

## The Role of Perceived Parenting Styles and Positive Thinking in Predicting Gender Identity of Iranian Female Adolescents

Seyed Mohsen Asgharinekah<sup>1</sup>, Maryam Joka<sup>2</sup>, Zahra Hossainzadeh-Maleki<sup>3</sup>,  
Mustafa Bolghan-Abadi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

<sup>2</sup> MSc Student, Department of Psychology, Islamic Azad University, Electronic Campus, Tehran, Iran

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

<sup>4</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Neyshabur Branch, Islamic Azad University, Neyshabur, Iran

*Corresponding Author:* Seyed Mohsen Asgharinekah; Associate Professor, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

*Email:* [asghari-n@um.ac.ir](mailto:asghari-n@um.ac.ir)

### Quantitative Study

#### Abstract

**Background:** This study was aimed to investigate the relationship between perceived parental style and positive thinking with gender identity of Iranian female adolescents.

**Methods:** This was a correlational research. Statistical population included all female adolescents of Tehran, Iran (2018 academic year) and its statistical sample consisted of 384 participants which were selected through cluster sampling method. The data were gathered using Schertzer et al.'s Gender Role Identity Scale (GRIS), Robbins' perception of parenting styles (POPS), and Ingram and Wisnicki's automatic thoughts questionnaire (ATQ). Analysis of data was conducted by Pearson correlation coefficient and linear multiple regression using SPSS software.

**Results:** The mean of feminine characteristics among the girls was higher than their masculine characteristics ( $P > 0.050$ ). Furthermore, there was a positive significant relationship between father and mother warmth and positive thinking with feminine and masculine gender identity of female adolescents ( $P < 0.050$ ). The result of regression analysis showed that the four variables of mother warmth ( $\beta = 0.40, P < 0.001$ ), father warmth ( $\beta = 0.23, P < 0.001$ ), positive thinking ( $\beta = 0.21, P < 0.001$ ), and mother support ( $\beta = 0.21, P < 0.001$ ) could predict gender identity.

**Conclusion:** According to the findings, it can be concluded that mother and father warmth, positive thinking, and mother support could predict gender identity. Therefore, based on our findings, we discuss the importance of perceived parenting style and positive thinking.

**Keywords:** Female; Adolescents; Gender identity; Parenting; Optimism

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## Introduction

Adolescence is one of the critical periods of an individual's life which is vital for fundamental changes (Basson, 2018; Saei Ghare, Ramezani, Ahmadi, Alavi, & Ozgoli, 2019). This stage, starting with maturation and ending with acquiring self-sufficiency, is a period of deep social, psychological, and biological changes (Foulkes & Blakemore, 2018). In general, during this period, an individual moves towards a purposeful life (Luciana, 2014). Since fast and extensive developments, like mood changes and cognitive capabilities achievements, are experienced in adolescence, this period is accompanied by a great deal of stress (McLean et al., 2018). Exposure to these stresses and the way an adolescent deals with them may lead to a condition known as "storm and stress" (Hollenstein & Lougheed, 2013). In this condition, an individual's most important challenge and his/her main task is to form a successful identity (Michalek-Kwiecien, 2016). Achieving a successful identity requires a positively solved "identity vs. role confusion" crisis and inclusion of various self-perception images in the accepted identity (Basson, 2018). Achieving a successful identity has a positive relationship with an individual's mental health and is related to decreased levels of depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies (Olson-Kennedy et al., 2016; Rageliene, 2016).

Research evidence shows that various factors, including cognitive development, positive thinking skill, self-directedness (Piaget, 1983; Sigelman & Rider, 2012; Sinkler, 2012), personality features, especially openness to experience, desired quality of one's relationship with his/her parents, parenting, and in general, the cultural context in which the individual is nurtured (Sigelman & Rider, 2012; Sinkler, 2012; Waterman, 2020) contribute to the process of forming a successful identity (Basson, 2018).

Gender identity is one of the main features of identity which refers to one's psychological and mental sense of his/her gender (Turban & Ehrensaft, 2018; Kim, Park, & Ko, 2013). The challenges adolescents face with today lead to increased importance of forming a gender identity (Lin & Billingham, 2014). For example, research evidence shows that in adolescents' view, gender identity is more important than other elements of identity such as racial identity (Rogers, Scott, & Way, 2015). Furthermore, gender identity has an undeniable relationship with physical and mental health care (Progovac et al., 2018), and most of the times, adolescents with gender identity problems would also suffer from psychological, and in particular, interpersonal problems in adulthood (Ruppin & Pfafflin, 2015). This increasing attention of both public and professionals (Aitken et al., 2015; Chen, Fuqua, & Eugster, 2016) has led to the importance of identifying the developmental trends and determinants of gender identity (Turban & Ehrensaft, 2018). Research found that forming a gender identity might be a hard and multifactor process for adolescents (Korpaisarn & Safer, 2019), which reflects the complicated integration of biological, environmental, and cultural factors (Olson-Kennedy et al., 2016).

In explaining the process of identity formation and its elements, Erikson (1968) used the term "self-sameness" to describe the continuity of interaction with others and the term "uniqueness" to refer to the distinction between self and others, which their realization enables an individual to act autonomously (Rageliene, 2016). He emphasized the individual-context interaction, in that he believed adolescents' family and friends had a role in identifying, supporting, and consequently, forming their identity. During the last few decades, in which identity was operationalized using Marcia's identity paradigm (1966), the influence of context on adolescents' identity development was mostly neglected (Beyers & Goossens, 2008). However, recent

evidence reemphasizes the importance of individual-context interaction in identity, in particular, gender identity formation (Gale-Ross, Baird, & Towson, 2009). Good parenting refers to providing the necessary support for a child's development in different dimensions (Ozturk & Yalcin, 2021). Since parents constantly influence the development of their children and are their main source of gender role-related experience, it is likely that their parenting characteristics may be related to their children's gender identity (Kaniušonytė & Žukauskienė, 2018).

Furthermore, gender identity forms through the process of thinking, understanding, and interpreting common attitudes towards gender, and as a result, one's thinking process and style may play important roles in gender identity formation (Lin & Billingham, 2014). In recent years, positive psychology has been introduced as a new psychological approach, which considers positivism as a view which focuses on the positive things of life, and does not restrict it to certain thoughts, but considers it as an overall orientation towards life (Quilliam, 2012). Research evidence has shown that some adolescents' characteristics, such as positive thinking, which persuade one to act according to accepted social norms and values and are results of one's sense of validation for understanding oneself, may also be related to gender identity (Simon, Zsolt, Fogd, & Czobor, 2011). Moreover, evidence of the paternal and maternal authoritative and permissive parenting styles significantly predicted career decision self-efficacy. Gender is a potential moderating variable that influences the relationship between the parenting styles and the career decision self-efficacy (Situmorang & Salim, 2021). Tu (2022) in his study found that for those women who described to perceive a strict paternal parenting, the disadvantages of being a girl was mainly coming from family pressure as a source, while women who believed that paternal parenting gave them a lower demandingness and that they had a higher level of personal autonomy, most of the disadvantages described by female participants came from the pressure of sexism on the social level or troubles. Specifically, those daughters with strict paternal parenting usually evaluate femininity negatively and have certain exclusions.

However, little research has been conducted to examine the relationship between these constructs and our search showed that the relationship between these two variables and gender identity had not been studied yet. Therefore, the current study investigated the relationship between perceived parenting style and positive thinking with gender identity in female adolescents.

## **Methods**

*Study design:* This study has been conducted by a descriptive correlational method. Besides, the data have been gathered through survey method and they were of quantitative type.

*Participants:* The statistical population of this study was all female adolescents in Tehran, Iran. We selected a sample of participants, using the two-stage cluster sampling. In order to provide regional data that represent all regions in Tehran, the first sampling stage grouped all 19 districts into 5 regions (2, 7, 10, 13, 15). In the second sampling stage, schools were selected within regions. Schools were randomly selected from each region. All collected data were weighted at the city level and regional level based on the ethnicity and grade level of students in each region. The statistical population number was more than 100000 female adolescents; therefore, the final sample included 384 adolescents based on Krejcie and Morgan formula. The mean age and grade of the participants was 15.64 (range: 14-18) years and 8-12, respectively.

*Ethical considerations:* Ethical considerations included respect for the dignity of research participants, obtaining informed consent, confidentiality of the research data, and not doing any harm to the participants.

### **Instruments**

*The Gender Role Identity Scale (GRIS):* The GRIS was developed by Schertzer et al. (2008). It is a 16-items self-report measure with 2 subscales of masculine (8 items) and feminine (8 items). Each item is scored on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (always or almost always true). They reported good internal consistency and validity for GRIS. The reliability of the scale based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient has been obtained as 0.78 for masculine subscale, 0.75 for feminine subscale, and 0.77 for total scale. The two-factor measurement model of the GRIS identified a ten-item masculine factor and a ten-item feminine factor. Factor analysis using AMOS 7.0 was conducted for the entire sample and for each country individually.

*The perception of parenting styles (POPS):* The POPS was developed by Robbins (1994). It is a 42-item measure (21 items for assessing mother parenting styles and 21 items for father styles). Each item is scored on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (very true). It has six subscales, such as mother involvement, father involvement, mother autonomy support, father autonomy support, mother warmth, and father warmth. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results suggested that the six factors fitted the data obtained and indicated a suitable fitting model. Cronbach's alpha was higher than 0.82 for mother and father parenting styles and for total scale was 0.82 (Robbins, 1994). The Iranian version of POPS consists of 30 items. Based on this scale, 6 scores are obtained for each participant. Furthermore, based on research aims, a parents' style score can be calculated through adding up subscale scores of both mother and father. In this way, three scores of parents' involvement, parents' autonomy support, and parents' warmth can be calculated for each participant. Cronbach's alpha and test-retest reliability were 0.59-0.77 and 0.88, respectively (Tanhaye Reshvanloo & Talepasand, 2018).

*Positive automatic thoughts questionnaire (ATQ-P):* This questionnaire is a 30-item self-report instrument that measures the frequency of occurrence of positive automatic thoughts or positive self-statements. Each item represents a thought and respondents rate the frequency of occurrence of this thought, or a similar thought. Each item is scored on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (all the time). The closer a participant's total score is to 150, the more positive thinking he/she has. Ingram and Wisnicki (1998) showed that this questionnaire was a reliable instrument for positive thinking. Bagheri Charook et al. (2019) reported good internal consistency (alpha = 0.86) for the ATQ-P.

*Data collection:* After receiving a license from the Education and Training Office of Tehran, coordination with school administrators, and identifying classes, the instruments were completed in the presence of the researcher. The importance of research was explained to the school administration and teachers before completing the instruments. The researcher answered the participants' questions during the answering time.

*Data analysis:* Descriptive and inferential statistics, such as mean, standard deviation (SD), the Pearson correlation coefficient, and linear regression, and also SPSS software (version 22.0, IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA) were used for data analysis.

## **Results**

The highest and lowest frequencies, respectively, belonged to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade with

31% and 10<sup>th</sup> grade with 14.6%. The mean age of our participants, who were studying in 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades, was 15.64 years. The results showed that the mean ± SD of masculine traits, feminine traits, and positive thinking were 3.44 ± 1.00, 5.41 ± 1.01, and 103.62 ± 6.78, respectively. The mean ± SD of mother involvement, father involvement, mother autonomy support, father autonomy support, mother warmth, and father warmth were 5.84 ± 0.64, 5.83 ± 0.67, 5.89 ± 0.69, 6.07 ± 0.80, 5.38 ± 1.12, and 5.41 ± 1.27, respectively (Table 1). The result of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for parenting style, gender identity, and positive thinking manifested that the level of significance was higher than 0.05 for all variables; therefore, it could be concluded that all data had a normal distribution.

Analytical results: To examine the first hypothesis, that is whether there is a relationship between perceived parenting style and gender identity of Tehran's female adolescents, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used (Table 1). There was a significant positive relationship between all indices of parenting style and feminine and masculine gender identity in female adolescents (P < 0.001). Our second hypothesis was that there was a relationship between positive thinking and gender identity in Tehran's female adolescents. The results showed that there was a significant positive relationship between positive thinking and feminine (r = 0.43, P < 0.001) and masculine (r = 0.32, P < 0.001) gender identity in female adolescents and the correlation coefficient was stronger between positive thinking and feminine characteristics (Table 1).

The third hypothesis was that perceived parenting style and positive thinking were able to predict gender identity in Tehran's female adolescents, which was examined using stepwise regression.

**Table 1.** The mean, standard deviation (SD), and correlation matrix between perceived parenting style, positive thinking, and gender identity (Part I)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Mother involvement	-				
Mother autonomy support	0.764*	-			
Mother warmth	0.259*	0.387*	-		
Father involvement	0.688*	0.730*	0.275*	-	
Father autonomy support	0.827*	0.853*	0.317*	0.825*	-
Father warmth	0.199*	0.275*	0.527*	0.203*	0.230*
Masculine traits	0.334*	0.430*	0.683*	0.305*	0.380*
Feminine traits	0.427*	0.519*	0.602*	0.398*	0.484*
Positive thinking	0.235*	0.260*	0.231*	0.205*	0.250*
Mean ± SD	5.84 ± 0.64	5.89 ± 0.69	5.38 ± 1.12	5.83 ± 0.67	6.07 ± 0.80

\*P < 0.01

SD: Standard deviation

**Table 1.** The mean, standard deviation (SD), and correlation matrix between perceived parenting style, positive thinking, and gender identity (Part II)

Variables	6	7	8	9
Mother involvement				
Mother autonomy support				
Mother warmth				
Father involvement				
Father autonomy support				
Father warmth				
Masculine traits	0.581*	-		
Feminine traits	0.440*	0.723*	-	
Positive thinking	0.154*	0.322*	0.430*	-
Mean ± SD	5.41 ± 1.27	3.44 ± 1.00	5.49 ± 1.01	103.62 ± 6.78

\*P < 0.01

SD: Standard deviation

**Table 2.** Summary of predictive model of teenage girls' masculine gender identity based on perceived parenting style and positive thinking

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	β	SE	Beta	t	P-value	Tolerance	VIF
Mother warmth	0.683	0.467	0.398	0.037	0.446	10.74	0.001	0.649	1.54
Father warmth	0.731	0.534	0.226	0.031	0.285	7.21	0.001	0.716	1.39
Positive thinking	0.748	0.560	0.210	0.005	0.138	3.94	0.001	0.912	1.09
Mother support	0.759	0.576	0.206	0.053	0.143	3.85	0.001	0.813	1.22

SE: Standard error; VIF: Variance inflation factor

Durbin-Watson statistic (1.94) was between 1.5 and 2.5, which shows that the errors are independent and do not affect each other. Therefore, the model coefficients can be presented. Furthermore, it can be said that predictive variables, perceived parenting style, and positive thinking could explain 0.576 of changes of the dependent variable (girls' masculine characteristics). In addition, the results of variance inflation factor (VIF) test and tolerance showed that there was no independent variable collinearity in this equation (Table 2). Therefore, the regression equation of this hypothesis is as follows:

Masculine characteristics = 3.26 + 0.398 (mother warmth) + 0.226 (father warmth) + 0.021 (positive thinking) + 0.206 (mother support)

In order to predict the amount of feminine characteristics in female adolescents, the stepwise regression was used. Durbin-Watson (2.05) statistic was between 1.5 and 2.5, which shows that the errors are independent and do not affect each other. Therefore, the model coefficients can be presented. Furthermore, it can be said that predictive variables, perceived parenting style, and positive thinking could explain 0.537 of changes of the dependent variable (Table 3).

The regression equation of this hypothesis is as follows:

Feminine characteristics = 3.11 + 0.333 (mother warmth) + 0.216 (mother support) + 0.037 (positive thinking) + 0.105 (father warmth) + 0.186 (father support)

## Discussion

The aim of the current study was to examine the relationship between perceived parenting style and positive thinking with gender identity in Iranian female adolescents. The results showed that girls' mean of feminine characteristics was higher than their mean of masculine characteristics. Furthermore, there was a significant positive relationship between all dimensions of parenting style and positive thinking with feminine and masculine gender identity in female adolescents. The result showed that the four variables of mother warmth, father warmth, positive thinking, and mother support could predict gender identity.

In general, the results of this study showed the importance of the introduced variables and provided a new insight into gender identity formation of female adolescents. However, this study, in line with previous research, showed that various factors were related to gender identity development (Korpaisarn & Safer, 2019).

**Table 3.** Summary of predictive model of teenage girls' feminine gender identity based on perceived parenting style and positive thinking

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	β	SE	Beta	t	P-value	Tolerance	VIF
Mother warmth	0.602	0.362	0.333	0.039	0.371	8.52	0.001	0.648	1.54
Mother support	0.677	0.459	0.216	0.100	0.149	2.15	0.032	0.256	3.90
Positive thinking	0.720	0.518	0.037	0.005	0.249	6.76	0.001	0.908	1.10
Father warmth	0.729	0.531	0.105	0.033	0.132	3.17	0.002	0.716	1.39
Father support	0.733	0.537	0.186	0.085	0.147	2.19	0.029	0.271	3.68

SE: Standard error; VIF: Variance inflation factor

On the other hand, these findings overall support the relationship between perceived parenting style and identity formation in general (e.g., Kaniušonytė & Žukauskienė, 2018; Basson, 2018). Furthermore, it should be noticed that the resulting data, in line with Erikson's view (1968), emphasized the important role of family and friends in identifying, supporting, and consequently, forming identity. Furthermore, based on the observed relationship between positive thinking and gender identity, the current study can support the evidence which considers positive thinking something beyond possessing certain thoughts, and views it as an overall orientation towards life (Quilliam, 2012), since it can also be related to some important identity features such as gender identity.

Another notable result of this research was that mother warmth had the strongest relationship with gender identity and it is likely that, while both mothers and fathers influence female adolescents' gender identity, mothers' influence is stronger, which emphasizes mothers' role in girls' gender identity. Furthermore, stepwise regression was used to predict gender identity based on perceived parenting style and positive thinking. The results showed that about 0.60 of changes of gender identity could be predicted by mother warmth, father warmth, positive thinking, and mother support. Since psychological variables are abstract or subjective, it is not possible to identify all factors affecting one variable; however, the explained percentage of this part of our study is considerable and it can be applied to predict female adolescents' gender identity.

Mothers are the ones who are responsible for raising children during pregnancy and later. It is for this reason that they should be familiar with the principles of child education in order to use suitable parenting methods for their child's bringing up. Because it is mother who trains children and in fact, mothers are builders of society. In this case, if they follow educational tips, it can be possible to have a society without problem. The influence of mother is not only related to mental and social dimensions, but also is related to making children familiar with society, and they have an essential role in guidance and leadership of their children to shape their thoughts with collective life.

**Limitations:** Although this study of gender identity, perceived parenting styles, and positive thinking helps understand how and how much various factors affect girls' gender identity development, its limitations should not be forgotten as well. Its first limitation was that we used quantitative research method, which provides some information about the strength of relationships; however, it does not provide a deep understanding of the nature and underlying dynamics of different variables and their relationships. Furthermore, self-reported questionnaires were used for data gathering and, while these questionnaires have necessary psychometric features, they may not present the variables precisely. Moreover, the precision of self-reported data may be limited due to the tendency to present a desirable social image. It should be noticed that many factors, such as school environment and interaction with peers, which can affect identity formation, were not examined in this study (e.g., Kail & Cavanaugh, 2013).

To overcome the abovementioned limitations, future research can apply a more comprehensive approach, using combined designs, semi-structured interviews, or focused (quality) groups. Furthermore, conducting a longitudinal study may facilitate the process of result evaluation. It is also recommended to identify and consider other factors, such as peer relationships, different developmental stages of adolescence, and social and economic status, which may affect gender identity.



## Conclusion

Various factors contribute to development of gender identity in female adolescents. The results of present study showed that perceived parenting style and positive thinking could predict gender identity in female adolescents.

## Conflict of Interests

Authors have no conflict of interests.

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