

## For Better and for Worse: Genes and Parenting Interact to Predict Future Behavior in Romantic Relationships

April S. Masarik,\* Rand D. Conger,\* M. Brent Donnellan,\*\* Michael C. Stallings,\*\*\* Monica J. Martin,\* Thomas J. Schofield,\*\*\*\* Tricia K. Nepl,\*\*\*\* Laura V. Scaramella,\*\*\*\*\* Andrew Smolen,\*\*\* and Keith F. Widaman\*

### Abstract

We tested the differential susceptibility hypothesis with respect to connections between interactions in the family of origin and subsequent behaviors with romantic partners. Focal or target participants (G2) in an ongoing longitudinal study ( $N = 352$ ) were observed interacting with their parents (G1) during adolescence and again with their romantic partners in adulthood. Independent observers rated positive engagement and hostility by G1 and G2 during structured interaction tasks. We created an index for hypothesized genetic plasticity by summing G2's allelic variation for polymorphisms in five genes (5-HTT, ANKK1/DRD2, DRD4, DAT, and COMT). Consistent with the differential susceptibility hypothesis, G2s exposed to more hostile and positively engaged parenting behaviors during adolescence were more hostile or positively engaged to a romantic partner if they had higher scores on the genetic plasticity index. In short, genetic factors moderated the connection between earlier experiences in the family of origin and future romantic relationship behaviors, for better *and* for worse.

*Keywords:* differential susceptibility; gene by environment interaction (GxE), parenting, romantic relationships

Author Affiliations:

\*University of California, Davis

\*\*Michigan State University

\*\*\*University of Colorado, Boulder

\*\*\*\*Iowa State University

\*\*\*\*\*University of New Orleans