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The Influence of Parenting Styles

on the Degree of Allocated Punishment

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Abstract

Though extensive research has been done investigating the influence parents have on their children (Baumrind, 1971; Buri, 1991; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 2003), the influence of parents on the assignment of punishment by their adult children has not been thoroughly examined. To illustrate this relationship, research was conducted measuring the degree and type of punishment 84 participants would allocate with both civic and household offenses. Level of punishment was compared with the parenting styles of the respondents' parents, as measured by Buri's (1991) *Parental Authority Questionnaire* (PAQ). These parenting styles included the three phenomenological parenting classifications of Baumrind (1971): authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) indicated significant differences in the degree of punishment allocation in the adult children of the authoritative fathers with the children of non-authoritative fathers, $F(2,49) = 3.8, p < .029$. The adult children of the authoritative fathers issued more severe punishments with both civic ($M = 5.5$ authoritative; $M = 4.6$ non-authoritative) and household offenses ($M = 4.6$ authoritative; $M = 2.98$ non-authoritative).

The Influence of Parenting Styles on the Degree of Allocated Punishment

The influence that parents have on the behavior and development of their children has been investigated by various researchers (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Lopez, Bonenberger, & Schneider, 2001; Pratt, Arnold, Pratt, & Diessner, 1999). In studying parenting styles, there is a popular classification system designed by Baumrind (1971) of classifying parenting styles according to two dimensions of parental influence: level of expectation (or level of demand upon the child), and the level of responsiveness to the child as an individual. Parents who have high expectations and are responsive to their children are classified as *authoritative*; parents who have high expectations for their children but are not responsive to them are classified as *authoritarian*; and responsive parents with low expectations are classified as *permissive*. Additionally, parents who are both low in dimensions of responsiveness and demand are considered *neglectful* or *uninvolved* (Pratt et al., 1999). This final category is considered to be an absence of parenting rather than as an implemented “parenting style”—it is actually the lack of or complete absence of parenting in extreme cases—and was, therefore, not considered in the present study. Authoritative parenting is typically considered the most effective parenting style for producing healthy, well-adjusted children, whereas authoritarian and permissive parenting have been seen as having the tendency to hinder social and moral development (Lopez et al., 2001; Pratt et al., 1999).

These parenting styles have been linked to the development of children’s moral reasoning (Lopez et al., 2001). Moral reasoning is the process of making decisions concerning right and wrong based upon social norms and ethical principles. The development of moral reasoning reaches its pinnacle when a person is able to view a

situation from the perspective of another and to base decisions on universal principles (Crain, 2000).

Authoritative parenting tends to facilitate the development of moral reasoning more effectively than any other parenting style (Pratt et al., 1999). This is likely because an authoritative parent will use induction and reasoning in disciplining their children, thus helping the child to internalize social values and norms (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). As a child internalizes these values, his or her moral reasoning skills are viewed as more fully developed. In contrast, because authoritarian parenting tends to elicit fear, anger and anxiety, it is associated with lower levels of moral development in children. These emotions direct a child's attention toward external consequences and hinder the internalization of social values and the ability to have empathy for others. The permissive style of parenting does not actively hinder moral development, but neither does it provide children with sufficient opportunity to internalize values. This, then, indirectly impacts moral development (Lopez et al., 2001).

The defining aspect in the development of moral reasoning is empathy—indeed, the highest level of moral development requires a certain level of empathy, because it is based on the universal application of moral principles (Kohlberg, 1958). Helwig, Zelazo, and Wilson (2001) found that children who have reached a higher stage of moral development when assigning punishment, tend to take into account the intentions of an individual, rather than just the consequences. This suggests an increased level of empathy or an ability to better identify with others.

Empathy is, likewise, closely related to the principle of distributive justice and is influential in its implementation. Distributive justice is the principle through which

individuals seek a correlation between allocated rewards and some level of deservingness on the part of a recipient (Hoffman, 2000). This generally applies to allocating rewards, such as the distribution of points to individual students in a group who have worked collaboratively on a project. However, the same idea may be used in considering the designation of a specific punishment as a consequence of wrongdoing.

According to Hoffman (2000), empathetic feelings motivate actions to ensure the just treatment of others. These empathetic feelings tend to be heavily related to the perceived merit of the individual—specifically the individual’s effort, productivity, competency, or needs. This is in an effort to distribute justice equitably. Empathy, therefore, may even induce an individual to transcend the concept of justice in making judgments (Batson, Klein, Highberger, & Shaw, 1995). In other words, an individual who is induced to feel empathy for another tends to show preferential treatment toward that individual and will sometimes act against what principles of justice would normally warrant.

Hence, the relationship between parenting style and the degree of empathy—involved in moral reasoning—has been well established by previous research. It has also been shown clearly that there is a link between empathy and distributive justice, particularly surrounding the allocation of punishment. However, the specific relationship between parenting style and punishment allocation has not been thoroughly investigated. Therefore, the present study will investigate this relationship. We believe that the degree of punishment allocated by participants will be influenced by the perceived parenting style of their parents.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from psychology courses at Brigham Young University (BYU) and received extra credit from those professors who offered it. There were a total of 84 volunteers; 49 were female and 35 were male. All participants were of college age. Recruitment was accomplished through visiting classes on campus and distributing flyers to students with the relevant research information.

Materials

Informed Consent Form. The informed consent form briefly introduced the study without disclosing specific details, noted potential risks, assured confidentiality of participants, and provided contact information for researchers. It was included as a coversheet to the packet of surveys.

The Household and Civic Measure of Punishment Allocation. The Household and Civic Measure of Punishment Allocation (HCOMP) was developed for the present study. It included four different offense scenarios—two civic offenses and two household offenses. Specific details (e.g., race, gender, etc.) about characters in each scenario were not provided. The scenarios within each of the two categories varied only in the severity of the offense; all other elements such as location, type of individuals involved, and reason for dispute were kept constant. A pilot was conducted to ensure that the behaviors in the scenarios did, in fact, vary in their degree of severity. An example of one of the scenarios, the severe civic offense scenario, follows:

An adolescent enters a gas station and gets into a dispute with the clerk over the amount of change received for a purchase. While they are arguing, the phone rings

and the clerk turns away momentarily, leaving the cash drawer exposed. The adolescent strikes the clerk on the back of the head hard, leaving him unconscious and bleeding badly. He then empties the cash register and quickly exits the gas station.

The participant was then asked to allocate the degree of punishment that he or she felt was appropriate, using an anchored Likert scale ranging, from (0) no punishment to (4) maximum punishment. (To see the scale, please see Appendix A, HCOMP A.)

Social Desirability Scale. The Social Desirability Scale was developed by Crowne and Marlowe (1960) in order to assess the degree to which participants are prone to give socially desirable responses. It consists of 33 statements for which participants may respond as either “True” or “False.” The questionnaire included statements like the following: “Before voting I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates.” (To see the questionnaire, please see Appendix A, Social Desirability Scale.) This scale was included as a distracter; it was placed between the civic and household scenarios.

Parental Authority Questionnaire. The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) (Buri, 1991) contains 30 questions in reference to a respondent’s parent. Two versions of the PAQ were used in the present study—one for the respondent’s mother and another for the father. Both versions are identical in content and form. The 30 questions in each questionnaire have ten questions measuring each of the three parenting styles. The following are examples of the statements used for each of the three parenting styles:

Authoritative: As I was growing up, once family policy had been established, my father discussed the reasoning behind the policy with the children in the family.

Authoritarian: Even if his children didn't agree with him, my father felt that it was for our own good if we were forced to conform to what he thought was right.

Permissive: While I was growing up, my father felt that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do.

A Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree is used by respondents to denote the level of accuracy the statement has for their parents. (Please see Appendix A, PAQ to review the survey.) The Test-Retest reliability on the PAQ is .78 for mother's authoritativeness, .86 for mother's authoritarianism, and .81 for mother's permissiveness. It is .92 for father's authoritativeness, .85 for father's authoritarianism, and .77 for father's permissiveness.

Design and Procedure

Pilots. In preparing to conduct research, two pilots were conducted testing the validity of the scenarios that were to be used in the experiment. Researchers wanted to ensure that the scenarios were dependably measuring the seriousness of the offenses being reviewed. After each pilot was conducted, the results were examined and the scenarios underwent any necessary revisions to ensure that the scenarios were similar, but were varying effectively in the severity of the offences being committed in each. The pilots were conducted with upper-level psychology students prior to conducting research.

When the first pilot was conducted, the scenarios were passed out to 23 participants by researchers. They were asked to read the instructions and to fill out the pilot accordingly. Upon completing the pilot session, the results were briefly reviewed and the participants were asked for verbal feedback on the scenarios; this was in preparation to making any alterations to the scenarios for subsequent pilots and for research. Though the household

scenarios were left unchanged, the civic scenarios were adjusted because no significant difference between moderate and severe offenses was observed in the pilot's results.

Consequently, two differing, new versions of the scenarios were created for evaluation and a final pilot was conducted to reevaluate the altered scenarios.

The second pilot on the civic scenarios was conducted in an upper-level psychology course. Twelve students in the class were given one version of the civic scenarios and 10 other students were provided with a second version of altered civic scenarios to identify which version of the scenarios would demonstrate a larger difference in severity ratings. The forms were subsequently collected from the participants and the results were reviewed. The second pilot demonstrated the following results: the first altered version of the civic scenarios that was distributed to 12 students, $M = 3.58$ for the moderate civic scenario and $M = 6$ for the severe scenario; the altered version of the civic scenario that was distributed to the 10 students (the second version) produced a $M = 3.2$; the respective severe civic scenario was similarly $M = 6$. Thus, the second version of the moderate scenario was chosen for the final version, as it demonstrated the farthest difference from the mean of the serious offense scenario.

Study protocol. The procedures implemented in conducting the research were the same in each of the research sessions. To begin each session, a member of the research team showed the participants the available sign-up list to sign up for extra credit in their respective psychology courses. After the participants had been provided a few moments to sign up for extra credit, the research packets were distributed. Each research packet was divided into two parts or sections; the first section contained the following materials in the listed order: consent form to participate in research, the civic scenarios from the Household and Civic

Measure of Punishment Allocation (HCOMP), the Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960), the household scenarios from the HCOMP. The second section of the research packet contained the Parental Authority Questionnaires (PAQ) for mothers and fathers (Buri, 1991). (To review the research packet, please see Appendix A.)

Instructions. The research participants were next given the following verbal instructions by a research team member: “Please read and sign the consent form then detach and pass forward.” The consent forms were then subsequently collected from the participants. Once all the consent forms had been collected, everyone was give the following verbal instructions for the first part of the research packet:

Please fill out the questions in Part 1 and read the instructions carefully. Stop at Part 2 for further instructions. Please do not talk out loud or interact with each other. If you need to ask a question, please raise you hand. When finished, please put your pencils down and look up.

After everyone had completed the first section, all the participants were then instructed as follows:

There are two questionnaires in Part 2. The first inquires about your mother and the second inquires about your father. If you did not grow up with both parents, then fill out the questionnaire for the person that was present. If you had a step-parent or a guardian, then please fill it out for the individuals as you feel is appropriate. We are looking for those individuals who were most prevalent in parenting you. Please do not talk out loud or interact with each other. If you need to ask a question please raise you hand. Turn in questionnaires when you are done to a researcher and take a copy of the consent form.

The participants then proceeded to complete the second section of the research packet.

Debriefing. As the participants completed the research packet, members of the research team would record the gender of the participant in the top right corner of the research packet. Copies of the consent form were again provided at the end of the research process and participants were encouraged to take one. Participants were also shown and encouraged to read a debriefing sheet that read as follows:

We were looking at the way parenting style has affected the degree to which individuals issue judgment. Specifically, we looked at how and if judgments were significantly affected by the different parenting styles. If you have any further inquiries or questions regarding this research, please contact the person indicated on the provide consent form. Please refrain from sharing this information with others for at least 3 weeks as participants are still being recruited. Sharing this information may adversely affect the data. Thank you for your participation.

The debriefing sheet was kept in a plastic cover and was retained by the research team members to ensure that the purpose of the research was not revealed or exposed. (To review the debriefing sheet, please see Appendix B.) Participants were then allowed to leave as they completed the research process.

Participants were provided with the contact information of the researchers on the consent form in the event that they had any questions concerning the research.

Results

Pre-Analysis

Civic and household scenario variables. It was decided that responses for both moderate and severe scenarios would be summed for each condition: civic and household.

Combining participants scores for the moderate and severe scenarios for each condition allowed us to look at the overall allocation of punishment. Each condition had one Likert-type response scale (0-4) for the moderate scenario and an identical response scale for the serious scenario. Responses to both scales were now combined (with a new scale range of 0-8) and used for further analysis as one variable.

Parenting style variables. Preliminary analyses demonstrated that the authoritative parenting style was most powerful in influencing punishment allocations. Hence, it was decided that variables would be constructed contrasting authoritative and non-authoritative parenting styles. The two PAQs allotted 60 items to be reviewed which might endorse authoritative, authoritarian, or permissive parenting styles—thirty for the father and thirty for the mother. The contrast variable was calculated by classifying a score of 10 to 30 as non-authoritative and a score of 40 to 60 as authoritative.

Analysis

Multivariate results. A MANOVA was performed, submitting gender of participant, authoritative vs. non-authoritative mothers, and authoritative vs. non-authoritative fathers as fixed factors and punishment allocations for both civic and household offenses as the dependent variables. There was a main effect for fathers, $F(2,49) = 3.82, p < .029$. This illustrates a significant difference in punishment allocation between participants with authoritative and non-authoritative fathers. There was also an interaction effect for gender of respondent by fathers, $F(2,49) = 3.35, p < .043$. The gender of the participant crossed with the parenting style of father had an effect on the punishment allocation by the participant.

Between subject effects: differences between authoritative and non-authoritative fathers. Between subject effects were significant in the household offense condition for fathers, $F(1,50) = 3.17, p < .008$, and for the interaction of gender with fathers, $F(1,50) = 6.29, p < .015$.

Pairwise comparisons. There were significant differences between civic and household offenses, multivariate $F(2,49) = 4.83, p < .012$; univariate $F(1,50) = 4.34, p < .042$ for civic offenses and univariate $F(1,50) = 9.5, p < .003$ for household offenses ($M = 4.6$ for non-authoritative fathers and $M = 5.5$ for authoritative fathers in the civic offense condition; $M = 2.98$ for non-authoritative fathers and $M = 4.63$ for authoritative fathers in the household offense condition). Participants with authoritative fathers allocated higher levels of punishment for both civic and household offenses compared to individuals with non-authoritative fathers.

Conclusion

It was hypothesized that the degree of punishment allocated by participants would be influenced by the perceived parenting style used by the parents of the respondents. This is because parenting styles have been found to have an effect on the cognitive and social development of adolescents (Pratt et al., 1999). Our study demonstrated that if the father of the participant was authoritative, then the participant was more likely to allocate a higher level of punishment than if the father of the participant were a non-authoritative father. It is interesting to note that the authoritativeness of the participant's father was more predictive of punishment allocation in the household scenarios than in the civic scenarios. Also, our study did not find a significant difference between authoritative and non-authoritative mothers.

It is not clear why significance was found in the parenting styles of fathers and not with mothers; however, it is possible that further changes to the Household and Civic Measure of Punishment Allocation (HCMPA) may help in clarifying this difference between parents. The results for fathers suggest that the impact of empathetic development was overestimated, and perhaps the internalization of social norms has a greater influence than previously thought. We speculate that the internalization of social values and norms of a child reared in an authoritative home could affect the level of punishment allocated to a large degree. When social norms and values are not internalized, they remain nothing more than an externally imposed expectation. Additionally, when a child internalizes social norms and values, those norms and values become a part of that child's concept of how individuals ought to behave (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Lopez et al., 2001). Thus, when a child sees an individual not behaving in accordance with his or her understood, internalized norms and values, they would expect adverse consequences to follow—they have expectations. Hence, the former would be more likely to perceive the latter as deserving of punishment. Our results support this idea, because those participants who rated their fathers as authoritative allocated a more severe punishment, and the children of authoritative parents are most likely to have internalized social norms and values (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994).

We acknowledge that this study carries certain limitations. Firstly, the HCMPA contains a limited variety of scenarios. It would, of course, be impossible to test for every possible offense in civil or household situations, but the HCMPA would certainly be improved if it were to contain a greater number of varying types of scenarios. Also, the nature of the population from which we drew our sample may have been an additional limitation. The majority of the students at BYU come from homes where the Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the predominant faith. A person is likely to find authoritative parenting among these parents because this type of parenting style is consistent with the religious beliefs of that faith. Thus, our sample included a large amount of participants from authoritative homes than from the other phenomenological classifications of Baumrind's (1971) parenting styles.

In addition to these limitations, it is possible that variables other than the perceived parenting style of the participant's parents influenced the severity of allocated punishment. For example, we noted that the father's authoritativeness was more predictive of severe punishment in household scenarios than in civic scenarios. This may be attributed to the views participants have of government and law enforcement roles. Their ideas may have impacted the allocation of punishment in the civic scenarios. The qualitative recommendations of punishment provided by participants tend to support this idea. In the household scenarios, participants attempted to designate more specific punishments, while in the civic scenarios, the recommendations generally relied on local law enforcement to actually choose and allocate a punishment. Also, we noted that between the two household scenarios the influence of the authoritative father was only significant for the first, less severe scenario. It is possible that because the first household scenario was only mildly offensive, the parenting style would have had a stronger impact on punishment allocation. Furthermore, it may be that the offense in the second scenario was so severe that extreme punishments would be allocated regardless of the parenting style.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provides compelling results and invites further investigation. Additional research could include expanding the HCPA to test for punishment allocation in a greater variety of situations. Also, a longitudinal study in which

parenting style was actually observed, rather than simply reported by adult children, would establish and validate an even stronger connection between parenting style and punishment allocation.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

The Household and Civic Measure of Punishment Allocation (HCMPA)

Social Desirability Scale

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) For Mothers

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) For Fathers

Appendix B

Debriefing Sheet