

13th SRA Biennial Meeting, 11. – 13. 03. 2010,  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

(3-020) Paper Symposium

**How can we Understand Parents' Behaviors? Viewing Youths as Active Agents in the Development of Parental Behaviors**

Independence Ballroom Salon II, Saturday 10:00 AM - 11:45 AM

Chair: Terese Glatz

1. Parents' Experiences of Their Children's Influence in the Context of the Parent-Child Relationship  
Robyn Pitman, Leon Kuczynski, Lori D. Harach
2. Youth Psychopathic Traits and Parenting Behavior: How Do Parents React?  
Selma L. Salihovic, Vilmane Pakalniskiene, Margaret Kerr
3. Adolescents' Strategic Disclosure to Parents: Anticipating Reactions  
Ana Tokic
4. Understanding Why Parents Give Up When They Encounter Problematic Youth Adjustment  
Terese Glatz, Håkan Stattin, Margaret Kerr

**Symposium integrative statement:**

**How can we Understand Parents' Behaviors? Viewing Youths as Active Agents in the Development of Parental Behaviors**

Parenting research has mostly emphasized on the influence from parents on children, but this direction of influence has been questioned. Over the past 50 years, researchers started to argue that children, as active agents, influence their parents' behaviors and not just the other way around. Since then, more research has investigated "child-effects" and has shown that parents seem to react to the child's behavior and characteristics and not just influencing them. In later years, a smaller body of research has shown that parents sometimes react negatively to youths' behaviors – that some child behaviors might evoke inappropriate behaviors in parents. These studies have questioned the idea about bad parenting leading to negative child adjustment, because it is possible that the opposite direction of influence is more likely to be true. The purpose of this symposium is to illustrate how parents might be influenced, both negatively and positively, by their children's and youths' behavior, and how parents react to some specific youth behaviors. This is exemplified by using different youth behaviors and personality characteristics, to predict parents' reactions. The first study deals with parents' experiences of their youths' influence and the results show that parents are highly influenced by their youths in several areas in their everyday life. However, parents reported most influence, from their children, on their own conventional behaviors than on their attitudes, beliefs, and values. The second study focus on youth disclosure and the results show that parents reacted both negatively and positively when their youth disclosed to them. Parents' reactions were in turn influencing the level of future disclosure, where youth based the decision to disclose on past parental reactions. The third study covers parents' reactions to youth psychopathic traits and the results indicate clear "child-effects", where youth psychopathic traits lead to changes in parental behaviors, but parenting had little effect on youth behaviors. Further, parents reacted to youth psychopathic traits rather than to problem behaviors per se. Finally, the fourth study offers a theoretical explanation for parents' reactions to youths' temperamental behaviors. Preliminary results show that, as expected from earlier literature, irresponsible youth behaviors worked as a mediator between youth temperamental behaviors and parental negative reactions. To summarize, this symposium will

be an attempt to illustrate the influence children and youths have on their parents in different situations. Further, the symposium will cover both quantitative and qualitative results, which gives a broader understanding of parents' reactions to children and youth behaviors.

### **Adolescents' Strategic Disclosure to Parents: Anticipating Reactions**

Ana Tokić

University of Zagreb, Croatia

Parental knowledge about adolescents' daily activities was found to be predictive of numerous indicators of adolescent adjustment, including well-being (e. g. Jacobson & Crockett, 2000). This knowledge was found to originate mainly from adolescents' disclosure which involved spontaneously revealing the information to parents (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). However, withholding information often stems from expecting negative reactions from parents (Marshall, Tilton-Weaver, & Bosdet, 2005), which makes important to investigate how parents actually react to adolescents' disclosures and how it affects future disclosures. The aim of this research was to explore adolescents' views on parents' reactions which inhibit or facilitate their future disclosures about daily activities, feelings and concerns. Four focus groups with 13 and 14 year olds were conducted. Content analysis of adolescents' responses resulted in two large categories of parental reactions. The first one consists of *parental reactions* which were considered by youth as *positive and facilitating future disclosures* (e. g. constructive feedback, emotional support etc..), and the other consists of parental reactions considered as *negative and inhibiting future disclosures* (e. g. lecturing, teasing etc..). The results also clearly illustrate the *active role of adolescents* in moderating their relationships with parents by strategically disclosing or withholding information, thereby enhancing relationship or limiting parental authority over certain aspects of their lives (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995). Adolescents anticipate parental reactions on the basis of the reactions in similar past interactions, and decide on disclosure or non-disclosure accordingly. Moreover, it seems that adolescents even attempt to moderate expected parental reactions by actively choosing the "right moment" for disclosure. They observe parental states and subtle signs which determine the appropriateness of the disclosure in a given situation.