Divorced Mothers' Gender Role Ideology, Locus of Control, and Disciplinary Patterns

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This study examined gender role ideology, locus of control, and disciplinary patterns of divorced mothers. Data were gathered from 135 divorced mothers and their elementary school-aged children. Eighty-five percent of the subjects were white and 15% were nonwhite (African American, Hispanic, and Native American). Stepwise regression analyses were used to determine variations in child-rearing patterns explained by locus of control and gender ideology. Child-rearing patterns included four parental attitudes. The basic hypothesis that gender role ideology and locus of control are personal resources that influence child-rearing patterns of divorced mothers received clear support. These findings suggest that the relation between single parenthood and child socialization patterns are complex and that sociocognitive beliefs play an important role in single mothers' child-rearing choices.

The contemporary research in parental belief systems has concentrated on attributions related to the parent's understanding of the child or of the relationship with the child (Bugenthal, Blue, & Lewis, 1990; Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Sigel, 1986; Skinner, 1985). Less research attention has been given to how sociocognitive beliefs influence child-rearing patterns. The role of social cognition in child rearing has been demonstrated by a small body of research that has linked parenting values with parenting behaviors in intact families (Belsky, 1984; Kohn, 1977; Luster, Rhoades, & Haas, 1989). The role parental sociocognitive beliefs play in child socialization patterns in the single-parent family is a relatively unexplored area. Those researchers studying parental belief systems in single-parent families have linked custodial parents' beliefs with their children's development (Machida
The present study of single mothers and their children expands the limited research focusing on parenting attitudes and socialization patterns. The single mother’s gender ideology and locus of control are conceptualized as personal resources that may be expected to impact her child-rearing patterns. Examination of these beliefs within the single-parent household provides a larger picture of the influence of parental social cognition on child socialization patterns. That resources available to custodial mothers are significant determinants of her child socialization patterns has been demonstrated by Machida and Holloway (1991). These researchers found that availability of friends and family for social support contribute significantly to divorced mothers’ authoritative parenting. Authoritative parenting refers to Baumrind’s (1967) pattern of parenting, which consists of reasonable limits and reasonable consequences carried out in an atmosphere that includes a sensitivity to children’s questions and needs for explanation.

Conceptualizing sociocognitive beliefs of single mothers as personal resources that influence their parenting patterns broadens our awareness of resources available to single-parent families by emphasizing internal as well external resources. Determination of the role that parental beliefs play in child-rearing patterns of single parents is especially relevant since variations seen in children’s adjustment to living in one-parent families have been consistently related to the parenting patterns of custodial parents (Heath & MacKinnon, 1988; Hess & Camara, 1979; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982). Two social cognitive belief systems are germane to acquiring an expanded view of the role of social cognition in child-rearing patterns in single-parent families: locus of control and gender ideology. Locus of control describes the degree to which individuals perceive the consequences they encounter are under personal control as opposed to external forces beyond their control (Morgan, 1988). Gender ideology refers to an individual’s stand on the issues of male and female roles and behaviors, measured on an autocratic–egalitarian continuum (Levinson & Huffman, 1958).

**Gender Ideology**

Conceptualizing gender ideology as a personal resource of single parents is applicable since single parents do not have the options of dividing tasks and responsibilities related to parenting according to parent gender. They are of necessity assuming nontraditional roles and carrying out responsibilities traditionally assigned to their own gender as well as to the gender of the absent parent. As noted by Kitson and Roach (1989),