

Section 7. Psychology

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EFFECT OF PARENTING STYLES ON AGGRESSION

Abstract. Previous research has observed that parenting style can influence the level of aggression in children. In general, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles have been most commonly linked to aggressive behavior in children. This has been observed in a wide variety of populations and in college students. However, to date there is little research on the link to parenting style in older adult populations. The goal of the current study was to observe whether differences in parenting styles would predict aggression level in an adult population with a wide range of age groups. We administered the Parenting Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) along with the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) to a sample of participants on Amazon's mechanical turk (N = 285). We found evidence that permissive parenting led to more aggressive behavior, but authoritarian parenting did not. These results became more extreme in later adulthood. These results present an interesting addition to the literature on parenting style and aggression and suggest future research is needed on how parenting in childhood leads to differences in adult behavior.

Keywords: Parenting, aggression, permissive parenting, authoritarian parenting.

Introduction

The relationship between aggressive and the parenting styles has been thoroughly researched with a focus on four main parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parents). First, authoritative parents have high responsiveness and high demand (Abdullah [1]; Alizadeh [1]; Mansor [1]; Talib [1]). This means, there is a combination of warmth, firm control and clear standards (Baumrind [7]). In general, authoritative parents set clear limits and encourage compliance with reasons and logics (Baumrind [8]). It is characterized by mutually warm, sensitive, and responsive interactions with the child (Chen et al. [17]). The second parenting style is the authoritarian parenting style which has high levels of control and low levels of respon-

siveness (Bornstein & Bornstien [1]). Parents value obedience and use strict rules. They usually punish children with absolute standards, restricting their children's autonomy. They are very low in warmth and lack connections with their children (Baumrind [8]; Coie & Dodge [19]). The third parenting style is the permissive parenting style which is high in responses and low in demands (Alizadeh et al. [1]). Permissive parents are responsive to their children's needs but do not set clear limits and boundaries. They do not make many demands and allow children to regulate by their own paces and desires. They often lack rules and discipline (Baumrind [7]). Finally, the fourth parenting style, neglectful or uninvolved, parents are emotionally detached with the child and do not spend time with children at all, being an un-

involved and irresponsible caregiver (Rothrauff et al. [32]).

Different parenting styles influence children in a number of ways. Parents, who adopt the permissive style, encourage their children's autonomy and let them make their own decisions and regulate their own activities (Baumrind [9] Reitman et al. [31]). Children raised by permissive parents have poor social skills and low self-esteem (Baumrind, [9]; Reitman et al. [31]), and are often seen as selfish, dependent, irresponsible, spoiled, unruly, inconsiderate of others' needs, and antisocial (Binger et al. 1994; Wennar [40]). Research has shown, permissive parenting style impacts on children's externalizing behavioral problems (Alizadeh et al. [1]). It has been suggested this effect may be related to children's use of relational aggression because it is a means of negative reinforcement (Casas et al. [16]). Permissive parents provide negative reinforcement for children's undesired or disruptive behaviors via their inconsistent discipline and laxness because they fail to provide sufficient behavioral control to counteract the development and maintenance of children's aggressive or disruptive behaviors (Nelson & Crick [30]). As a result, with lack of guidance from parents, children make their own decisions and result in unresponsive actions because they are passive and lack self-dependence and social responsibility (Alizadeh et al. [1]). Therefore, in certain public situations, children may be angered or distressed when provoked, and they might use highly aggressive actions to deal with their emotional stress (Crick [20]). Therefore, children of permissive parents often do not know how to make the proper decisions and hurt others because they have not thought about rules and from different perspectives. Quantitative research has been mixed about whether permissive parenting is related to aggression. Multiple studies have found permissive parenting related to physical aggression in high schoolers (Batool [6]; Moghadam et al. [29]). However, other studies have found no effect of permissive parenting styles on aggression

(Setiawati et al. [34], Azimi et al. [3]; McErlean et al. [23]; Anjum et al. [2]).

Authoritarian parenting style has been more consistently linked to aggression.

Authoritarian parenting focuses on their control of the child and his/her obedience (Baumrind [9]), and they are neither warm nor responsive to their children (Baumrind [8]). Authoritarian parents expect full obedience of rules without any explanation (Baumrind [9]). This leads to the child having problems with feeling emotions, known as alexithymia, and increased levels of aggression (De Panfilis et al. [21]). This effect is present especially in teenagers, where teenagers of authoritarian parents have been found to be very aggressive and cause disturbance in the climate of the family (Baumrind [9]). Further, authoritarian parenting is inherently aggressive and children may model this aggressive behavior (Azimi et al. [3]). In addition, the psychological control authoritarian parents exert over their children may lead them to feel great insecurity and result in aggressive behaviors because they want to compensate for their sense of instability (Soenens et al. [35]). As such authoritarian parenting has been linked to increased fighting, cursing and bullying (Alizadeh et al. [1]). Authoritarian parenting has been linked to greater aggression in elementary school student (Anjum et al. [2]) high schoolers (Moghadam et al. [29]; Azimi et al. [3]) and college students (McErlean et al. [23]; Setiawati et al. [34]). However, research by Batool [6] found no effect of authoritarian parenting on aggression.

Children raised from authoritative families tend to have an advantage over their peers who are raised in authoritarian or permissive families. Children raised according to this parenting style are not completely restricted but are allowed a reasonable degree of behavioral latitude. Children of authoritative parents display high self-esteem and tend to be self-reliant, self-controlled, secure, popular and inquisitive (Wennar [40]). So, when they grow up, they will be emotionally stable so that they will not easily become as aggressive. This may be related to

a sense of attachment. When a caregiver is sensitive and responsive in the child's life, the child is likely to develop a secure attachment with the caregiver because the caregiver is responsive and sensitive enough to develop a stronger bond with the child (Bowlby [12]). When compared to an authoritative parenting style, a low level of reasoning and high levels of physical, verbal and emotional aggressiveness, generates aggressive behavior in the children, whereas less aggressive and more reason-based discipline does not (Sheehan & Watson [35]). The trick is that love withdrawal and guilt induction are interactional styles that parents use to manipulate the love and attachment relationship with the child by implying that love, but acceptance will not be restored until the child changes his or her behavior (Barber [4]). Further studies show that authoritative/supportive parenting leads children towards prosocial behavior, more socially competent, less negative and low aggressive behavior (Collins & Steinberg [18]). Comparing the authoritative and the neglective parenting style, the benefit is clear. Numerous studies have supported that adolescents who have a close relationship with their parents report greater social competence, life satisfaction and closeness in peer relationship (Feldman & Wentzel [22]). On the other hand, Simons and colleagues [36] found that a lack of parental support and involvement was associated with adolescents delinquent behavior and drug use, which in turn was also associated with aggression (specifically dating violence).

The goal of the present research is to better understand the role of parenting style in later aggressive behavior. While many studies have been performed using qualitative evidence, not enough research has been done using quantitative studies (Masud et al. [27]). Further, while several studies have looked at aggression in college students (McErlean et al. [23]; Setiawati et al. [34]) no known quantitative study has looked at the relationship between parenting styles and aggression in an adult sample older than college students. We are curious to investigate whether the influ-

ence of parents on children's aggression continues later in life. To do this, we plan to survey adults of a wide age range using Amazon's mechanical turk. The most consistent effect in previous research on parenting styles and aggression is that authoritarian parenting leads to increased aggression (McErlean et al. [23]; Setiawati et al. [34]). Therefore, we predict we will find similar results in our sample. We also may find that permissive parenting leads to increased aggression, as has been found in some of the previous research (Batool [6]; Moghaddam et al. [29]). However, it is worth noting that multiple studies on adult populations did not find evidence of an effect of permissive parenting (McErlean et al. [23]; Setiawati et al. [34]).

Methods

Participants. We recruited a total of 300 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk and obtained 285 complete responses. In our final sample, 42% of our participants were female, 75% were White, 10% were African American, 7% were Hispanic, 6% were Asian, with 2% listed as two or more races or Other. Additionally, 66% of our participants had a college degree.

Our participants had a mean age of 40.17 years old ($SD = 11.38$).

Procedure. Participants were given a series of tests to understand what type of parents they had along with their current tendencies towards aggressive behavior. Participants were first given a modified version of the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ). Next, participants were given two forms of the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) one for questions about their mother followed by the same questions about their father. Finally, participants were given demographic questions including asking for their age.

Aggression Questionnaire (AQ). In this study we used a 12-item modified version of the AQ (Bryant & Smith [13]). This 12-item measure was based on the questions used in the original 52-item AQ (Buss & Perry [15]). Participants rated how characteristic each of 12 statements (ex. "Given enough provocation, I may hit another person.") were of them on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (extremely

uncharacteristic of me) to 5 (extremely characteristics of me). For each of the 12 statements a higher score was indicative of more aggressive behavior.

Final scores were a sum of responses to all 12 items.

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ). The PAQ is a set of thirty statements designed to understand parenting styles (Buri [14]). For each question participants would view a statement (ex. "While I was growing up my mother felt that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do.") and rate their agreement with the statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Parents completed the set of thirty statements for both their mother and father. Of the 30 statements in the PAQ, 10 are related to each of three parenting styles (Authoritarian, Authoritative, and Permissive). Responses to each of the 10 questions for each parenting style were summed together to create scores for each parenting style. Participants had two sets of scores, one for their mother's parenting style and a second for their father's parenting style.

Results

Consistent with previous research on parenting styles and aggression (Setiawati et al. [34]) participants were labeled with the parenting style that had the highest score of the three.

When scores for two styles were equal, they were listed as combined. When questioned about their mother's parenting style, 130 (45.6%) participants reported their mother was authoritarian, 103 (36.1%) reported their mother was authoritative, 39 (13.7%) reported she was permissive, while 13 were labeled as combine (4.6%). For their father's parenting style 127 (44.6%) were authoritarian, 79 (27.7%) were authoritative, 41 (14.4%) were permissive, and 38 (13.3%) were combined. Participants had a mean score of 25.06 (SD = 10.72) on the AQ. Level of aggression did not differ by age ($r = -0.07$, $p = 0.23$) and age did not differ across parenting styles for the mother ($F(3,281) = 1.01$, $p = 0.36$) or father ($F(3,281) = 0.40$, $p = 0.75$).

Level of aggression was found to differ across parenting styles. Respondents who had a permissive mother had a mean aggression level of 32.07 (SD = 12.21) compared to 23.88 (SD = 10.00) for those with an authoritarian mother, 23.48 for those with an authoritative mother (SD = 9.64), and 28.23 (SD = 13.16) for those with a mother with combine parenting styles. We conducted an ANOVA test and found these groups were significantly different ($F(3,281) = 7.74$, $p < 0.001$). Post hoc Tukey tests revealed aggression level was significantly higher for those with permissive mothers as opposed to those with authoritarian ($p < 0.001$) or authoritative mothers ($p < 0.001$). Interestingly, there was no observed difference between aggression levels of those with authoritarian and authoritative mothers ($p = 0.99$).

When looking at the fathers' parenting style, we found a similar trend in the results. Of the three main parenting styles, participants with permissive fathers showed the highest level of aggression ($M = 28.39$, $SD = 12.43$), followed by authoritative ($M = 23.65$, $SD = 9.50$) and authoritarian ($M = 23.54$, $SD = 9.85$). Finally, those whose father had a combine parenting style had a mean aggression of 29.47 (SD = 12.61). There were again significant difference in aggression across father's parenting style ($F(3,281) = 4.99$, $p = 0.002$). Post hoc Tukey revealed a somewhat significant difference in aggression levels between those with permissive fathers as opposed to those with authoritative ($p = 0.08$) or authoritarian ($p = 0.05$). Again, surprisingly there was no difference in aggression level between those with authoritarian and authoritative fathers ($p = 0.99$) and the aggression level was indeed slightly higher among those with authoritative fathers.

The relationship between parenting styles and aggression was found to increase with age. We performed a pair of ANCOVA tests to investigate the interaction between parenting style and age on aggression level. When testing a mother's parenting style, there was a significant interaction between parenting style and age ($F(3,277) = 4.67$, $p = 0.003$).

This showed the higher aggression found when participants had permissive mothers was more extreme in older participants. When testing for the effect of father's parenting style, there was a somewhat signifi-

cant change in the same direction ($F(3,277) = 2.60$, $p = 0.05$). For a summary of results for participants over and under the age of 40, see Table 1.

Table 1. – Mean AQ score Across Parenting Styles by Age Group

Decision Task	Permissive	Authoritarian	Authoritative	Combine
Mother's Parenting Style				
Younger Adults	30.27	23.95	24.74	23.60
Older Adults	34.42	23.82	21.64	31.13
All Participants	32.08	23.88	23.48	28.23
Father's Parenting Style				
Younger Adults	26.45	24.49	23.90	27.96
Older Adult	30.23	22.40	23.41	32.38
All Participant	28.39	23.54	23.65	29.47

Discussion

There are a lot of consistencies in the data that support our hypothesis. First, the high aggression found when participants had permissive mothers was present in our adult sample (Setiawati et al. [34]). Compared to the AQ scores of 23–25 resulting from authoritarian and authoritative mothers, children raised by permissive parents show extremely high levels of aggression with an average AQ score of 32. The results for father's parenting style yield similar results though not as extreme. Therefore, our hypothesis about the aggressiveness resulting from permissive parents is proved valid.

However, there are also unexpected findings. Originally, according to the assumption, authoritarian parents are supposed to "cultivate" aggressiveness. That was not found in our sample. Younger (under 40 years old) and older adults (age 40 and older) raised by the mother's side both with authoritarian parenting style displays similar levels of aggressiveness as the authoritative parenting style with the mean AQ score from 23 to 25. So, authoritarian parenting style from mothers does not necessarily lead to aggressive adults. We found similar results for the fathers side. Even though it is claimed that authoritarian and permissive fathers bring aggressive children, this was not found in our sample.

Although the current study makes great contributions to the discovery of the relationship between the parenting styles and the aggressiveness of adolescents, few limitations should be considered. First, the reliance of correlational data precludes statements of cause and effect (McCormick et al. [28]). There has been no controlled manipulation of variables to provide clear causal evidence. Additionally, we used an American sample which may be what has led us to finding different results from other studies which surveyed members of a different cultural group (Setiawati et al. [34]; Moghaddam et al. [29]; Azimi et al. [3]). Additionally, this research is limited to parenting factors (Alizadeh et al. [1]). There are many relevant factors that influence children's behavioral problems, such as age, genetics, socio-economics, peer pressure, parent's income, society, and school. We considered only parenting style types. In addition, there is also a need to conduct studies in developing countries to compare the effect of parenting styles from different cultures and communities (Alizadeh et al. [1]). Finally, the study should incorporate different kinds of research because the present research incorporates

mostly quantitative data but not a lot of qualitative data (Masud et al. [27]). So, it is important to provide a mixed kind of research because there are

better ways to understand the data and the point that it wants to prove (Masud et al. [27]).

The present study results suggest that perceptions of parental authority play an important role in the aggressiveness of their children throughout their lifetime. In this study, the perceived authoritarian parenting does not have high correlation with adolescent aggression as expected, but permissive parenting

brings significantly high possibility for adolescents to become aggressive. This study reports that individual adolescents who are regulated by parents, whether with rules or strict control, are less likely to display aggression than adolescents coming from permissive families. Collectively, the results can be used to further understand the relationship between parenting styles and aggression throughout the life trajectory.

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