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Do Parents' Educational Expectations in Adolescence Predict Adult Life Satisfaction?

Objective: To examine the extent to which parents' educational expectations for adolescents are associated with children's life satisfaction in adulthood and whether that association is mediated by adolescents' individual characteristics.

Background: Life satisfaction is acknowledged to be an important goal in a child's developmental path. However, less is known about the long-term influence of parental expectations on adolescents' positive life outcomes and how functioning in adolescents aside from parental expectations is related to these long-term associations.

Method: Using data from the 2 cohorts of high school students and their parents who participated in the Longitudinal Study of American Youth from 1991 to 2010 (N = 2,289), direct and indirect paths from parental expectations to adulthood life satisfaction were tested within the structural equation modeling framework.

Results: Parents' higher educational expectations for adolescents were positively related to their children's life satisfaction 2 decades later via children's expectations, self-esteem, and educational attainment. Parents' expectations were associated with higher self-esteem in the adolescent years through adolescents' expectations, which ultimately predicted adolescents' life satisfaction as adults.

Conclusion: The level of expectations parents have for their children are related to their adolescents' life satisfaction 2 decades later, perhaps because expectations are associated with adolescents' educational attainment and self-esteem.

Implications: Family practitioners and educators are encouraged to educate adolescents' parents about the link between their educational expectations and long-term educational attainment and life satisfaction for their children in adulthood.

Scholars have long sought to understand how parents' educational expectations—that is, expectations of their children's educational attainment (Briley, Harden, & Tucker-Drob, 2014), hereafter referred to simply as *expectations*—play a role in their children's educational success. Much research in this area has focused on the influence of parents' expectations on children's own educational expectations and showed that children tend to build their own expectations to match their parents' (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1978; Schneider, Keesler, & Morlock, 2010). Adolescent children with parents who have higher expectations often show higher expectations themselves. Parents' expectations also have been shown to have a positive relationship with children's school outcomes (Sciarra & Ambrosino, 2011), including over and above the effect of socioeconomic status or race and ethnicity (Froiland & Davison, 2014). This line of inquiry is well established, revealing key processes in parents' influence in families that appear to affect children's educational

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performance and achievement outcomes (Briley et al., 2004; Froiland & Davison, 2014; Sciarra & Ambrosino, 2011; Wood, Kaplan, & McLoyd, 2007; Wood, Kurtz-Costes, & Coping, 2011). However, less is known about (a) the long-term influence of parental expectations on adolescents' positive life outcomes, (b) how functioning in adolescents aside from parental expectations is related to the long-term associations between parents' expectations during adolescence and adult positive life outcomes, and (c) the mediators that might link these two domains.

Life satisfaction, defined as one's overall evaluation of his or her quality of life based on subjective criteria (Shin & Johnson, 1978), is a critical component of positive development and a key indicator of quality of life (O'Connor et al., 2011). As a subjective evaluation of personal well-being (Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Veenhoven, 1996), the life satisfaction domain demonstrates the degree to which one is satisfied with his or her accomplishments, implementation of goals, or surroundings (Huebner, 2004; O'Connor et al., 2011). Life satisfaction is among the most desired developmental life outcomes that parents tend to have for their children in adulthood (Louis & Zhao, 2002). A focus on predictors of adult life satisfaction is especially warranted for adolescents because they are able to evaluate their own educational choices and have some degree of agency to shape the trajectory of their own lives (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006); yet they are still largely influenced by their family environment, parenting practices, and parental beliefs and expectations (Neto, 1993; Zhang & Leung, 2002). Although life satisfaction is acknowledged to be an important goal in children's developmental path, studies have rarely been conducted to investigate the long-term influence of parental expectations on children's life satisfaction (Bryant & Conger, 2002). Thus, the present study was designed to longitudinally examine possible direct and indirect paths linking adolescent and parent predictors to subsequent life satisfaction outcomes in adulthood.

BACKGROUND

Theoretical Perspectives

Previous theory and empirical research on positive development provide a context for an examination of life satisfaction in adulthood. Eccles's

expectancy-value model emphasizes the role one's own expectations and evaluation play in shaping one's decision-making, pursuit of future behaviors, and later performance (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). This model also suggests that parents and schools are important for fostering desirable outcomes by influencing adolescents' expectations and evaluation of themselves. Indeed, this model recognizes the importance of environmental contexts, and of parents in particular, for having a critical influence on children's developmental paths and ultimately developmental outcomes (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Jacobs & Eccles, 2000; Schneider et al., 2010).

Self-esteem theory (Boden, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2008) posits that children who focus more on educational attainment and expect to attain higher education are more likely to have experiences that nurture a belief in their ability to effectively navigate educational expectations. For these children, their expectations, self-evaluations, self-esteem, and educational attainment are also affected by previous experiences of achieving success and positive development in their families and other environmental contexts (Eccles, Barber, Updegraff, & O'Brien, 1998). From a life span developmental systems perspective, the developmental transition from adolescence to adulthood is a crucial process in that one's capacities either continue to develop as tasks are successfully accomplished (Vargas, Galambos, & Hoglund, 2013) or digress from a positive developmental trajectory when tasks are not successfully accomplished (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). Each child has different expectations and perceptions of his or her abilities and may have dissimilar life experiences and life outcomes over time, depending on the expectations of his or her parents and the surrounding context (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1978). As such, one's life satisfaction in adulthood is likely to be influenced by both parents' and children's interactions and processes that take place during adolescence and the transition to adulthood (Bryant & Conger, 2002).

Parental Expectations

Much work has been done to show that parents' expectations are associated with positive educational and familial environments for children's development (e.g., Briley et al., 2014; Jacobs & Eccles, 2000; Ou & Reynolds, 2008;

Wood, Okeke, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2006). Parents with high expectations expect their children to continue on an educational path rather than pursue other vocational options (Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger, 1994). In particular, higher levels of parental expectations have been reported to strongly predict adolescents' educational expectations (Froiland, Peterson, & Davison, 2013; Sciarra & Ambrosino, 2011). A large body of research has consistently suggested that higher levels of parental expectations are related to higher levels of achievement, fewer behavior issues, and greater education attainment (Froiland & Davison, 2014; Wood et al., 2007, 2011).

Parents' expectations help children construct their beliefs about themselves throughout their school years, and parents' input influences their children's own educational expectations (Jacobs & Eccles, 2000; Jeynes, 2012). However, young minority children and children from less advantaged backgrounds are more likely to hold unrealistic expectations; these expectations do not predict their school performance outcomes (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1978) and result in less plausible career aspirations (Hoelter, 1982). The discrepancy between children's expectations and their actual outcomes could be the product of overly optimistic or idealistic expectations among parents, which could be the result of their parents providing ineffective academic socialization experiences to their children.

Another key individual characteristic important to children's development is their self-esteem. Self-esteem, defined as "one's perceived sense of self-worth or whether one accepts and respects oneself" (Schunk, 2004, p. 374), is an evaluative component of self-concept, which is critical in adolescent development. Additional key developmental outcomes include one's educational attainment and life satisfaction. Parental expectations have been found to be positively associated with children's educational attainment (Froiland et al., 2013), even after controlling for other family and individual characteristics, including family economic status, parental involvement, and prior achievement (Froiland & Davison, 2014; Jacob & Linkow, 2011). Life satisfaction is usually defined as general wellness and positive functioning (Suldo, Riley, & Shaffer, 2006). Despite the importance of life satisfaction as one of a child's developmental goals, relatively few studies have investigated the relation between parental expectations and a child's

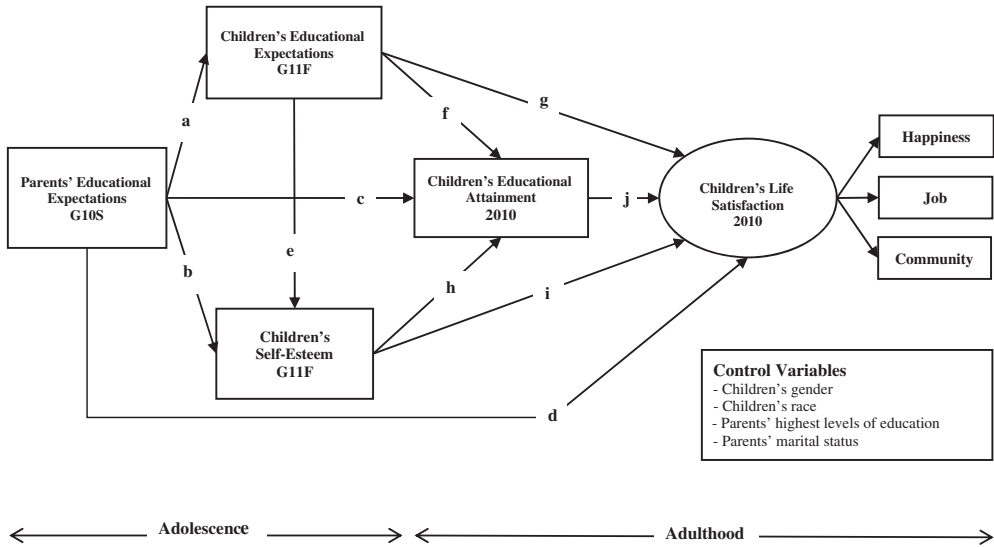
life satisfaction. Among the few, some studies found associations among parental support, family functioning, and a child's psychological well-being, including life satisfaction (Bush, Peterson, Cobas, & Supple, 2002; Salem, Zimmerman, & Notaro, 1998; Shek, 1998). In particular, parental support and close familial relationships in childhood were associated with an adult's life satisfaction (Louis & Zhao, 2002). Considering parents' expectations as indications of parental support for their children's future (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010), we anticipate that higher parental expectations relate to higher future life satisfaction of children.

On the basis of this literature (e.g., Boden et al., 2008; Entwisle & Hayduk, 1978; Jacob & Linkow, 2011; Louis & Zhao, 2002; Schneider et al., 2010; Sciarra & Ambrosino, 2011), we hypothesized that parents with higher expectations report higher child expectations (path a), more positive self-esteem (path b), higher educational attainment (path c), and better life satisfaction (path d) in the developmental paths. Figure 1 gives a graphical depiction of the pathways to be tested with structural equation modeling (SEM).

Children's Expectations

Students who have higher educational expectations often maintain higher levels of self-esteem (Agnew & Jones, 1988). The literature in this area shows that self-esteem may be influenced by students' aspirations for success (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971) and their expectations for future performance (Liska, 1981). Although some students from more challenged backgrounds demonstrated inflated expectations for their future success, such inflated educational expectations did not adversely affect their self-evaluation and self-image (Agnew & Jones, 1988). Children's expectations predict higher educational attainment (Wood et al., 2011), including among racial and ethnic minority children's (Roche et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2006); indeed, children's expectations could be one of the most important predictors of one's social status and educational attainment (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Ash and Huebner (1998) found that expectations among early adolescents were positively associated with their life satisfaction but differed according to their background characteristics; indeed, other research has found that adolescents' expectations and

FIGURE 1. HYPOTHESIZED MODEL. G10S = SPRING OF 10TH GRADE; G11F = FALL OF 11TH GRADE.



goals are related to their life satisfaction at varying degrees and through different paths according to socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (del Valle, Álvarez, Vera, & Acosta, 2017). In short, variations aside, when children have greater educational expectations, they acquire higher levels of education in their lives and perform better academically, even after controlling for environmental and familial characteristics (Alexander et al., 1994).

Thus, we hypothesized that children's educational expectations are positively associated with their self-esteem (path e), later educational attainment (path f), and later life satisfaction (path g), as shown in Figure 1. We also speculated that children's expectations might mediate the connections between parents' expectations and children's outcomes (i.e., self-esteem, educational attainment, and life satisfaction). Although we could find studies showing that parents' expectations mediate the program effects on education attainment (Purtell & McLoyd, 2013), to our knowledge, no study has investigated the mediating effect of a child's own expectations on the relation between parents' expectations and a child's own education attainment. Considering that children's expectations are closely related to parents' expectations (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1978; Schneider et al., 2010), we speculated that, similar to the case of

parents' expectations, children's expectations can mediate the relations between parents' expectations and educational attainment.

Children's Self-Esteem

Self-esteem plays a central role in children's developmental process. When adolescents perceive their value positively and respect themselves, they tend to perform better and persist in their academic endeavors, thus reaching higher educational attainment (Gutman, Schoon, & Sabates, 2012). Self-esteem also predicts life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1995; Neto, 1993); lower levels of self-esteem in adolescence were related to lower levels of life satisfaction (Boden et al., 2008; Diener & Diener, 1995). In fact, research suggests that self-esteem may be the strongest predictor of life satisfaction (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Crocker & Park, 2004; Diener & Diener, 1995; Neto, 1993). Therefore, self-esteem is a robust variable that may explain the variance in one's life satisfaction. As with many other psychosocial characteristics that children develop in family contexts—such as hope, purpose (Chui & Wong, 2017), autonomy, intrinsic motivation (Froiland, 2011), and school adjustment (Froiland & Oros, 2014)—we anticipate that higher parental expectation is related to higher self-esteem in adolescents.

On the whole, we hypothesized that adolescents' self-esteem is positively associated with educational attainment (path h) and life satisfaction (path i), as shown in Figure 1. We also speculated that self-esteem plays a role in the link between the two variables. A body of research has shown that self-esteem not only mediated the relationships between higher initial levels of work success and later work success (Judge & Hurst, 2008), but also partially mediated the relationships between hope and life satisfaction (Du, Bernardo, & Yeung, 2015) and between gratitude and life satisfaction (Kong, Ding, & Zhao, 2015). Although we found studies showing that children's self-esteem mediates the influence of psychological variables on life outcomes, to our knowledge, no study has investigated the mediating effect of a child's own self-esteem in these relations. Therefore, we used these studies as evidence to support the possibility of indirect paths linking parents' expectations and a child's educational attainment and life satisfaction.

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is one of the most important developmental outcomes in adulthood because it is associated with quality of life, life satisfaction, sense of control over life, and economic status (Ross & Willigen, 1997; Suldo et al., 2006), and researchers have often emphasized the importance of familial and environmental factors in that process. Gordon and Cui (2015) found that educational attainment in young adulthood mediates the relationship between positive parenting practices during adolescence and children's later career success. This has also been observed in the educational attainment of children from minority backgrounds (Wood et al., 2006). Additionally, adolescents' educational expectations strongly predict their educational attainment (Alexander et al., 1994; Roche et al., 2017), showing the role of individual beliefs in the pursuit of their education and educational success. Children's educational attainment is influenced by their perceived ability and their self-esteem (Gutman et al., 2012), as well as by key positive life outcomes in terms of satisfaction, general wellness, and positive functioning (Ross & Willigen, 1997; Suldo et al., 2006).

On the basis of past studies, we expected that adolescents' educational attainment is positively associated with their life satisfaction (path

j, as shown in Figure 1). We also speculated that educational attainment mediates the association between adolescents' expectations and life satisfaction, as well as between adolescents' self-esteem and life satisfaction.

The Present Study

The present study was designed to examine how parents' expectations for their adolescents are directly connected to their children's life satisfaction during adulthood, and indirectly associated via the mechanism of educational expectations and self-esteem of adolescents and educational attainment in adulthood. In conjunction with findings from previous research, the study is framed using the expectancy-value model (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), self-esteem theory (Boden et al., 2008), and a life span developmental systems perspective (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006; Vargas et al., 2013) to understand the role of parents on adolescents' life satisfaction development. A large, nationally representative sample was used to obtain data from both parents and children as they transitioned from adolescence to adulthood over 2 decades. This sample provided a rare opportunity to examine the long-term effect of parental expectations in adolescence, combined with data from children in adolescence and positive life outcomes about 20 years later.

Five specific hypotheses were tested. First, we hypothesized that parents' expectations in adolescence positively predict adolescents' expectations, self-esteem, educational attainment, and later life satisfaction. Second, we hypothesized that adolescents' expectations predict their future self-esteem, educational attainment, and life satisfaction. Third, we hypothesized that adolescents' self-esteem predicts their later educational attainment and life satisfaction. We also expected that adolescents' educational attainment predicts life satisfaction. Finally, we expected that the influence of parent's expectations on later life satisfaction is largely mediated by these measures in children's developmental paths.

METHOD

Participants

The present study used the Longitudinal Study of American Youth (LSAY), a nationwide study

conducted in the United States with middle and high school students, parents, and teachers in public schools. The LSAY consists of two cohorts. The first cohort included 2,829 high-school students who were in 10th grade in 1987. Follow-up surveys were administered annually for 7 years, with 3 years of high school and 4 years after high school, ending in 1994. The second cohort included 3,116 middle school students who were in seventh grade in 1987. Follow-up surveys were administered annually for 7 years, with 3 years of middle school, 3 years of high school, and 1 year after high school, ending in 1994. Thirteen years later in 2007, surveys were administered again annually for 5 years (ending in 2011) to track the educational and occupational outcomes of the original LSAY participants. See Miller (2014) for a more complete description of the LSAY design and sampling procedures.

Given our theoretical considerations and research interests, we focused on 5,945 10th-grade high school students in the two cohorts. Inclusion criteria required that (a) parents participated when their children were in 10th grade (72.0% of the total sample), (b) children participated when they were in 11th grade (76.1% of the total sample), and (c) children participated in 2010 (54.5% of the total sample). Our final sample consisted of 2,289 children (38.5% of the total sample; 54.5% female, 45.5% male) who met these three inclusion criteria. The children were primarily non-Hispanic White (81.5%); 6.6% were non-Hispanic Black, 5.6% were Hispanic, and 1.7% were Asian. In 2010, the highest level of education of most participants was a high school diploma (38.1%), followed by a baccalaureate degree (31.7 %) and a master's degree (14.1%). The sample of parents comprised 56.3% mothers, 42.2% fathers, and 1.5% grandparents or guardians. The majority (82.6%) of participating parents were married at their time of participation (i.e., when their children were in the 10th grade). Most parents' highest level of education was a high school diploma (47.4%), followed by a 4-year college degree (19.7%), and an advanced degree (15.6%).

Measures

Parents' educational expectations. Parents' educational expectations when their children were in 10th grade (the first cohort was in spring

of 1988, and the second cohort was in spring of 1991) were measured using one ordinal measure: "What is the highest level of education that you would like to see your child complete?" Response choices ranged from *less than high school graduation* (coded as 1) to *doctorate* (8).

Children's educational expectations. Children's educational expectations when they were in 11th grade (the first cohort was in fall of 1988 and the second cohort was in fall of 1991) were measured using one ordinal measure: "How far in school do you think you will get?" Response choices ranged from *less than high school graduation* (1) to *PhD/MD/other* (9).

Children's self-esteem. Children's self-esteem when they were in 11th grade was measured using six items from Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965); the original scale comprised 10 items. Examples of items included are "I take a positive attitude toward myself" and "I feel I am a person of worth on an equal plane with others." Response choices ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5), with higher scores reflecting greater self-esteem. Mean scores of the six items used in our analysis. Alpha reliability for the scale was .80 in this study.

Children's educational attainment. Children's highest educational attainment was measured using one self-report item from children in 2010. Response choices ranged from *less than high school diploma* (1) to *doctorate/professional degree* (6).

Children's life satisfaction. Children's life satisfaction in 2010 was measured using three items assessing (a) happiness, with options ranging from *very unhappy* (0) to *completely happy* (10); (b) job satisfaction, with options ranging from *very dissatisfied* (0) to *completely satisfied* (10); and (c) community satisfaction *very dissatisfied* (0) to *completely satisfied* (10). These three items were used as indicators of a life satisfaction latent construct.

Control variables. Children's sex (1 = female, 0 = male) and race or ethnicity (1 = White, 0 = non-White), as well as parents' marital status (1 = married, 0 = others), were collected from children in the fall of 1987. Parents' highest education was gathered from three sources:

children in 1987, parents' interviews conducted from 1988 to 1990, and children in 2008. The highest level of education of the parent who completed the interview was coded into five categories, ranging from *less than high school diploma* (1) to *advanced degree* (5).

Analyses

We employed a descriptive analysis and bivariate correlation analysis to examine the means, standard deviations, and relationships among study variables. Next, structural equation modeling analysis using AMOS 20.0 (Arbuckle, 2011) was conducted to test the hypotheses. The percentage of missing data on study variables ranged from 0% to 16%; thus, full information maximum likelihood estimation was used to consider all cases and missing data patterns in the analysis (Acock, 2005). To examine the indirect effects among study variables, we conducted a Sobel test (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001). Comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used to evaluate the fit between these data and the structural equations (Hu & Bentler, 1999). For the purposes of this study, a CFI value $>.90$ (Bollen, 1989) and an RMSEA value $<.08$ (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006) indicated an acceptable model fit.

Four control variables important in prior research were included in the model: adolescents' sex, adolescents' race or ethnicity, parents' highest level of education, and parents' marital status. Research has found that parents and teachers alike hold lower educational expectations for African American boys than for African American girls, suggesting the potential for gendered parental expectations across other races and ethnicities as well (Wood et al., 2006). Studies have also found that parental expectations for education and life satisfaction are positively related to adolescents' academic outcomes while controlling for variables such as race and ethnicity (Froiland et al., 2013) and socioeconomic status (Chui & Wong, 2017; Louis & Zhao, 2002; Rätty & Kasanen, 2010; Roche et al., 2017). Parents' socioeconomic status and education level have both been directly and indirectly related to the level of education attainment and life satisfaction in previous studies (Ou & Reynold, 2008; Roche et al., 2017). Additionally, other research that examined the relations between education expectations

and education attainment controlled for family structure such as marital status (Alexander et al., 1994). Therefore, we controlled for adolescents' sex, adolescents' race or ethnicity, parents' education level as a socioeconomic status indicator, and parents' marital status as a family structure indicator.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among the study variables. The mean scores of four indices of children's life satisfaction in 2010 were 7.50 ($SD = 1.75$) for happiness, 7.03 ($SD = 2.06$) for job satisfaction, and 7.28 ($SD = 1.96$) for community satisfaction. Parents' educational expectations in 10th grade correlated positively with most children's variables, such as educational expectations in adolescence ($r = .47$, $p < .001$), self-esteem in adolescence ($r = .11$, $p < .001$), educational attainment in adulthood ($r = .37$, $p < .001$), happiness in adulthood ($r = .05$, $p = .024$), and community satisfaction in adulthood ($r = .06$, $p = .010$).

Testing the Theoretical Model

Figure 2 presents the results of the hypothesized model. The model provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(16) = 27.779$, $p < .001$; CFI = .996; RMSEA = .018. Given the adequate fit of the model to the data, we tested each of our hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that parents' educational expectations are positively associated with adolescents' educational expectations, self-esteem, later education attainment, and later life satisfaction. The results partially supported our hypothesis, showing that parents' educational expectations were positively associated with adolescents' educational expectations in adolescence (path a; $\beta = .42$, $p < .001$) and adolescents' educational attainment in adulthood (path c; $\beta = .15$, $p < .001$). However, parents' educational expectations were not related to adolescents' self-esteem in adolescence (path b; $\beta = .04$, $p = .117$) or to adolescents' life satisfaction in adulthood (path d; $\beta = -.01$, $p = .843$). Thus, higher levels of parental expectations for education in adolescence were statistically related to higher educational expectations and greater educational attainment among children,

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations of Study Variables

Variables	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Adolescent gender ^a	0–1	0.54	0.49	—										
2. Adolescent race ^b	0–1	0.81	0.38	-.01	—									
3. Parent highest level of education	1–5	2.96	1.20	-.06**	.05*	—								
4. Parent marital status (10th grade) ^c	0–1	0.83	0.38	-.04	.13***	.04	—							
5. Parent educational expectations (10th grade)	1–8	6.07	1.30	.02	.02	.29***	.06**	—						
6. Adolescent educational expectations (11th grade)	1–9	6.67	1.89	.06**	.02	.32***	.07**	.47***	—					
7. Adolescent self-esteem (11th grade)	1–5	3.86	0.65	-.03	.01	.06*	.01	.11***	.16***	—				
8. Adolescent educational attainment in 2010	1–6	3.34	1.28	.03	.08***	.37***	.08***	.37***	.46***	.14***	—			
9. Adolescent happiness in 2010	0–10	7.50	1.75	.03	.03	.05*	.02	.05*	.07**	.14***	.12***	—		
10. Adolescent job satisfaction in 2010	0–10	7.03	2.06	.04	.01	.02	.03	.02	.04	.09***	.05*	.47***	—	
11. Adolescent community satisfaction in 2010	0–10	7.28	1.96	.02	.05*	.08***	.04	.06*	.08***	.05*	.14***	.35***	.31***	—

Note.

^aBinary variable with *boy* (0) and *girl* (1). ^bBinary variable with *non-White* (0) and *White* (1). ^cBinary variable with *not married* (0) and *married* (1). **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

but those positive associations did not extend to broader measures of well-being such as self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Second, we hypothesized that adolescents’ educational expectations are positively associated with their self-esteem, later educational attainment, and later life satisfaction. The results partially supported the hypothesis, showing that adolescents’ educational expectations in adolescence were positively associated with their self-esteem in adolescence (path e; $\beta = .15, p < .001$) and educational attainment in adulthood (path f; $\beta = .31, p < .001$). However, adolescents’ educational expectations in adolescence were not directly related to their life satisfaction in adulthood (path g; $\beta = .01, p = .720$).

Third, we hypothesized that adolescents’ self-esteem is positively associated with later educational attainment and later life satisfaction. Indeed, as predicted, adolescents’ self-esteem in adolescence was positively associated with their educational attainment (path h; $\beta = .06, p = .003$) and life satisfaction in adulthood (path i; $\beta = .15, p < .001$).

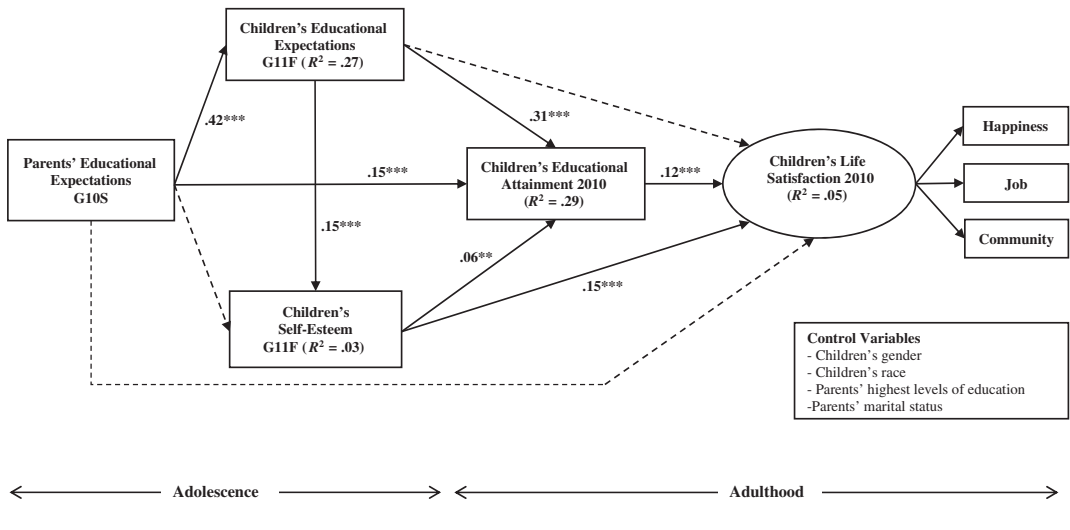
Finally, we hypothesized that children’s educational attainment is positively associated with their life satisfaction. Consistent with the

hypothesis, children’s educational attainment had a positive association with life satisfaction in 2010 (path j; $\beta = .12, p < .001$).

Overall, the hypothesized model explained 27% of the variance in children’s educational expectations in adolescence, 3% of children’s self-esteem in adolescence, 29% of children’s educational attainment in adulthood, and 5% of children’s life satisfaction in adulthood.

To learn how parents’ educational expectations were associated with adolescents’ life satisfaction in adulthood, we investigated the possible indirect paths via adolescents’ educational expectations, adolescents’ self-esteem, and adolescents’ educational attainment by conducting a Sobel test. The results from the Sobel test showed that adolescents’ educational expectations in adolescence fully mediated the association between parents’ expectations in adolescence and adolescents’ self-esteem in adolescence ($z = 5.58, p < .001$), indicating that parents’ educational expectations had a positive association with adolescents’ self-esteem through adolescents’ educational expectations. Adolescents’ educational attainment in adulthood fully mediated the association between their educational expectations in adolescence and their life satisfaction in adulthood ($z = 3.77,$

FIGURE 2. RESULTS FOR HYPOTHESIZED MODEL. STANDARD COEFFICIENTS ARE SHOWN. G10S = SPRING OF 10TH GRADE; G11F = FALL OF 11TH GRADE. MODEL FIT: $\chi^2(16) = 27.779$, $p < .001$; COMPARATIVE FIT INDEX = .996; ROOT MEAN SQUARE ERROR OF APPROXIMATION = .018. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.



$p < .001$). This result indicates that adolescents' educational expectations were positively associated with their adult life satisfaction through educational attainment. In addition, adolescents' educational attainment mediated the association between self-esteem in adolescence and life satisfaction in adulthood ($z = 2.38$, $p = .017$). This result indicates that adolescents' self-esteem was positively associated with life satisfaction through educational attainment.

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to explore the paths from parental expectations during adolescence to adulthood life satisfaction directly and indirectly via adolescents' individual characteristics during the transition to adulthood. This model was tested using the data from two cohorts of high school students who participated in the LSAY over 2 decades. The first notable finding of this study is that parental expectations for adolescence directly predicted adolescents' expectations and educational attainment. The predictive power of parent's expectations to adolescents' expectations strongly supports the life span developmental systems perspective (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006) and aligns with evidence that parents influence their adolescents' educational expectations. The finding

that higher parental expectations are associated with higher educational attainment is also consistent with other literature (Jacobs & Eccles, 2000; Schneider et al., 2010; Sciarra & Ambrosino, 2011; Wood et al., 2006).

Importantly, this finding concerning ultimate educational attainment extends the literature in that studies on the relations between parents' expectations and education attainment have thus far been limited to short-term relations (e.g., adolescents' college entrance; Wood et al., 2011); this finding provides evidence of parents' long-term impact on educational attainment. This can be interpreted to mean that higher levels of parents' expectations may, in part, be associated with adolescents' higher expectations and educational attainment due to more positive feelings and evaluations of children who may go through challenges during their developmental phase. It may enable these children to more confidently plan their life and tasks (Briley et al., 2014; Sciarra & Ambrosino, 2011) and better envision higher educational attainment as they go through their developmental process (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Parents may have low expectations of adolescents' education for several reasons, including socioeconomic status, personal beliefs about education, family history (Chiu & Wong, 2015; Roche et al., 2017), feelings of helplessness, stress, a lack

of confidence in adolescents' education, and negative prospects regarding their adolescents' ability (Alexander et al., 1994; Louis & Zhao, 2002; Roche et al., 2016). Nonetheless, our findings suggest that parents should be encouraged to sustain higher education expectations because these expectations appear to contribute to their adolescents' own expectations and educational attainment. An important caveat needs to be mentioned here. Likely, it is not the expectations themselves that lead to attainment, but rather the behaviors that coincide with those expectations. Parents who expect their child to obtain higher education are more likely to check homework, follow up regarding progress, review semester grades, and generally monitor their children's academic behaviors more carefully and routinely than those parents who do not hold high educational attainment expectations for their children. These behaviors likely influence child attainment more than expectations alone.

Our findings show that adolescents' educational expectations directly predicted adolescents' self-esteem. Children who had higher educational expectations were more likely to have higher self-esteem during adolescence. The results that children with high expectations of education are likely to self-evaluate that they can make things work is consistent with a previous study (Agnew & Jones, 1988), implying that they can persist in their educational trajectories (Wood et al., 2006). Importantly, the relationship between expectations and self-esteem may be reciprocal—that is, higher expectations may influence self-esteem, which in turn shapes expectations that one will do well. Scholars have noted that children who focus more on educational attainment and expect to attain higher education are more likely to have educational experiences in their developmental phase that help them build their belief in their ability to effectively navigate their educational experiences through their developmental phases (Boden et al., 2008). In other words, a self-fulfilling prophecy occurs in that positive expectations lead to positive experiences, which confirm, reinforce, and perpetuate further positive expectations. We also found that children who had higher educational expectations had attained more education by the time they reached their 30s. As the expectancy-value model posits, throughout their developmental paths, they may have been more interested in

their career and educational paths with the parents expecting them to persist, which may have helped them to focus on and sustain their education (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

Previous studies have rarely considered the role of adolescents' self-esteem in their educational attainment and life satisfaction. The present findings suggest that adolescents' evaluation of self and self-esteem are strongly associated with their educational attainment and life satisfaction when they become adults. The results add to other studies that have investigated life satisfaction as a subjective concept of well-being (Diener & Diener, 1995). The better these adolescents felt about themselves, the more education they attained and the more satisfied they were in their subsequent lives. These findings confirm the expectation that adolescents' feelings toward themselves are an important foundation on which these individuals base their general understanding of self (Boden et al., 2008; Zhang & Leung, 2002).

Furthermore, level of educational attainment was statistically related to life satisfaction in adulthood, which is consistent with previous studies (Ross & Willigen, 1997; Suldo et al., 2006). The relationship between higher educational attainment and life satisfaction may be due to higher earnings, prestige of jobs, marital status, housing, and other factors (Alexander et al., 1994; Chui & Wong, 2017). Evidence has shown that these aspects of life circumstances, which we did not investigate directly in the present study, have meaningful influences on adolescents' life satisfaction as they reach adulthood. For example, people who have a higher level of education are likely to earn relatively more money compared with people who have a lower level of education (Featherman & Hauser, 1978; Glenn & Weaver, 1982; Ross & Willigen, 1997), and level of income is positively related to life satisfaction (Louis & Zhao, 2002; Quinn, Staines, & McCullough, 1974).

Although we found that parents' educational expectations were directly associated with adolescents' education expectations and educational attainment, adolescents' educational expectations also emerged as an indirect mechanism through which parent's expectations were associated with adolescents' self-esteem. Specifically, parent expectations were associated with increased self-esteem in their adolescent years through adolescents'

expectations, which ultimately predicted adolescents' life satisfaction as adults. Adolescence is a key developmental phase for constructing one's self-identity, developing a career focus, and identifying life tasks (Neto, 1993; Zhang & Leung, 2002). It appears that adolescents may develop their self-esteem, at least in part, through their interactions with parents and in familial contexts, and the influence of self-esteem in adolescence appears to extend into adulthood (Crocker & Park, 2004). Hence, it is important to note that parental expectations for educational attainment seem to be important for adolescents given that adolescents may build their self-esteem through their own educational expectations. This finding is noteworthy to the extent that it provides evidence that parental expectations of their adolescents potentially play an important role in the development of adolescents' self-esteem throughout the transition to adulthood by influencing adolescents' expectations, which ultimately are related to one's life satisfaction.

Educational attainment in adulthood also emerged as a mechanism linking adolescents' educational expectations and their degree of life satisfaction. Adolescents' educational attainment when they have reached adulthood fully linked the association between their educational expectations in high school and their life satisfaction a few decades later. This finding suggests that adolescents' educational expectations in high school have a positive relationship to life satisfaction in adulthood through the education that they have received. Results from the present study suggest that adolescents' educational attainment further serves as a mechanism linking adolescents' self-esteem and their life satisfaction. What adolescents feel about themselves in high school appears to influence their educational attainment by the time they reach adulthood. In alignment with the self-esteem theory (Boden, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2008) and life span developmental systems perspective (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006; Vargas et al., 2013), these results also provide evidence to support the view that transitioning to adulthood is a vibrant process in which adolescents' self-evaluation is connected with their life outcomes, and especially life satisfaction. The magnitude of influence adolescents' self-esteem had on their life satisfaction in adulthood was much larger on their educational attainment, providing evidence that

adolescents' positive self-evaluation during adolescence is important beyond educational attainment.

Overall, the results of this study are consistent with our premise that the level of expectations parents have for their children could indeed have a lasting effect on their adolescents' life satisfaction after about 2 decades, by way of its impact on adolescents' educational attainment and self-esteem. Children may feel pressured while they are still in high school when their parents hold higher educational expectations of them. However, our results indicated that parents' expectations of their children in terms of education could actually be central factors in adolescents' educational progress and successful life path, as gauged by their degree of life satisfaction. Although parents may be less engaged with their adolescents' schooling and daily practices than with younger children, parents' involvement in education is still closely related to adolescents' positive developmental outcomes (Eccles & Harold, 1993), and parental expectations continue to be an important feature in children's lives (Froiland & Davison, 2014).

Limitations

Along with the findings, several limitations should be considered. First, the findings were based on parent and child reports of their educational expectations, self-esteem, educational attainment, and life satisfaction. Although the measures were valid and reliable (Miller, 2014), self-reported measures may be susceptible to bias in a way that could impair construct validity (Conway & Lance, 2010). Future research could combine self-report and responses from other reports about the same variables together in the study. Second, one parent completed the educational expectations questions when the child was in 10th grade. Therefore, our findings reflected the perspective of only one parent's educational expectations and at only one point in time. Although their adolescents were about halfway through high school, parents' responses could have differed if they were asked to respond when their children were younger or if they believed that they could exert more influence on their children's education. Future research could elaborate on this point, providing perspectives of both parents across different age levels of children. Third, our measure of

parental educational expectations used only one item. Although the measure is regarded as highly valid and reliable (Miller, 2014), due to the evaluative nature of the item, parents could have interpreted the question differently. A composite measure or multiple measures of parental expectations of their adolescents' education could have provided a more complete perspective on their beliefs. Finally, although we found statistically significant relationships between parents' and adolescents' educational expectations in adolescence and adolescents' life satisfaction in adulthood through adolescents' self-esteem and educational attainment, the meaningfulness of these findings should be interpreted with caution because of the low r value. Incorporating qualitative data in future research would add richness to our findings with regard to these variables.

Practical Implications

Despite these limitations, the results of this study highlighted several important points for practical implications and family processes. The major practical contribution of the present research is that it provides much needed empirical evidence that parental expectations remain associated with child outcomes 2 decades later, even after controlling for sociodemographic variables, gender, and family structure through adolescents' individual characteristics that evolve in their developmental paths. Our findings suggest that higher parental expectations of their adolescents' education may be an important factor to consider in intentional efforts to enhance adolescents' success over time, and adolescents' own educational expectations are highly correlated with developing their own career paths and life satisfaction. Thus, family practitioners and educators are encouraged to educate parents about the link between their educational expectations and long-term educational attainment and life satisfaction for their children in adulthood.

Conclusion

In conclusion, parental expectations in adolescence are highly correlated with outcomes in adulthood, yet can be largely explained by familial and environmental factors within which each child's expectations and self-esteem develop (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1978). Family

practitioners and educators are encouraged to acknowledge—to the extent that these associations are causal—the potential of adolescents' parents playing a meaningful role in shaping their children's educational expectations, long-term educational attainment, and life satisfaction as they progress through adolescence and into adulthood, even after accounting for each child's different characteristics and environmental context. Our findings suggest that parents need to and are encouraged to maintain high expectations of their children because doing so may ultimately help them achieve greater life satisfaction when they become adults.

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