiate all aspects of involvement. This means that the parent needs to be sensitive to developmental changes that may signal greater need for autonomy of choice but to continue to provide appropriate rules and guidance about how to make such choices. There may also be a mismatch if the child's values or abilities do not fit the expectations of the parents. For example, if the parents' activity value hierarchy is both rigid and inconsistent with the child's relative competencies, the child may be at risk of lowered self-esteem because she/he cannot lower the values for areas of less competence without encountering negative feedback from the parents.

SOCIALIZATION FOR TASK VALUES

We have just discussed a variety of features of contexts in which task values are likely to flourish. Although many experiences (e.g., teams, lessons, school) and a variety of socializers (e.g., parents, teachers, peers) help provide these contexts and shape children's values, here we focus primarily on the role of parents. Over the years, numerous studies have linked parenting practices to children's achievement motivation (see Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998, for review); however, few researchers have focused on how parents motivate their children to do different things or to value different activities.

The model of parent socialization set forth by Eccles (Parsons) et al. (1983) is presented in Figure 14.2. As indicated in the model, we believe that characteristics of the parents, family, and neighborhood and characteristics of the child will influence parents' behaviors and their general beliefs about the world, as well as their specific beliefs about the child. We expect these beliefs to then influence their parenting behaviors, which, in turn, will affect child outcomes. Examples of each of these constructs are given in the figure. Although the model is drawn in a linear fashion and the original model (Eccles [Parsons] et al., 1983) proposed a causal sequence, it is important to acknowledge that parents' and children's beliefs are likely to influence each other reciprocally and that different beliefs depicted as a single construct in the model are likely to influence each other (e.g., values and competence beliefs).

In this chapter, we focus on the three boxes in the middle of Figure 14.2, depicting parents' general beliefs and behaviors, parents' child-specific beliefs, and parenting behaviors. Although several examples of each construct are listed in the figure, here we focus on only the following four ways in which parents influence their children: (1) by the general social-emotional climate they offer and by their general child-rearing beliefs, (2) by providing specific experiences for the child (e.g., enrollment in lessons, involvement in religious activities), (3) by modeling involvement in valued activities, and (4) by communicating their perceptions of the child's abilities and expectations for performance.

The environment, role modeling, and messages that parents provide regarding the value they attach to various activities are expected to influence children's motivation to pursue any particular activity. Over time, children construct their own values for particular activities and integrate these values into their self-systems. Ultimately, the values that are incorporated into one's self-beliefs will affect future task choices. (It is important to remember, however, that the influence between self-beliefs and values is bidirectional.) Parent's roles may shift in this process from providing exposure, opportunities, and role modeling in the early phases of activity choice to providing encouragement and guidance for activities that continue to be supportive of the child's developing self-systems. We have tested and found support for each of the four components of parent influence (e.g., Eccles,

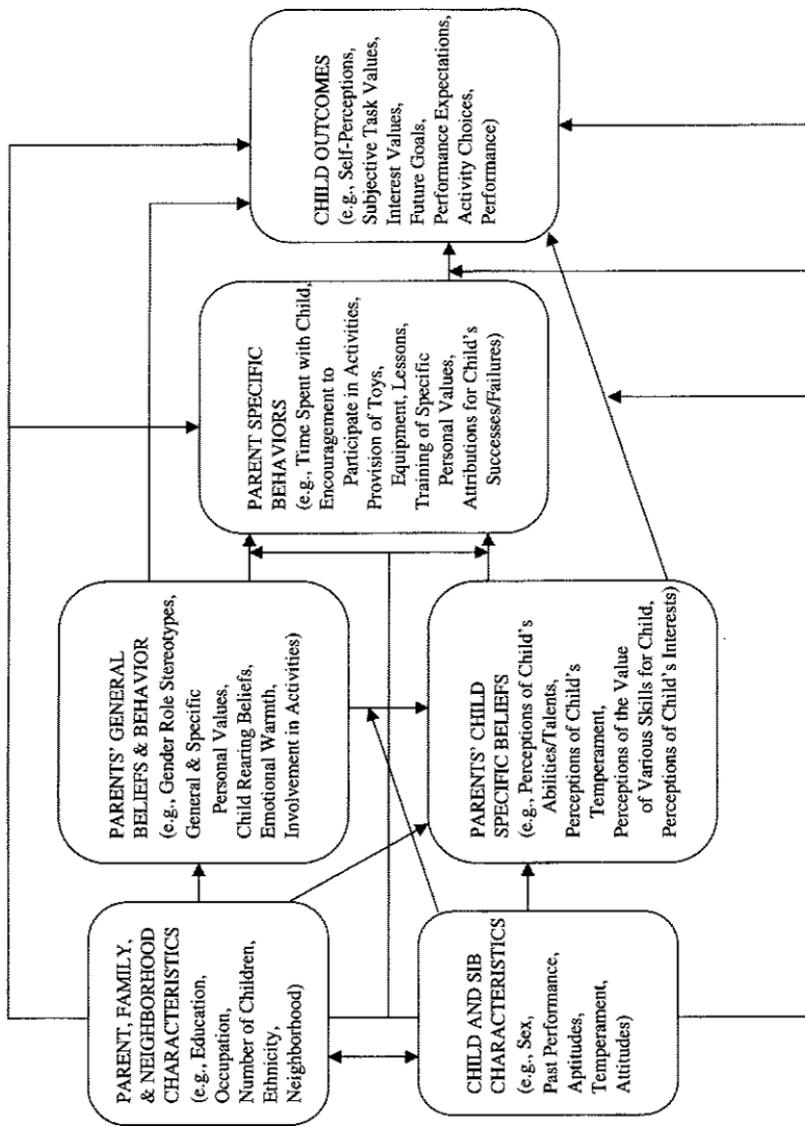


FIGURE 14.2
Parental socialization model.

1994; Eccles [Parsons] et al., 1983; Jacobs, 1991; Jacobs & Eccles, 1985, 1992). Our findings on each are briefly reviewed below.

Social-Emotional Climate and General Beliefs

Warmth and relatedness have often been connected with successful parental socialization. Although we have not emphasized this construct, Eccles et al. (1996) found that perceived high levels of connectedness and emotional support were positively related to both psychological and behavioral indicators of successful development during early adolescence, particularly for girls. We have also found support for the impact of parental emotional support during childhood on later adolescent behaviors and parent-adolescent relationships. For example, we found that parents' reports of perceived closeness to their elementary school-aged children are positively related to the children's perceptions of parent support, affection, and monitoring several years later during adolescence and negatively related to perceptions of parental strictness and involvement in problem behaviors (Jacobs, Hyatt, Tanner, & Eccles, 1998).

To test our hypotheses about general beliefs, we have considered gender stereotypes in several studies. For example, in two studies, we investigated the relationships among parents' gender-based stereotypes, their beliefs about their own children's abilities, and their children's self-perceptions and performance (Jacobs, 1991; Jacobs & Eccles, 1992). The first study focused on stereotypes, beliefs, and performance related to mathematical ability only. The second study involved three domains of ability (mathematics, sports, and social). Parents' gender stereotypes in both studies and in all domains directly influenced their perceptions of their children's abilities, resulting in more positive perceptions for children favored by the stereotypes (e.g., daughters for social skills, sons for mathematics and sports skills). Parents' perceptions, in turn, influenced their children's performance and their self-perceptions of their abilities in each domain, even after controlling for the child's previous performance. These findings suggest that parents hold general beliefs (stereotypes) that influence the way in which they interpret their children's performance, depending on individual characteristics of the children, such as gender. More important, their interpretations of that performance are conveyed to their children and tend to influence the children's self-perceptions and grades, ultimately carrying more weight than previous performance.

Provision of Specific Experiences for the Child

Parents structure children's experiences in a variety of ways that should affect self- and task values, skill acquisition, preferences, and choice. We have found that exogenous child and family characteristics (e.g., parents'

income, education, child sex, age) influence the experiences parents provide for their children primarily through their impact on parents' perceptions of their children's abilities and interests and parents' valuing of the activity domain. For example, parents were more likely to provide extra sports experiences for their children if they believed that the children were interested in the activity and had sports ability (Fredericks, 1999). This is a good example of the reciprocal nature of parent-child attitudes: parents are using the feedback they receive from the child, as well as their own assessment of the child, to inform their decisions about which opportunities to provide. Not surprisingly, parents often provide experiences for their children that fit existing expectations for gender-appropriate activities. For example, in one study (Altenburg-Caldwell et al., 1999), we found that parents provide equal numbers of organized activities during early middle childhood for girls and for boys but that the activities provided differ by gender.

Modeling Involvement in Valued Activities

The importance of role models in socializing behavior has been well documented in the developmental literature (e.g., Bandura & Walters, 1963). According to this work, parents exhibit behaviors that children may later imitate and adopt as part of their own repertoire. Role models' influence may include the messages they provide about their beliefs regarding their own abilities and about their values in general, and previous work suggests that children perceive these messages accurately. The ways in which parents spend their time, the choices they make between available activities, and the sense of self-competence that they project send strong messages to their children about activities that are valued and about acceptable ways to spend time. To test this facet of parental influence, we have included numerous indicators of parents' practices and involvement in different types of activities. Our findings support the importance of modeling that has often been reported in experimental studies. For example, we have found that children's perceptions of their parents' enjoyment of mathematics are significantly correlated with the parents' self-reports of past and present mathematical ability, difficulty with mathematics, and the effort needed to do well in mathematics. In addition, children who see their parents do household mathematics (e.g., balancing a checkbook) believe that their parents like mathematics more than those whose parents do not engage in mathematical activities at home (Eccles-Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982).

Communicating Ability Perceptions and Future Expectations

We have found that parents' perceptions of their children's abilities and their expectations for the children's future success have a large impact on

children's developing perceptions of self-competence (e.g., Eccles-Parsons et al., 1982; Jacobs & Eccles, 1992). In these studies, parents' perceptions of their children's abilities, their expectations for their children's success, and their gender stereotypes predict children's self-perceptions of competence and their actual achievement, even after previous indicators of achievement are controlled. Although parents are clearly forming their opinions about the child's ability on the basis of such objective indicators as grades and performance in sports competitions, it appears that the direction of influence for perceptions of competence is from parents to children and that parents' views of their children's abilities are quite stable over time (Yoon et al., 1993).

PARENTAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF TASK VALUES: DILEMMAS FOR PARENTS AND RESEARCHERS

Although it is clear that parents play a role in the socialization of activity engagement and values, it is not always clear exactly what the parameters of that role should be. As suggested earlier, parents may influence their children's values and choices in many ways; however, both researchers and parents have trouble defining the optimal levels of encouragement, reward, and guidance when trying to initiate or maintain a child's value for an activity. This was exemplified in the research community by an article questioning whether the detrimental effects of reward found in some research studies are myth or reality (Eisenberger & Cameron, 1996) and by the scholarly exchange that followed about the conditions under which either the myth or the reality (or both) might be true (Hennessey & Amabile, 1998; Lepper, 1998; Lepper, Keavney, & Drake, 1996; Sansone & Harackiewicz, 1998). Although researchers may phrase their questions in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, parents are posing the same questions when they ask: Should I reward my son to get him involved or to keep him involved in an activity I value? When do I let my daughter decide to stop practicing or attending an activity? Will I undermine his interest if I push too hard, seem to value it too much, or reward participation? When is she doing it for me rather than for herself?

At the heart of many of these questions is the notion that there is a clear dichotomy between the intrinsic rewards and extrinsic rewards of activity participation; if something is extrinsically rewarded, it cannot be intrinsically rewarding at the same time. Although this concept might be inferred from the early social psychological work on the topic (e.g., Deci, 1971; Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973) that found decreases in perceived intrinsic motivation when extrinsic rewards were introduced, the dichotomy is not an essential part of more recent thinking on the topic in either the develop-

mental literature (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985) or in the adult literature (e.g., Harackiewicz, Abrahams, & Wageman, 1987; Lepper et al., 1996). Indeed, this issue is addressed in two chapters within this book (see chapters 2 and 10). Ryan, Deci, and their colleagues have suggested that the critical element is not whether external rewards are used but how they are used and how they are perceived by the child (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991). They have found that rewards undermine intrinsic motivation when they detract from the individual's sense of autonomy and initiative by attempting to control behavior. Autonomous behavior is initiated and regulated by actions that emanate from one's core sense of self, whereas controlled behavior is the result of yielding to pressure from some other force (this could be external pressure or intrapsychic pressure). They suggested that children are more likely to internalize parents' goals when parents provide support for autonomy versus using controlling techniques and that autonomy support facilitates persistence at a task when no external support is present (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan, 1993). In support of this theory, they found that children whose parents used more "autonomy supportive" techniques versus controlling techniques had children who reported more internalized achievement values (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989) and that children's perceptions of parents' autonomy support predict both internalization of academic values and perceived competence (Grolnick et al., 1991). Thus, there is no clear distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic parenting techniques but a focus on the meaning of the parenting behavior and the potential for the motivational support to become internalized.

Even if some activities can be both internally and externally motivated or if some activities can make the transition from being extrinsic sources to intrinsic sources of motivation, there is still an inherent tension between socializers' external reinforcement of an activity and the child beginning to internalize a value for that activity. In addition, the parent still faces the dilemma of knowing how and when to provide and to withdraw the extrinsic supports that may initially engage or maintain the child's participation in the activity. Consider the following examples:

Parent A plays tennis and sees it as a great way to exercise and as a lifelong kind of activity. She encourages her daughter to take tennis lessons, and her daughter complies because she can see how much her mother likes the sport and because she will get to spend time with her mother when they play together. However, after two lessons, the daughter hates it and does not want to return for more lessons. She tells her mother that she agreed to the lessons only to please her mother and now she does not want to continue. Her mother insists that she continue to take lessons until she has learned enough to be able to play. After 2 months of battling about lessons and practice, the mother tells her daughter that if she just keeps it up for 1 year, she will be rewarded by a trip to Disneyland. The daughter wants to go to Disneyland, so she quits complaining, but she does not enjoy tennis.

However, after she has taken lessons for a year (and hated most of it), the daughter's skills improve and she begins to really enjoy playing. The next year (after the trip to Disneyland), she chooses to continue to take lessons, she joins a tennis club, and she becomes very proficient. Eventually, tennis is one of the activities she values most and she is willing to give up other activities to pursue it.

The scenario is exactly the same for Parent B and his son; however, in this case, after a year of tennis lessons (and the trip to Disneyland), the son still does not really enjoy tennis. He has become quite good at it and he plays with his father sometimes, but he does not enjoy it and still says that the only reason he is doing it is because his father "makes him." The father sees that his son has the potential to be competitive at this sport, and he believes that if his son just plays enough, he will begin to love it (like his father). On this basis, he gets his son to agree to another year of tennis lessons by using another large incentive (like the trip to Disneyland). After taking lessons for another year, the son continues to hate tennis.

In situations such as these, parents may feel caught between a rock and hard place—they want to encourage their children to value an activity and they know that without enough experience, it will be impossible for their children to feel engaged or be intrinsically motivated; however, they do not want their efforts to backfire and undermine the intrinsic value of the activity for their children. Connell and Wellborn (1990) summarized the position well when they suggested that the "path to optimal engagement is difficult to find" (p. 70). Many parents are striving to find or to construct that "path" for their children, just as many researchers are trying to model it developmentally.

FINDING A MODEL OF OPTIMAL ENGAGEMENT

As social scientists, we are constantly asking a question that parallels the one facing parents—what model would best describe the path to optimal engagement in activities? It seems clear that the model must be one that is iterative, with the parent constantly reassessing and reacting to the child's needs, values, and interests and the child communicating about values and interests and reacting to the parent's signs of support. This process could begin with the parent (e.g., "Wouldn't you like to try Little League?") or with the child (e.g., "Can't I go to art camp?"). If it begins with the parent providing the initial impetus and support, the child may well be reacting and is likely to be externally motivated to engage in the activity. At some juncture, the parent must reassess the child's interest in the activity and decide whether to support continued engagement. At another point, however, the child begins to share responsibility for continued motivation (e.g., parental rewards become less tangible), and, ultimately, when the parent reassesses

the child's value/interests, most of the external motivators drop out because the child has internalized values for the activity. This means not that there are not some external rewards that will continue to motivate the child (e.g., performances, competitions, friends, parents' praise) but that the child begins to value the activity for its own sake. Figure 14.3 is a simplified version of Eccles's socialization model. The emphasis in this model is on the feedback and interactions that take place between parents and children.

This kind of an iterative model has a long-standing tradition within behavioral analysis. For example, Herbst (1953) described a "co-directional situation pattern" as "one of the simpler types of learning processes" in which a person moves from not engaging in a disliked activity to being pressured to engage in the activity to liking the activity while being pressured to ultimately liking the activity once the pressure is withdrawn (pp.124–125). According to this view, external pressures and internal pressures coexist and determine an individual's behavior in a given situation, and "pressures" that begin externally can become internalized. Additionally, internal "pressures" are not deemed inherently more desirable than those originating externally, but a balance between the two is expected for optimum adjustment.

A relevant and more familiar model to developmentalists can be found in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978/1934). In this theory of cognitive development, Vygotsky emphasized the social origins of cognition. He believed that children master activities and refine their thinking as a result of joint activities with more mature members of society. Most relevant for our discussion here are two features of his theory: intersubjectivity and

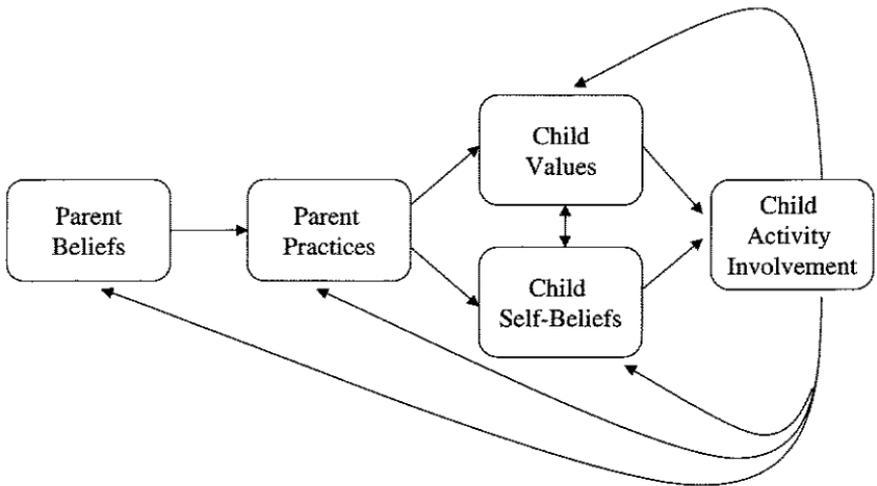


FIGURE 14.3
Codirectional model of parent-child influence.

scaffolding. *Intersubjectivity* refers to the process of two people who begin a task with different conceptualizations coming to a shared understanding of the task as each person adjusts to the perspective of the other (Newson & Newson, 1975; Vygotsky, 1978/1934). Parents (and other adults) try to promote shared meaning when they translate their own views into words that are within the child's grasp or when they point out the links between a new task and one that the child has done before (e.g., Rogoff, 1990). The concept of *scaffolding* refers to the social support provided by adults in any learning situation (Bruner, 1983; Wood, 1989). The idea is that adults offer enough support for a child to accomplish a task but that an effective scaffold is constantly being readjusted to fit the child's level of performance. If more assistance is needed, it is provided, but as the child exhibits independent mastery, the adult will withdraw support and let the child succeed alone. It is clear that Vygotsky saw the parents' role as both pushing and pulling development by adjusting communications and support to fit the child's understanding and ability to master a task. This theory highlights the need for ongoing assessment and adjustment of support to fit the child's needs and interests.

Thus far, we have focused on parents initiating and providing support for activity involvement, and this fits traditional social learning views, which described a unidirectional model that went from parents to children. Since the 1980s, however, attachment theories and life span views have placed the child in a more active and initiating role within the family (e.g., Baltes, 1987; Bretherton, 1985; Connell & Thompson, 1986). It is clear that much of what parents do is in response to their perceptions of the child and may be elicited by the child; thus, the process of activity involvement that results in a particular set of values may begin with the child. Although the process might be somewhat different if the child initiated it, we cannot assume that children who begin by valuing activities necessarily maintain that interest and involvement without some external support and/or pressure. Thus, the social context can still be regarded as either facilitating or inhibiting task interest and values.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOCIALIZATION OF TASK VALUES AND ACTIVITY INVOLVEMENT

The conceptual models described earlier suggest that if parents want to foster task values, they will need to provide a context that will allow the child to begin to value an activity by supporting interest and task engagement. We believe that in general, parents want to create a supportive context; however, even the most well intentioned parents are not always successful and problems arise for a variety of reasons. In this section, we discuss what current research suggests parents can do to provide a sup-

portive context for the development of achievement and activity values, and what might go wrong in these attempts. We discuss these in light of the major types of influence parents have at their disposal: (1) structuring opportunities, (2) interpreting reality, and (3) imparting their values. We conclude this section by reviewing potential parenting practices that might contribute to the development of contexts that will foster competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Opportunity Structure

One of the main ways in which parents influence their children's developing activity values is by the opportunities they provide. Although it seems obvious that children need to be exposed to an activity if they are to become interested in it, the way in which such exposure affects preferences and activity choices is not clear. Theories of familiarity (Zajonc, 1968), and conditioning suggest that exposure should affect preference and skill acquisition and, therefore, perceived competence. Parents are in the position of choosing both the types and structures of the activities in which their children participate. (This is especially true at young ages.) As children pass into adolescence, parents may become as concerned with preventing their children from engaging in some activities as they are with getting their children to engage in particular activities.

The type of opportunities provided will depend on many factors—what is available in the community, economic resources (many activities and equipment for activities have high costs), time constraints (single parents, two-earner families, and families with many children have less time to devote to any given activity), and parents' values for a particular endeavor. Participation in extracurricular activities has been associated with socioeconomic class (e.g., Coleman, 1961; Hollingshead, 1949), but participation in activities can raise an individual's status within the school, extend the child's social network, and even serve as a protective factor against dropping out (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Eder & Parker, 1987; Kinney, 1993; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). Therefore, parents' decisions to provide or to curtail particular opportunities may have an impact that reaches beyond the child's activity values and perceptions of competence.

The structure of the task will also play a large role. In this case, structure might be viewed as the overarching dimensions of the task. For example, dimensions that have been considered by researchers include infrequent versus daily activities (Crouter & Larson, 1998), leisure versus productive activities (Larson, 1990), organized versus informal activities (Kirshnit, Ham, & Richards, 1989), and obligatory versus nonobligatory activities (Shaw, Caldwell, & Kleiber, 1996). Parents may not consider these dimensions explicitly when they are choosing or allowing their children to choose how to spend their time; however, data from our recent study of elementary

school-aged children suggest that most parents report that they involve their children in extracurricular activities for social reasons rather than for reasons related to competition or competence (Altenburg-Caldwell et al., 1999). At another level, task structure may involve the parents' support for the child's participation. Parents need to provide good scaffolding for any endeavor (Vygotsky, 1978/1934), giving a lot of structure and guidance in the beginning so that the child performs at a higher level than if left alone, but withdrawing the support as the child is ready to take on more responsibility for the task. The trick for any parent, coach, or teacher is to be able to provide the activity within the child's "zone of proximal development," defined by Vygotsky as the range of tasks that the child cannot yet handle alone but can do with the help of a more skilled partner.

Interpreters of Reality

Another way in which parents influence their children's task values is by acting as "interpreters of reality" through the messages they provide regarding their perceptions of their children's world and experiences (Eccles, Lord, Roeser, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1997; Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Phillips, 1987). When children are young, they are not particularly good at assessing their own competence (Nicholls, 1978), so they must rely on their parents' interpretations of their performance as a major source of information about their competence. As mentioned earlier, parents' interpretations of their children's competence have been related to the children's self-perceptions and to their actual achievement (Eccles [Parsons] et al., 1983). In addition, parents' inappropriately low estimations of their children's competence are related to children's lower self-perceptions of their competence in the same areas. Owing to the links between self-competence and values, the accuracy of parents' interpretations is critical to children's continued interest, participation, and ultimate valuing of an activity. However, we know that parents' interpretations will be influenced by many things, including the values and expectations within their culture.

Although we know that parents play the "interpreter" role for their children, the precise behaviors that carry the messages are not well documented. It seems unlikely that parents tell their children outright that they are not competent at an activity, but the message may be conveyed in subtle ways. If the underlying message is "you aren't competent and you'd better change to increase your competence," the parents might try such strategies as providing extra help, tutoring, or lessons; threatening punishment if performance doesn't improve; structuring more time for the child to work on the activity; or comparing the child to others who are more competent. If the parents' underlying message is "You aren't competent at this task, so you shouldn't pursue it," the parents may try such strategies as refocusing the child's interests on a different activity, emphasizing other

strengths, or lowering the value of the activity. The parents' strategy of choice is likely to depend on how much the parents value the activity themselves and whether they focus on performance or learning as the goal of involvement in the activity. (For more discussion of this point, see chapters 6 and 7 in this book). According to Dweck and her colleagues, a focus on performance may undermine intrinsic motivation to continue to be involved in the activity and it will certainly lower the intrinsic value of the activity for the child (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Provision of Values

As suggested several times in the preceding paragraphs, parents are providing messages about their own values through the opportunities they provide and the interpretations they give. In addition, their values may be imparted by their involvement in various activities (role modeling) and by direct instruction. The values in question may range from specific values for particular activities (e.g., the parent who plays tennis and makes it clear that tennis is valued by taking the child to Wimbledon) to general world beliefs and values (e.g., the parent who believes boys should not have dolls because they will become sissies). Children are likely to discern the parents' values by noticing how free time is spent; by comparing how much time, money, or effort goes into one activity versus another; and by participating in conversations with parents in which the parents convey enthusiasm or interest about one topic but little about another.

General beliefs or values may have an indirect effect by influencing what opportunities the parents provide (e.g., no dolls for boys) or how they respond to their children's performance (e.g., assuming greater effort was required for success in sports by girls than by boys), or they may be communicated directly (e.g., "Boys who take dance lessons are sissies and no son of mine is taking ballet"). We have documented the indirect effects of parents' general beliefs on the goals that they set for their children in the area of gender stereotyping (Jacobs, 1991; Jacobs & Eccles, 1992). It is likely that the messages provided and "received" change as children move into and through adolescence. For example, gender-role intensification theory (Hill & Lynch, 1983) suggests that the association of parents' gender-role beliefs to both their goals for their children and their socialization practices should increase as their children become adolescents.

Parenting Practices

We conclude by briefly discussing parenting practices that have been related to the development of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Within each of these areas, we highlight the need for parents to use a developmental approach that takes into account individual and social identity as well as

meets universal needs. Children and adolescents change rapidly and sometimes leave their parents in the dust. Strategies and parenting practices that may have worked well last year or last month may no longer work. Several adolescence researchers have hypothesized that parent-child relationships change as children enter and move through adolescence (Eccles, 1993; Steinberg, 1988). Numerous changes occur during this period of life: children experience physical maturation, their social roles change, parents and teachers may increase gender-role socialization pressures, parents may link their behaviors and choices to future adult roles, and the opportunity for participating in unsupervised peer interactions increases (e.g., Jacobs & Osgood, 1994). Each of these types of changes should affect self and task beliefs, activity choices, and relative performance across a variety of activity domains. This means that parents have to be ready to adapt to the changing emotional, cognitive, and social needs of the child while still supporting (but not forcing) the development of internalized and autonomous task values.

Much of our work has looked at how parents' attitudes and practices are related to children's perceptions of *competence*. Parents' beliefs about their children's competence are likely to guide their decisions about which activities to provide for their children (Sigel, 1982) and about how they interact with their children (Sigel, McGillicuddy-Delisi, & Goodnow, 1992), making their actions into messages about their interpretations of reality. If children receive parental interactions and activity endorsements as messages about their abilities, it suggests that parents need to be careful about what messages they are providing. For example, a decision to take a child out of swimming lessons may be interpreted by the child as an indication of lack of ability when the decision was made only to facilitate the parents' busy schedule. Parents' lack of involvement in academics may be interpreted as either lack of interest or perceptions of low academic ability. Many researchers have documented the relationship between parent involvement in schooling and increased achievement and positive school behaviors (e.g., Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1992), and one of the mechanisms for these effects may be the messages sent to children about the importance of schooling and about the child's competence.

One way in which parents' messages about the child's ability may go awry is if the parents' estimates of the child's ability are inaccurate. Phillips (1987) found that parents differ in the accuracy of their estimates about their child's performance; those parents who underestimate their child's abilities have children who doubt their own abilities (Phillips & Zimmerman, 1990). Although most studies show that feedback needs to be performance based to be believable to children and to be helpful, it also needs to be accurate. One of the ways in which parents may be inaccurate is by using old "data." We have found that parents' beliefs about their children's abilities are quite stable during the elementary school years; this is particularly true for reading and sports, areas in which they stick to perceptions of their

children that are formed in kindergarten (Yoon et al., 1993). If children are late bloomers in a particular area and parents' perceptions remain stable, parents may underestimate their children's current abilities by relying on earlier beliefs.

Even if parents are accurate about their children's abilities and they are being supportive in an area at which their children excel, the messages may not always lead to greater intrinsic value for the domain. This may occur for a variety of reasons, but one of the ones we have documented is when parents become overly invested in one area. This may happen initially because the children are talented and interested, but as the focus narrows to that one domain, the children may feel increased pressure to perform or may begin to feel that they are participating to please their parents rather than because of intrinsic interest in the area. In one analysis of high school students, we found that all parents of gifted students professed a high value for academics but that the same parents differed in how much they valued social skills and social success. The parents who focused on academics alone had children who were more worried about school and had lower self-perceptions of their abilities than did those parents who had more balanced perceptions of the need for both academic and social skills (Tanner, Jacobs, & Eccles, 1998). It seems likely that parents who value more areas of competence encourage their children to participate in a broader array of activities. The provision of a larger range of opportunities may be particularly important as children move into adolescence.

As parents send messages about their children's competence, they need to be aware of their children's developmental needs and changing expertise. A child who is a star athlete at age 8 years may not continue on the same trajectory. Parents need to be able to respond to changes in their children's relative standing by being supportive but realistic. If the parent continues to focus on basketball prowess in the son who was tall for his age at 10 years but ended up short relative to age-mates after puberty, the son may continue to play basketball to please his parents but may be better off focusing on a different activity. We have found developmental trends in children's reasons for participating in activities; at younger ages, they say that they are involved because they "like" an activity, but ability or lack of ability at doing a task and task ease or difficulty became more salient reasons as children get older.

Most research suggests that parental support for *autonomy* is positively related to numerous indicators of successful development, such as achievement motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985), self-esteem, connection to school, and academic achievement (Eccles et al., 1996). Parents provide support for autonomy primarily by giving children choices that will allow them to connect their behavior to their personal goals and values (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). For this to be successful, parents need to give children real choices that are within the child's "zone of proximal development" to carry out and

that parents are willing to "live with." This can be contrasted with either making choices for the child or giving the appearance of allowing choice but overriding unpopular decisions.

Differences in the amount of autonomy that parents give may be due to parental beliefs or to differences in parents' responses to individual children. For example, we have some data suggesting that the amount of autonomy and decision making that parents afford their children may be a reaction to their perceptions of the child's personal characteristics (Hyatt, Jacobs, & Tanner, 1998), suggesting that parents may be assessing their children's readiness and then responding on the basis of their assessment. In addition, perceptions of the desirability of autonomy for children at different ages may vary by ethnicity or social class.

Although most of the research has focused on academic tasks, we expect the same dynamics between perceived autonomy and task values in any domain in which there is some choice; however, a problem that parents may experience is competitive dynamics between competence and autonomy (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). For example, a parent's goal may be for a child to like tennis and develop competence at it, but tactics that force the child's involvement may result in the child's feeling manipulated and controlled. Previous research suggests that perceptions of autonomy will decrease when others try to exercise too much control over an individual's behavior. This suggests that parents walk a very fine line between being supportive and being overcontrolling. The critical dimension seems to be perceived choice. If children believe that they are engaging in the activity because they like it or because they chose to be involved, they are more likely to continue to value it. Even if children make the choice to be involved, they may do it for a variety of reasons: (1) because performance on the activity is relevant to their self-concepts (e.g., "I have to practice violin because I will feel bad about myself if I don't"), (2) because they enjoy the activity (e.g., "Practicing violin is the best part of my day"), or (3) because they relate it to a higher self-chosen goal (e.g., "If I practice hard, I will be able to join the school orchestra"). Parents can facilitate their children's activity values by allowing the children to choose learning goals rather than performance goals and to develop realistic ways to meet those goals. The emphasis on choice does not mean that children are making decisions without adult guidance or that they may "choose" to change or quit activities on a whim. Parents must be able to create a scaffold for children's decisions that will allow the children to make choices within parental guidelines at earlier stages of involvement, with more flexibility and fewer constraints as the parent reassesses the child and is able to withdraw some of the scaffolding.

Another issue related to parental support of autonomy is that some parents may get their own identities involved in their children's achievements rather than see the children as separate from them. Parents' goals for their children are not independent of their own values, and their desires for their

children to participate or excel at activities may be related to their perceptions of themselves as parents, coaches, and mentors. Although we often talk about parents' effects on their children, we keep coming back to the interactive nature of parent-child self-systems. Children's achievements, values, and task involvement also affect parents' perceptions of themselves and parents' values. For example, parents who may never have given a thought to the sport of soccer suddenly become very invested in soccer when their children show interest and talent for the sport. This may extend beyond children's soccer matches to include watching professional games on television or attending college matches.

Although the relationships between autonomy and successful outcomes have been found at different ages, support for autonomy may be particularly important at early adolescence because establishing oneself is the quintessential developmental task of the adolescent period (e.g., Eccles et al., 1993). The importance of autonomy during this period has already been demonstrated in school settings (e.g., Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Midgley et al. 1989). Families must respond to the same needs for autonomy that have been seen in education settings; however, it is very likely that parents provide greater support for autonomy to adolescents who are viewed as trustworthy and responsible than to those teens who are seen as likely to get into trouble if left on their own. For example, during the transition to junior high school, perceptions of one's parents as too controlling and intrusive are associated with a decline in self-esteem, whereas perceptions of involvement in family decision making are associated with increases in self-esteem (Eccles et al., 1997). In these families, the authority renegotiation process that accelerates in adolescence is more likely to proceed relatively smoothly than in families in which either the parents are incompetent, the parent-child relationship is already problematic, or the adolescent is already on a problematic developmental trajectory (Eccles et al., 1996). The extent to which parents adapt their general child-rearing strategies (particularly with regard to the support they provide for autonomous decision making and activity choice) to their children's increasing maturity should affect the parent-child relationship and the children's social development (see Eccles et al., 1993).

The importance of a warm and caring *relationship* between children and parents is clear in theories ranging from attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978) to social learning (Bandura, 1994) to parenting styles (Baumrind, 1971); however, the question for parents is how to maintain a close emotional relationship with children as they develop. In one study, Eccles et al., (1996) found that perceived high levels of connectedness and emotional support were related positively to both psychological and behavioral indicators of successful development, particularly for girls. These results are consistent with theories hypothesizing that feeling connected and supported emotionally in both parent-child and school contexts has positive benefits (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Goodnow, 1993).

One of the major ways in which parents seem to demonstrate their affection for their children is through involvement with them, defined by Connell and Wellborn (1991) as the "dedication of psychological resources," such as time and interest (p. 56). Positive correlations have been found between children's perceptions of their parents' involvement and their perceptions of their own abilities, academic success, and values for school (e.g., Epstein, 1989; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Roeser, Lord, & Eccles, 1994). Moreover, affective experiences during participation in activities with parents may influence subjective task value and participation (Skinner, 1991). It is clear that just spending time with children is not enough—the affect surrounding the parent–child involvement is important. If parents help children with homework but belittle the children and get angry if they do not understand a concept, both the affective relationship and value for the task are likely to suffer. Many parents report that monitoring homework drains their energy and patience (e.g., Corno, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow, 1995), suggesting that maintaining positive affect during interchanges about homework may be difficult. In a study comparing middle-school students who were highly alienated from school with those who reported low alienation, Roeser et al. (1994) found that alienated students experienced much more negative affect and less positive affect when doing schoolwork with their parents than did the other group.

Additionally, too much involvement or control may raise anxiety around activity involvement (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987). If children continue to participate in an activity to please their parents (as in the earlier tennis scenario), their intrinsic interest and eventual involvement with the activity are expected to decline (Deci & Ryan, 1985). For example, in one study, we found that when parental monitoring was perceived as reasonable rather than stifling, it was related to positive adolescent–parent affective relationships, but when it was perceived as overly strict and demanding, less positive adolescent–parent relationships resulted (Jacobs et al., 1998). These studies draw attention to the importance of children's *perceptions* of their parents' overtures at involvement and affection. Similar observed levels of involvement may have different meanings to different children, and it is the child's perception that will determine the effect.

Once again, developmental changes play a large role in the nature of parent–child affective relationships. Being "close" to parents during early elementary school may mean spending many hours together and sharing confidences, whereas during adolescence it may mean acknowledging parents' opinions and eating dinner together. This means not that adolescents have lower needs for affective relationships with their parents as they get older but that the fit between their needs and the expression of that relationship will be critical for maintaining close ties. It appears that one of the important tasks for parents is to maintain a supportive and close relationship as their children mature and develop their own values as they try out

different activities. This may not always be easy; however, a close parent-child relationship is likely to lead the child to value activities that are important or at least acceptable to the parent.

CONCLUSION

We began this chapter by describing the importance of task values for intrinsic motivation, continued activity involvement, and achievement choices. We described the Eccles expectancy-value model and the role that parents play as socializers of their children's values. In the first section, we elaborated on the literature describing the ways in which values are developed within the contexts of social identity, individual identity, and the universal needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

In the next section, we tried to elaborate the implications of models that emphasize task values for the socialization of activity involvement. We discussed the dilemmas facing both researchers and parents of trying to develop theoretical and practical models that specify optimal levels of support, so that intrinsic values are developed rather than undermined. The interactive and interative nature of the processes were emphasized. We then used our general model of parent influence to describe the potential avenues of influence on task values, including (1) the general social-emotional climate they provide and by their general child-rearing beliefs, (2) the provision of specific experiences for the child, (3) parental involvement in valued activities, and (4) communication of perceptions of the child's abilities and expectations for performance. We ended this section by talking about parenting practices that have been related to the development of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, highlighting the need for parents to be aware of changing needs as their children develop.

In conclusion, it is clear that parents play a large role in the development of task values across a variety of activity domains. Although some theoretical models (including Eccles's model) attempt to describe the relationships between the multifaceted contexts provided by parents, the interactions of parents and children, and what children bring to the mix, most empirical work has been piecemeal, emphasizing only one part of the picture at a time and often in only one domain or context. This is because it is a complex process that takes place over time and across many interactions that provide feedback and redirection for parents and children; it also varies by family and by domain. We are continuing to explore the processes that underlie both continuity and change across time in varied settings and across activities.

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