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Learning and Parenting in Spanish Environments: Prosocial Behavior, Aggression, and Self-Concept

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Received: 17 August 2019; Accepted: 18 September 2019; Published: 22 September 2019



Abstract: The psychology of sustainability and sustainable development is related to improvements in people's quality of life in different environments, including the family. Based on this theoretical approach, this study explores the relationships between parenting styles (maternal and paternal support, control, and neglect) and prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept of children from Spain aged 4–7 years ($M = 5.81$; $DS = 1.05$). Participants were 635 boys and girls (53.7% boys; 46.3% girls) from Valencia and Castellón (Spain). Most parents had low educational levels and low-qualified, temporary jobs. Over 82% of participants were from Spain. The other participants were from Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and Southeast Asia. The results indicate that maternal support and control have the strongest relationships with children's prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept, fundamentally as predictors of self-concept and aggression. According to children's perceptions, maternal parenting plays a more prominent role than paternal parenting. Authoritarian and neglectful parenting at these ages seems to be perceived less negatively than at other ages, and the effects of such parenting may arise at a later age. Furthermore, prosocial behavior and self-concept curb aggression. These results can support the design of interventions in childhood.

Keywords: prosocial behavior; parenting styles; aggression; self-concept; childhood

1. Introduction

Socialization during childhood primarily occurs through family relations. According to the psychology of sustainability, the concept of sustainability must be broadened to embrace the psychological dimension of human development [1]. Accordingly, the psychology of sustainability can enrich the traditional view of sustainability. Instead of limiting this view to ecology, equity, and the economy, the psychology of sustainability also deals with sustainability in terms of improvement in the quality of life of people in a range of contexts, thereby encouraging sustainable development [1–3].

From this perspective, the family context can be an important driver of the quality of life of family members and can encourage sustainable development. The way in which parents conceive parenting shapes parent–child relationships and the way that children understand complex relationships with the world [4]. During the early years of development, proximal and contextual factors are essential for the development of cognitive or social skills as well as the way in which an individual understands relationships in the future [5,6]. Among these factors, parenting occupies a crucial position.

Furthermore, from an early age, children progress in performing simple prosocial actions such as helping or sharing toys [7]. They also externalize aggressive behaviors in response to embarrassing or frustrating situations [8].

The first goal of this study is to explore the relationships between parenting styles, prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept during childhood. The second goal is to observe the possible

predictors of prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept in children from Spain aged 4–7 years. To date, studies have focused specifically on early childhood [9,10], late childhood [11], preadolescence, or adolescence [12]. However, few studies have examined middle childhood (4–7 years), particularly in Spain.

1.1. Parenting Styles

The attitudes of parents in terms of parenting together with their parenting practices create an emotional climate in the family setting. Children who grow up in more authoritative family environments characterized by support, warmth, and communication tend to develop socially adaptive behaviors, which are an indicator of psychosocial adjustment and personal well-being [13,14]. Through parenting styles and practices, parents establish disciplinary standards and criteria that shape the way they undertake the task of socializing their children [15,16].

The authoritative parenting style promotes two-way communication, fostering an environment of warmth, affect, and inductive control toward children's behavior. This type of parenting encourages the development of good psychological adjustment [14,17]. In contrast, the authoritarian parenting style, which is based on the imposition of rules and psychological control of children, and indulgent or neglectful parenting, is related to children's inadequate social adjustment and, to a greater degree, contributes to increasing aggression [18,19].

In this context, a positive emotional climate in parenting sends messages of acceptance and sharing to help with daily tasks. Parenting based on reasoning and emotional warmth increases awareness about one's own behavior and the effects it has on others [20], facilitating prosocial behaviors in both adolescence and childhood [21–23]. Therefore, when parents foster more opportunity for interaction and communication, they encourage actions to reach out to others such as smiling, greeting, doing favors, and being polite [24]. This form of parenting is also positively related to children's and adolescents' development of moral and prosocial behaviors [13,25].

In contrast, like neglectful parenting, authoritarian parenting tends to be related to internalized and externalized problems in children [26]. Early experiences of rejection can cause internalizing problems and sow the seeds for sensitivity to rejection once these rejection experiences have been internalized [27]. Authoritarian parenting practices have also been linked to externalizing problems [28] and can hinder the development of a prosocial disposition, especially in children with strong emotionality [29]. It is also related to children's low self-esteem [30]. Conversely, greater childhood aggression has been observed to increase parental control, which may give rise to a two-way relationship between parental control and childhood aggression [19]. Nevertheless, Holmes et al. [31] observed that punitive parenting during childhood may not have immediate negative effects but that such effects may emerge later, after the preschool years when academic demands increase and these demands are more focused on cognitive areas. In short, the family environment is proposed as a context that is conducive to moral learning, which is essential for social communication.

1.2. Prosocial Behavior in Childhood

Prosocial behavior is aimed at benefiting and helping others [32]. These behaviors include actions aimed at helping, consoling, sharing, or cooperating with others. Thus, prosocial behavior refers to reaching out to others and promoting positive social actions [33]. Prosocial behavior has been observed to act as a personal protection mechanism during the development process. In other words, it stimulates interpersonal relationships and acceptance by others [34] and can help individuals stay in harmony with their social environment [35]. Prosocial behavior is also an inhibitor of aggression in both childhood and adolescence [36].

Prosocial behavior has been shown to be related to the way in which relationships are established in the family environment. Accordingly, warmth in parent–child relationships tends to promote prosocial behavior because, as Spinrad and Gal [23] argue, this type of relationship with children encourages warm, reciprocal, cooperative interactions between parents and children. Such a situation is

more common in early childhood than in late childhood, as Pastorelli et al. [37] found in a cross-cultural study of eight countries with different cultures, social classes, and religions.

From an evolutionary point of view, prosocial behaviors have been observed at early ages. At first, these actions are directed at people in the immediate social context where social relations are initiated [33]. Toward the end of childhood and in adolescence, prosocial children are more likely to reach out to peers and develop social helping behaviors, thereby promoting personal and social adaptation behaviors [38,39]. It has been observed that encouraging prosocial behavior can facilitate children's learning of social responsibility [40], not least because it strengthens the quality of interactions and is related to socially adaptive behaviors [35]. Nevertheless, a greater stability of prosocial behavior has also been observed in early childhood than at later ages such as late childhood and preadolescence when personal interests are greater [41].

In terms of the prosocial behavior of girls and boys and possible differences as a function of gender, girls are known to have higher indices of prosocial disposition in the dimensions of empathy and prosociality, have a greater inclination to put themselves in the place of others, be more attentive to the needs of others, and be more prone to helping others [33,42]. It seems that these differences may have genetic and environmental components that are linked to the roles that each individual plays within the prevailing social dynamic [43] and that may be due to cultural and social stereotypes and the type of prosocial behavior [44].

1.3. Aggressive Behavior in Childhood

Aggressive behavior starts to manifest itself in early childhood and is quite common among boys in the first few years of life. This aggression, which is usually physical, has an emotional component and has been linked to anger [45]. Therefore, this type of aggression does not necessarily entail intention to harm others.

Aggression increases in preschool years, with a prevalence of 77% [46]. This aggression is usually triggered by a conflict of interests between people, and it tends to be used as an intimidation tool [8]. During development, the prevalence of aggression increases steadily as children acquire emotion self-regulation strategies and the ability to understand others [47,48].

An inverse relationship between prosocial behavior and aggressive behavior in boys and girls of different ages has been found. Accordingly, prosocial children tend to display little aggression, and, in contrast, the most aggressive children tend not to be very prosocial [49]. However, it has also been shown that prosocial behavior and aggression can co-exist in adolescence as ways of controlling interpersonal relationships for personal benefit [50]. Moreover, it seems that the family environment can affect the development and consolidation of aggressive behavior. Thus, coercive family environments have been linked to externalizing behaviors such as aggression and, conversely, childhood aggression has been linked to an increase in parental control [19,28].

Differences between boys and girls in terms of aggressive behavior have also been observed. Boys tend to be more aggressive [51,52], and these differences are present from birth, particularly in reactive aggression [53].

1.4. Self-Concept in Childhood

Self-concept is developed through a process of interaction with the environment through social experiences that extend throughout the child's full life cycle [54,55]. Based on the processes of interaction with others, children receive positive or negative messages about the way they behave and their worth. These messages forge the individual's self-concept, although in the initial stages of development, messages from parents are crucial. A good self-concept is fundamental for psychological well-being and social adjustment and is an indicator of personal satisfaction [56].

First, positive self-concept is valued as an end in itself because it is associated with social and school adaptation and has been identified as helpful in preventing psychological and emotional problems [57]. Furthermore, self-concept is linked to a good reputation among peers [58] and the

improvement of socioemotional skills [59]. In contrast, a low self-concept contributes to poor social relationships and encourages the development of internalizing problems [26]. Similarly, the role of the family in building an individual's self-concept has been studied. A non-conflictive, coherent family environment, which encourages support and parent–child communication, tends to emotionally reinforce children and contributes to forming a good self-concept in adolescence [60]. Parent–child communication is positively related not only to children's self-concept but also to children's emotional stability and the quality of relationships with peers [61]. In contrast, punitive parenting styles such as authoritarian and neglectful parenting are related to low self-esteem and deficient socioemotional skills [30].

The first aim of this study is to analyze the relationships between parenting styles in childhood and the behavioral dimensions of prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept in children's preschool years and the first few years of school (4–7 years). The second aim is to analyze the predictors of prosocial behavior, aggression, and children's self-concept. We thus study the parenting factors that contribute to building socially adaptive behaviors in children and creating a healthy, sustainable family environment [2]. The hypotheses tested in this study are as follows:

Hypothesis 1. *Parenting based on support and good communication with children is positively related to prosocial behavior and self-concept and negatively related to aggression.*

Hypothesis 2. *At early ages, authoritarian and neglectful parenting is negatively related to prosocial behavior and self-concept in childhood and is positively related to aggression, consistent with the findings reported by Ramírez-Uclés et al. [18] at later ages of preadolescence and adolescence.*

Hypothesis 3. *Prosocial behavior and self-concept are positively related to one another and negatively related to aggression.*

Hypothesis 4. *Parenting predicts prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept of small children, consistent with the findings of studies using late-childhood and adolescent populations [18,30]. (1) Support and communication in parenting positively predict prosocial behavior and self-concept and negatively predict aggressive behavior. (2) Aggressive and neglectful parenting positively predict aggressive behavior and negatively predict prosocial behavior and self-concept.*

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 635 girls and boys (53.7% boys; 46.3% girls) aged 4–7 years ($M = 5.81$; $DS = 1.05$). By age, the sample consisted of children aged 4 years (16.5%), 5 years (20.5%), 6 years (35.1%), and seven years (27.9%). The participants were enrolled in preschool education and the first few years of primary education in six public schools in the metropolitan area of Valencia and Castellón (Spain). Most children were from families of Spanish origin (82.2%). The remaining 17.8% were from Western Europe (0.8%), Eastern Europe (2.5%), Latin America (9.6%), North Africa (0.9%), Southeast Asia (0.5%), Sub-Saharan Africa (2.5%), and other regions (1%). Most fathers had primary studies (32.8%) or post-16 studies or professional training (32.1%). Only 1.8% had not completed their primary studies, and 10.6% had university studies. The educational level of the students' mothers was similar: primary studies (35%), post-16 education or professional training (28%), no primary studies (1.6%), and university studies (12.6%). This variable was unavailable in 22.8% of cases because they were single-parent families. Therefore, approximately 65% of parents (fathers and mothers) had a low level of education and a low academic level, which prevented them from accessing more highly qualified jobs. In total, 63% had low-qualified manual jobs. Only 12% had more highly qualified technical jobs, and 16% were in unemployment or had temporary or unstable work. This percentage was higher for mothers—over 50% of whom did not work or had temporary or unstable work.

2.2. Instruments

Children's perceptions of parenting styles and practices [62]. This instrument assessed children's perceptions of paternal and maternal discipline. The children responded on a 3-point scale (*a lot, little, or not at all*) in regard to different daily situations, each accompanied by a picture to represent the situation. An example item was "My mother (father) talks to me a lot." The children first assessed their mother and then their father on the same items. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three factors for the children's perceptions of the mother and father were as follows: maternal support = 0.86, paternal support = 0.86, maternal control = 0.89, paternal control = 0.89, maternal neglect = 0.78, and paternal neglect = 0.71. The fit indices for the model were as follows: $\chi^2 = 3.501$ ***, $df = 24$, RMSEA = 0.063, RMR = 0.019, GFI = 0.972, AGFI = 0.947, and TLI = 0.958 (RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; RMR = Root Mean square Residual; GFI = Goodness of Fit Index; AGFI = Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index). Goodness-of-fit indices for perceived paternal parenting were as follows: $\chi^2 = 8.648$, $df = 23$, $p = 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.008, RMR = 0.006, GFI = 0.995, AGFI = 0.994, and TLI = 0.967.

Prosocial behavior [63]. This instrument assessed children's prosocial behavior using six items. These items were presented as statements, each accompanied by a picture reflecting the situation. The children responded on a 3-point scale (*a lot, little, or not at all*). An example item was "If I see a friend who's sad, I sit with them" (accompanied by a picture of a child crying and another child by his or her side). Cronbach's alpha was 0.71. The fit indices for the model were as follows: $\chi^2 = 13.169$ **, $df = 5$, $p = 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.051, RMR = 0.016, GFI = 0.992, AGFI = 0.975, and TLI = 0.948.

Physical and verbal aggressive behavior [64]. This instrument assessed physical and verbal aggression toward others. As in the previous procedure, the children responded on a 3-point scale (*a lot, sometimes, or not at all*), which was also accompanied by a picture of a heap of apples, one apple, or an empty basket to aid comprehension of the concepts of *often, little, or not at all*. One example item was "I hit my friends." The children selected an option in relation to their usual behavior. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.86. The fit indices for the model were as follows: $\chi^2 = 80,382$ ***, $df = 20$, RMSEA = 0.071, RMR = 0.005, GFI = 0.967, AGFI = 0.940, and TLI = 0.948.

Children's perceived self-concept [65]. This instrument had 34 items that identified 10 aspects in relation to small children: autonomy and sense of independence, self-confidence, sports and competitive worth, family and feelings toward the family, social relations, affective feelings, mood, self-worth and self-competence, physical appearance, and sense of having friends and owning objects. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.87. The items were presented in the form of two pictures that reflected a situation related to the children. One of the pictures represented a positive situation, and the other represented the same situation from a negative angle. One example item was "Here are two children getting dressed. One's mom is helping, while the other one is getting dressed alone. Which child is most like you?". Each child was asked to point to the drawing that was most like her or him. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.87. The fit indices for the model were as follows: $\chi^2 = 18.589$, $df = 15$, $p = 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.007, RMR = 0.005, GFI = 0.938, AGFI = 0.904, and TLI = 0.958.

2.3. Procedure

The sample was selected using probabilistic cluster sampling. The criteria were that the schools should be in different regions of Valencia within a metropolitan area (Spain), that they should be public preschool and primary education schools, with a fairly balanced proportion of girls and boys, and that they should be located in different geographic locations.

The assessment procedure was approved by the regional ministry for education and the schools, who gave consent. Fathers and mothers or legal guardians of the children also gave consent. International ethical standards for this type of study were observed at all times in terms of voluntary nature, data confidentiality, and informed consent of fathers and mothers or legal guardians (Declaration of Helsinki). The sample comprised those for whom consent was given. We omitted the questionnaires completed by children who did not understand the items due to cognitive or language difficulties.

Assessment took place in small groups of two or three children in the classroom during school hours. The sessions lasted 10 to 15 min. Evaluators were present at all times, along with the class teaching staff. The assessment was preceded by a pilot study to identify any modifications that needed to be made to the items or the accompanying pictures for each item.

2.4. Data Analysis

We first performed a descriptive analysis and a correlation analysis of the following variables: prosocial behavior, physical and verbal aggression, self-concept, and supportive, controlling, and neglectful parenting styles. Next, three hierarchical regression analyses were performed. In the first analysis, the dependent variable was prosocial behavior. The other variables were independent variables. In the second analysis, the dependent variable was physical and verbal aggression. In the third analysis, the dependent variable was self-concept. The goal was to independently observe the predictors of children's prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept. The order in which the variables were introduced in all regression analyses was as follows: gender, maternal parenting, paternal parenting, and finally the variables associated with the child (prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept). In all regression analyses, the dependent variable was not introduced as an independent variable. Gender was defined as a dummy variable (0 = girl; 1 = boy).

3. Results

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis appear in Table 1. We first considered the relationships between parenting styles and children's behavior (prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept). We observed that paternal support and maternal support were positively related to prosocial behavior and self-concept, whereas the relationship with physical and verbal aggression was negative (Table 1). Control and neglect of both parents were less strongly related. Paternal and maternal control was positively related to aggression and negatively related to self-concept. Furthermore, paternal but not maternal control was negatively related to prosocial behavior. Paternal and maternal neglect was barely related to children's aggression, prosocial behavior, or self-concept. There were only small positive correlations between paternal neglect and aggression ($r = 0.084$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 1. Pearson correlation analysis between variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Support (M)	–								
2. Control (M)	–0.099 *	–							
3. Neglect (M)	0.080	–0.112 **	–						
4. Support (F)	0.541 **	–0.102 *	0.084 *	–					
5. Control (F)	–0.020	0.515 **	–0.085 *	–0.05	–				
6. Neglect (F)	–0.040	0.00	0.462 **	0.010	0.010	–			
7. Aggression	–0.222 **	0.227 **	0.020	–0.142 **	0.136 **	0.099 *	–		
8. Prosocial behavior	0.229 **	–0.07	0.060	0.208 **	–0.128 **	–0.010	–0.215 **	–	
9. Self-concept	0.156 **	–0.157 **	0.080	0.152 **	–0.130 **	0.06	–0.230 **	0.177 **	–
10. Gender	–0.087 *	0.03	–0.020	–0.01	0.03	–0.01	0.152 **	–0.120 **	–0.128 **
Mean	2.81	1.66	2.24	2.672	1.69	2.22	1.14	2.78	1.87
Standard deviation	0.362	0.573	0.550	0.461	0.634	0.537	0.280	0.286	0.113

M = mother; F = father; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$.

The relationship between prosocial behavior and self-concept was positive, and the relationships between physical and verbal aggression and prosocial behavior and between aggression and self-concept were negative. The relationships between the three variables were consistent with those reported in studies of childhood and adolescence [35,49,60].

Table 1 also illustrates the strong relationships between paternal support and maternal support ($r = 0.541$, $p < 0.01$), paternal control and maternal control ($r = 0.462$, $p < 0.01$), and paternal neglect and maternal neglect ($r = 0.515$, $p < 0.01$). These relationships might be due to the affinity and consistency between parents in the way they approach parenting and deal with the daily and emotional needs of their children.

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

As mentioned earlier in the data analysis section, three hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. In the first, the dependent variable was prosocial behavior. In the second, the dependent variable was physical and verbal aggression. In the third, the dependent variable was self-concept.

The results of the first hierarchical regression analysis appear in Table 2, where prosocial behavior was the dependent variable. The results show that gender predicted prosocial behavior. The negative values indicate that girls behaved more prosocially than boys. The variables related to children's perceptions of maternal parenting were included in the second block. The only significant variable was maternal support, which had a positive effect. Maternal control and neglect were not significant. The variables related to children's perceptions of paternal parenting were included in the third block. The only significant variable was paternal control. Thus, paternal control negatively predicted prosocial behavior. In the fourth block, physical and verbal aggression and self-concept predicted prosocial behavior. Whereas aggression was a negative predictor, self-concept was a positive predictor. These variables predicted 12.4% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.124$). The greatest percentage of variance was associated with the maternal parenting factors (5.8%).

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis for prosocial behavior.

Model		Non-Standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	R ²	VIF
		B	Standard Error	Beta				
Block 1	Gender	−0.07	0.02	−0.13	−3.11	0.00	0.016	1.00
Block 2	Support (M)	0.18	0.03	0.23	5.62	0.00	0.074	1.02
	Control (M)	−0.02	0.02	−0.04	−1.01	0.31		1.02
	Neglect (M)	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.88	0.38		1.02
Block 3	Support (F)	0.05	0.03	0.07	1.57	0.12	0.092	1.43
	Control (F)	−0.06	0.02	−0.13	−2.85	0.00		1.39
	Neglect (F)	−0.01	0.02	−0.03	−0.60	0.55		1.30
Block 4	Aggression	−0.16	0.04	−0.15	−3.64	0.00	0.124	1.14
	Self-concept	0.22	0.11	0.09	2.13	0.03		1.10

$F_{(9,579)} = 8.942, p = 0.000$
Durbin–Watson = 1.799

M = mother; F = father.

The values for the variance inflation factor (VIF) indicate the absence of collinearity problems. The values for the VIF were acceptable (approximately 2.00)—well below 10 [66]. The Durbin–Watson index was used to check the assumption of independence between the independent and dependent variables. The value of this index was 1.799. A value between 1 and 3 indicates that the residuals are independent. Therefore, independence between independent and dependent variables may be assumed [67].

Physical and verbal aggression was the dependent variable in the second hierarchical analysis. Table 3 shows that gender also predicted aggressive behavior. The positive sign indicates that boys were more aggressive than girls. The second and third blocks were used to analyze children's perceptions of both parents' parenting styles. The negative predictor of children's aggression was maternal support, and the positive predictors were maternal control and paternal neglect. Prosocial behavior and self-concept were both negative predictors of physical and verbal aggression. These variables explained 14.4% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.144$). No collinearity problems were observed: VIF values slightly exceeded 1 and fell well below 10 [66]. Similarly, the Durbin–Watson index was 1.839 (between 1 and 3), thereby supporting the assumption of independence between the independent and dependent variables [67].

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis for physical and verbal aggression.

Model		Non-Standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	R ²	VIF
		B	Standard Error	Beta				
Block 1	Sex	0.08	0.02	−0.14	3.53	0.00	0.021	1.00
Block 2	Support (M)	−0.11	0.03	0.15	−3.91	0.00	0.094	1.01
	Control (M)	0.09	0.01	0.20	5.15	0.00		1.02
	Neglect (M)	0.02	0.02	0.06	1.49	0.13		1.01
Block 3	Support (F)	−0.03	0.02	−0.05	−1.14	0.25	0.103	1.43
	Control (F)	0.01	0.02	−0.03	0.69	0.49		1.38
	Neglect (F)	0.04	0.02	0.08	1.91	0.05		1.29
Block 4	Prosoc. behavior	−0.14	0.03	−0.14	−3.63	0.00	0.144	1.11
	Self-concept	−0.32	0.09	−0.13	−3.30	0.00		1.08

$F_{(9,579)} = 10.616, p = 0.000$

Durbin–Watson = 1.839

M = mother; F = father.

In the third hierarchical regression analysis, the dependent variable was self-concept, and the independent variables were gender, maternal and paternal parenting styles, and prosocial behavior and aggression. As Table 4 shows, the predictors of self-concept were gender (negative predictor), indicating that girls tended to have a better self-concept than boys. The other predictors were maternal support (positive predictor) and maternal control (negative predictor), physical and verbal aggression (negative predictor), and prosocial behavior (positive predictor). The predictive variables explained 9.7% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.097$). Paternal parenting styles were not significant in the regression equation. There were no collinearity problems between the variables. The VIF values were slightly greater than 1, and the Durbin–Watson index was slightly less than 2 [66,67].

Table 4. Hierarchical regression analysis for self-concept during childhood.

Model		Non-Standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	R ²	VIF
		B	Standard Error	Beta				
Block 1	Gender	−0.03	0.01	−0.12	−2.86	0.00	0.014	1.00
Block 2	Support (M)	0.04	0.01	0.12	3.04	0.00	0.056	1.02
	Control (M)	−0.03	0.01	−0.14	−3.35	0.00		1.02
	Neglect (M)	0.01	0.01	0.05	1.18	0.24		1.02
Block 3	Support (F)	0.02	0.01	0.08	1.75	0.08	0.068	1.43
	Control (F)	−0.01	0.01	−0.07	−1.53	0.13		1.39
	Neglect (F)	0.01	0.01	0.06	1.20	0.23		1.30
Block 4	Aggression	−0.06	0.02	−0.14	−3.30	0.00	0.097	1.15
	Prosoc. behavior	0.04	0.02	0.09	2.13	0.03		1.13

$F_{(9,579)} = 6.754, p = 0.000$

Durbin–Watson = 1.706

M = mother; F = father.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

In this study, we explored the possibilities created by the psychology of sustainability to analyze the relationships between parenting styles and the development of children's behaviors and emotions. The goal was to analyze the possible links between parenting styles and children's prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept. The variables examined in this study were prosocial behavior, aggressive behavior, and self-concept during childhood, as well as the factors of supportive, controlling, and neglectful parenting by the father and mother as perceived by children aged 4–7 years.

The first hypothesis proposed that maternal support and paternal support were positively related to children's prosocial behavior and self-concept and negatively related to aggression. The results

indicate that a parenting style based on supporting children can help create a climate of affect and trust, which can aid the development of prosocial behaviors and self-concept. From the children's perspective, a family environment where children feel the support of both parents is a predictor of prosocial behavior. Maternal and paternal support is based on behaviors such as stimulating communication, cooperation, and sharing experiences with children [23]. Behaviors that involve reaching out and interacting with children provide a space for communication that is usually full of messages to facilitate communication and ties between children and parents. Such behaviors include looking at others, smiling, collaborating, asking for favors, and expressing gratitude. These messages are steadily naturally internalized as a way of interacting with others. Children are then more likely to replicate such behaviors later in other environments such as the educational environment [20,24]. The relationships between maternal support and children's aggression, prosocial behavior, and self-concept seem to be moderate. Therefore, mothers and fathers do not seem to play the same role in the development of the psychological constructs of prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept. The similarities between paternal and maternal support disappear when considered as predictors of prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept. Only maternal support remains a predictor, whereas the predictive value of paternal support disappears. The differences in the predictive value of maternal and paternal support perceived by children can undermine parenting. Parenting and disciplinary standards should be considered when developing criteria for intervention [60].

Nevertheless, regardless of whether maternal stimulation is greater, children who grow up in family environments where acceptance and communication are encouraged grow up in an emotional climate that facilitates social adaptation and personal well-being [13,14]. Such children are less prone to aggressive relationships [26]. These children are more likely to externalize prosocial behaviors of helping others and to form a good self-concept [60]. Prosociality and a good self-concept are important for personal well-being and social adjustment, can help enhance the quality of interactions with others, and can help prevent psychological and emotional problems [35,49,56].

The results also provide insight into the relationships between maternal and paternal control and children's prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept (hypothesis 2). The results indicate that maternal control can increase children's aggression and decrease children's self-concept. Paternal control has a weak direct positive relationship with aggression and a weak direct negative relationship with prosocial behavior. However, it only acts as a predictive variable for prosocial behavior. In this case, it also seems that the mother's role in parenting is slightly more important than the father's, according to children's perceptions. Authoritarian parenting at an early age provokes aggressive behavior and can hinder the development of prosocial behavior and self-concept, consistent with results from previous studies [26–28,30]. However, the findings reported by Holmes [28] were based on family environments where relationships between parents were aggressive. Thus, during childhood, it is less clear whether an authoritarian parenting style only has long-term negative effects. It might have negative effects as early as preschool and the first few years of school, as observed in this study [31]. Nevertheless, there appears to be a two-way relationship between extreme control and children's aggression such that they strengthen one another. Children's aggression also increases extreme control by parents [19].

The results indicate that neglectful parenting is scarcely linked to the development of children's prosocial behaviors, aggression, and self-concept. We barely observed links between neglect and the three psychological constructs in children. The linkages between feeling uncared for by parents and the children's behaviors examined in this study do not seem especially pronounced, at least in the short term. However, perceiving a certain degree of abandonment and rejection by parents is likely to affect the development of self-concept, as observed by Spilt et al. [26] by studying the effects of parental rejection in the educational and school environment.

The third hypothesis proposed relationships between children's aggression, prosocial behavior, and self-concept. The results reveal negative relationships between aggression and prosocial behavior and between aggression and self-concept. These relationships were observed both in the correlation

analysis and in the regression analysis, where the predictive variables were considered. Aggressive children tend to have low scores for prosocial behaviors, partly because aggressive children tend to resolve conflicts and handle frustration through aggression given their scarce resources to resolve problems using more socially adaptive strategies [49]. During childhood, there is also an inverse relationship between aggression and prosocial behavior. This relationship has already been observed in later years such as adolescence [35]. However, aggression during childhood is physical and verbal [45].

Self-concept was negatively related to aggression and positively related to prosocial behavior. This relationship was observed in all correlation and hierarchical regression analyses. Children who have a good general self-concept tend to have socioemotional resources and skills when interacting with others, which enhances their effectiveness in social relations and acceptance by others [59]. Having these skills also fosters psychological well-being and emotional and social adjustment [56].

The fourth hypothesis, which was divided into two sub-hypotheses, was designed to analyze the predictors of prosocial behavior, aggression, and self-concept. The results indicate, in moderation, the presence of the parenting factors for each dependent variable. Accordingly, the parenting factors appear in the three regression equations, with the parenting factors associated with the mother having a stronger presence (i.e., they have a higher index in the three regression equations; Tables 2–4). According to the children's perceptions, mothers seem to be more involved in parenting. Thus, in future research, it could be of interest to study this situation and analyze the factors that might contribute to the perception of greater closeness in parenting. It may depend on genetic factors as well as environmental and cultural factors linked to role distribution, as indicated by Buss and Schmitt [43].

In conclusion, during childhood in Spain, parenting is related to children's prosocial behaviors, aggression, and self-concept development. In this developmental stage, children who feel support from their parents are more likely to develop a positive self-concept and externalize prosocial behaviors. Both psychological constructs (self-concept and prosocial behavior) foster smooth interactions with others and tend to be accompanied by the acceptance of others and the strengthening of emotional development [33,35]. However, during childhood, parental control does not have a negative effect on the behaviors considered in this study, as was expected. At this age, children may perceive control as a standard form of relating to others. Neglect has a weak relationship with prosocial behavior, self-concept, and aggression. Thus, our results seem to be consistent with those reported by Holmes et al. [31], who showed that punitive parenting where intimate partner violence also occurs is related to aggression by children aged 4 years. In environments where intimate partner violence occurs, aggression remains stable two years later at the age of 6 to 7 years. Furthermore, it is linked to deficient prosocial skills when children reach the age of 6 to 7 years. Therefore, the negative effects might not manifest themselves immediately but rather after a lag of several years when academic demands become tougher and interpersonal relationships are more complex [31]. These findings may be important for future research and to establish intervention programs in childhood to address difficulties as soon as possible and avoid the buildup of problems that may become more difficult to deal with later, as has been observed in the implementation of an intervention program [11]. At these ages, the role of parents is crucial [56].

This study has certain limitations. The first relates to its cross-sectional nature. Collecting data in one wave can lead to biases owing to the time and place of when and where data collection occurs, preventing causal analysis. However, the data were collected in the classroom where the children spent their entire school day to ensure the setting was familiar. The second limitation refers to the data source, which consisted of the children themselves. However, the evaluations were conducted in small groups and were led by a professional with the support of the teaching staff to avoid unsettling the children by being with unfamiliar people. Despite this limitation, research has shown that in early ages, the data from children are more reliable than data from parents and are less affected by social desirability problems [68]. In future studies, it would nonetheless be of interest to analyze these issues using different data sources such as parents and children.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, G.B. and A.M.T.-P.; Data curation, G.B.; Investigation, A.M.T.-P.; Methodology, A.M.T.-P. and A.L.; Writing—original draft, G.B. and A.L.; Writing—review & editing, A.M.T.-P.

Funding: This research received no external funding

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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