The Relations Between Parenting Styles and Juvenile Delinquency

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The Relations Between Parenting Styles and Juvenile Delinquency

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relations between Diana Baumrind’s (1971) parenting styles and juvenile delinquency. The Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) was used to assess parenting style. The Self Reported Delinquency Survey (Elliot & Ageton, 1980) was used to determine delinquency levels in adolescents. There were 63 participants with ages ranging from 14 to middle twenties. The participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires on the Internet. The data was saved on-line, and was analyzed using correlational and multivariate procedures. We hypothesized that the permissive parenting style was highly correlated with high scores of delinquency. It was also hypothesized that the authoritative parenting style was related to low scores of delinquency. Additionally, it was hypothesized that authoritarian parenting style would fall in between permissive and authoritative in delinquency. Finally, mean difference, in delinquency scores from groups defined by parenting style were evaluated. Correlational analysis showed that there were no significant relations between permissive and authoritarian parenting styles and rate of delinquency. There was a significant inverse relation between authoritative parenting style and delinquency.
Juvenile delinquency is a growing problem in the United States today. Johnson and Fennell (1992) reported that 80% of adolescents in the US acknowledged committing one or more delinquent acts for which they could have been arrested, but were not. Along with increases in the prevalence of delinquency, it seems that the nature of the offenses are becoming more violent. Recent school shootings are a good example of this. Since juvenile delinquency is widespread in the US, it is important to study juvenile delinquency, and to assess some of the possible underlying causes of this behavior.

Juvenile delinquency is defined as major or minor lawbreaking by youth under the age of 18 (Berger, 2000). Some examples of major lawbreaking are murder, rape, robbery, and theft. Minor lawbreaking refers to misdemeanors and status offenses. Status offenses are acts that are illegal because of age, such as truancy and underage drinking. Most adolescents arrested have committed minor offenses. In fact, in 1990, 62.6% of the total arrests of juveniles were for misdemeanors rather than serious crimes. Of this 62.6%, 18.6% were arrested for status offenses (curfew violations, running away, and liquor law violations), while vandalism, disorderly conduct, drunkenness, and minor violations of drug laws accounted for another 16.2% (Flanagan & Maguire, 1992).

Since most juvenile offenders commit minor offenses, much of the literature examines delinquency related to substance abuse and truancy. For example, a study conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (1996) examined patterns of drug use in 12 to 16 year old adolescents. They found that 42% of adolescents have smoked cigarettes, and 20% have smoked in the last month. The study also showed that 39% of adolescents have used alcohol, and 21% have used alcohol in the last month (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1998). The Monitoring the Future study (1996) examined drug use rates among high school seniors. They concluded that illicit drug use has actually increased since 1992. They report that approximately 65% have smoked cigarettes, 81% have used alcohol, and 49% have used marijuana (Johnston, Bachman, & O'Malley, 1996). There are big
discrepancies between the percentages of these two major studies. There has to be some reasonable explanations for the drastic increases in the rates of illicit drug use. Some of the underlying factors could be relations between individual use of drugs and the drug taking behavior of peers, older siblings, and parents is very strong (VanHasselt & Herson, 1987). It is also believed that advertising for alcohol and tobacco promotes the use of drugs in adolescents. Some adolescents may use alcohol as a coping mechanism. For those who are addicted to drugs, they may be using to avoid withdrawal symptoms. Much of the data examining the possible causes of drug abuse is gathered “after the fact;” Thus, it is difficult to determine the specific cause of drug abuse (VanHasselt & Herson, 1987).

Along with drug use problems, delinquent youth often face problems at school and are truant. Truancy means skipping school without a reasonable excuse. Adolescents are truant for many reasons; for example, some adolescents dislike school, have little interest in school, are struggling academically in school, or are simply defying their parents’ wishes (Kimmel & Weiner, 1995). Other common school problems include fighting with peers, vandalism, and destruction of property.

Parents and Delinquency

Parents have a world of influence over their children and basically mold and shape their children into adults. The discipline style they use has a great impact. Diana Baumrind (1971) defined three parenting styles based on Earl Schaefer’s (1959) concepts of parental demandingness and responsiveness. Parental demandingness is the degree to which parents set guidelines for their children, and how they discipline based on these guidelines. Parental responsiveness is the emotional aspect of parenting. Responsiveness refers to the degree to which parents attend to their children’s needs and support their children. With these concepts in mind, Baumrind identified three styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Authoritative parenting is high in both demandingness and responsiveness (Baumrind, 1971). Thus, the parents monitor and discipline their children fairly, while being very supportive at the same time. This is generally considered the best
environment in which to rear children. Authoritarian parents are high in demandingness and low in responsiveness (Baumrind, 1971). Authoritarian parents are often strict and in some families, unfair in punishing their children. They are often described as “cold” and unemotional. Depending on cultural context, rigid discipline can be harmful to a child as he or she is maturing. The third style, permissive parenting, is low in demandingness and high in responsiveness (Baumrind, 1971). Permissive parents do not impose rules on their children; their children can do what they want when they want. Permissive parents can either be supportive (indulgent) or not care about their children (neglectful). This style of parenting can also be harmful to a developing child.

Research has identified variable outcomes for children raised in the three different parenting environments. Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, and Dornbusch (1991) found that adolescents who characterized their parents as authoritative reported “significantly higher academic competence, lower levels of problem behavior, and higher levels of psychosocial development.” Adolescents raised in authoritarian homes were similar to those in authoritative homes. However, they did not show as much “self reliance and social competence (Lamborn et al., 1991).” Finally, adolescents raised in permissive homes report the lowest levels in all categories (Lamborn et al., 1991).

Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1986) found similar results in their study. They listed parental characteristics associated with children developing antisocial personality, which is associated with problem behavior. They identified lack of supervision, no discipline, lack of emotional support, and rejection as the most significant factors in predicting delinquency in adolescents (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). A lack of supervision and discipline are indicators for a permissive parenting style. A lack of emotion support and rejection are characteristics of an authoritarian parenting style. This would indicate that these parenting styles would potentially be harmful to a child growing up in that environment.
Another study links parental care with high levels of psychological distress, which leads to delinquency. Chambers, Power, Loucks, and Swanson (2001) found that high parental control, such as in an authoritarian parenting style, leads to a faster first arrest. They also discovered that low parenting care, such as in a permissive parenting style, is related to high levels of distress in adolescents. These findings would also indicate harmful results from being reared in a permissive or authoritarian home.

School problems are related to parental attitudes. Dornbusch et al. (1998) found that when parents keep an eye on their children, and are genuinely interested in what their children are involved in, their grades are better. These parental behaviors seem to be characteristic of the authoritative parenting style. If this is true, it can be assumed that the opposite may be true for permissive parenting. One could predict more school problems among children whose parents do not monitor where they are, and do not pay attention to their school performance.

In addition to school problems, parenting attitudes can affect drug use in adolescents. Chassin, McLoughlin, & Sher (1988) found that parents who use drugs are more likely to have children that use drugs. This is a great example of how children imitate their parent’s behavior. Regarding parenting styles, authoritarian and permissive styles have been associated with drug use (Baumrind, 1991).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relations between parenting style and self-reported delinquency. Although Baumrind’s parenting styles have been shown to have an influence on drug use, it is important to empirically investigate the relations between parenting styles and other behaviors associated with delinquency. For this study, it was hypothesized that a permissive parenting style was highly correlated to high levels of delinquency. Conversely, the authoritative parenting style was related to low delinquency scores. Finally, significant mean differences were expected in self-reported delinquency in groups defined by parenting style.
Method

Participants

Sixty-three students participated in the study. The participants included 8 adolescents between 14 and 18 years of age. They were all recruited from Trico High School. The remaining 55 were college students from SIUC ranging in age from 19 years to their middle twenties. Of the participants, there were 46 females and 17 males. 55 participants were Caucasian, 5 were African American, and 3 classified themselves as "other."

Materials

Our web-based survey included a form for informed consent, a demographic sheet, the two questionnaires and confidentiality statement described below. There were two different web sites. The adolescent surveys were posted on the web address http://mccoy.lib.siu.edu/adolescentsurvey.html. The surveys for those 18 years and older were posted on http://mccoy.lib.siu.edu/mlcsurvey.html.

The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991) is a 30-item questionnaire designed to measure Baumrind's (1971) permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting styles. Unlike other parenting scales, the PAQ is a survey for adolescents to complete, not parents. The responses to the questions are rated on a Likert Scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The questions are divided into the three categories, permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative, with 10 questions defining each parenting style. The higher the score in a given category, the greater the level of the parental authority style measured. The results of several studies have supported the PAQ as a reliable and valid measure (Buri, 1991). Time required for completion of this measure is approximately 20 minutes.

The Self-Reported Delinquency Measure (SRD; Elliot & Ageton, 1980) is a 47-item measure used to assess self-reported involvement in delinquency for youth between the ages of 11 and 17. It has six scales assessing different types of delinquent acts. The
scales are: predatory crimes against persons, predatory crimes against property, illegal
service crimes, public disorder crimes, status crimes, and hard drug use. The measure is
directly comparable with other self-report and official measures that are reported annually
(Elliot & Ageton, 1980). Time required for completion of this measure is approximately
20 minutes.

Procedure

The participants, ages 18 and above, who chose to log on to our website first saw
a consent form before beginning the survey. If they read and accepted the conditions in
the informed consent, they continued and completed the surveys by clicking a "continue"
button. For adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17, they were given a consent form
by their teacher. After the consent form was filled out by their parents, they returned it to
their teacher. The teacher then gave them a code that would enable access to the
web-based survey. The surveys took approximately 60 minutes, collectively, to complete.
After completing the last item, they were given access to Internet coupons available for
downloading and use in a variety of stores. On the last page of the survey a confidentiality
statement gave instructions to the adolescent on how to protect their confidentiality. It
read “To protect your confidentiality, please either print out or write down these
instructions: To ensure that no one will see your responses, please do the following: As
soon as you have downloaded your coupons - EXIT YOUR WEB BROWSER. This
means that you need to close Netscape or Microsoft Explorer (click the X button in the
upper right hand corner).” The completed survey was saved on the website, with no
personally identifying information included (anonymously). We therefore did not provide
any feedback or individual scores directly to any participant. However, they were
provided the e-mail and contact information for the project director if they wanted to
request a summary of the project results.

Results
For this study, it was hypothesized that permissive parenting style would be strongly related to delinquency levels. There was no relation between permissive parenting and delinquency. It was also hypothesized that authoritative parents would be related to low levels of delinquency. This relation was only evident for fathers. There was in fact, an inverse relation between the two variables ($r = -0.340, p < 0.05$). It was expected that authoritarian delinquency scores would fall between the permissive and authoritative. No relation between authoritarian parenting style and delinquency was observed.

**Discussion**

The present findings indicate that parenting style does have some impact on delinquency. More importantly, it was found that authoritative parenting was associated with low levels of delinquency. Therefore, good parents may have more influence over their children as they are growing up. Although the permissive and authoritarian parenting styles were associated with higher levels of delinquency, there was not a significant relationship. Parents need to work on the characteristics of being an authoritative parent. Parents need to be taught how to be more supportive and responsive to their children. They need to learn how to become a more democratic family. The children should have some say in what happens in the family. If more parents followed this form of parenting, there may be less delinquent behavior in their children. These results support other studies that have found that authoritative parenting style is characterized by low levels of problem behaviors in adolescents (Lamborn et al., 1991 & Chambers et al., 2001). However, it was not found that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were not related to delinquency like in other studies (Chambers et al., 2001 & Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). It was believed that the limitations of this study may have affected these results.

There were several limitations to the study, which should be addressed in future studies. First of all, our sample was convenient, and therefore probably not representative. Almost all of the participants were from Illinois, with a few from Kentucky and Tennessee. Most came from rural areas. Also, almost all of the participants were classified as
Caucasian. Almost all of the participants have been college age students. Only 8 of the 63 surveyed are adolescents. Therefore, it is unknown whether the findings are true of all adolescents. In fact, the college students are looking in retrospect. Their memories may be different than what really happened. Also, their delinquency totals are expected to be much higher than adolescents, since their stage of adolescence is over. Another issue is that an overwhelming number of participants were female. This may have affected the data.

Another limitation would be the level of participation in the study. The goal of this study was to have at least 100 participants. There were only 63 participants. The goal was to have about half of the sample being college students and the other half adolescents. As mentioned before, an overwhelming number of participants were college students. This may be true because of the incentives. We could only offer downloadable coupons from the Internet because of lack of funding for the research. For the adolescents, they had to do a lot more work for the coupons. They had to take home the consent form, have their parent sign it, bring it back to school, get a password from their teacher, and finally fill out the survey on their own time. It is believed that participation for college students was higher because some college professors offered extra credit for their participation in the study.

The method of this study could also be a limitation. It was originally believed that having the survey on-line would be more convenient for the participants. In reality, we had a very poor response rate, and it was hard to get participants to fill out the survey on-line. Another possibility is that it may have been easier for college students to get access to computers than the adolescents. The US Census (2000) reports that half of all households have a computer, and of out of these households about forty percent have Internet access. Although this number is rising, it may have affected the participation level.
Self-report measures used may have had both negative and positive effects. First of all, some adolescents may have exaggerated or under-reported on the questionnaires. They may try to normalize their behavior and their parent’s behavior. At the same token, since our survey was on-line and completely anonymous, the adolescents may be more comfortable being truthful.

In the future, more studies should be conducted in the area of parenting styles and juvenile delinquency. Future studies should include participants nationwide to be able to generalize the findings. It would be interesting to include more objective measures as well to compare to the self-report measures. Perhaps, trained observers could rate the parents according to parenting style. It would be helpful to get data from several sources, including other family members. Then, the data may be more reliable. It would also be interesting to see the parents included in future studies. It would be interesting to see the differences between self-identified parenting styles and child-rated parenting styles. I would expect that parents would evaluate themselves differently than their children. The children may rate the parents more extreme than the parents would rate themselves.
References


Acknowledgments

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Appendix A

Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991)

Instructions: For each of the following statements, circle the number on the 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) that best describes how the statement applies to you and your mother/father. There are no right or wrong answers, so don’t spend a lot of time on any one item. We are looking for your overall impression regarding each statement. Be sure not to omit any items.

PART 1: MOTHER

1. My mother feels that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do. 1 2 3 4 5

2. Even if I don’t agree with her, my mother feels that it is for my own good if I am forced to conform to what she thinks is right. 1 2 3 4 5

3. Whenever my mother tells me to do something, she expects me to do it immediately without any questions. 1 2 3 4 5

4. Once family policy is established, my mother discusses the reasoning behind the policy with me. 1 2 3 4 5

5. My mother always encourages verbal give-and-take whenever I feel that family rules and restrictions are unreasonable. 1 2 3 4 5

6. My mother feels that what children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want. 1 2 3 4 5

7. My mother does not allow me to question any decision she has made. 1 2 3 4 5

8. My mother directs the activities and decisions of the children of the family through reasoning and discipline. 1 2 3 4 5

9. My mother feels that more force should be used by parents in order to get their children to behave the way they are supposed to. 1 2 3 4 5

10. My mother does not feel that I need to obey rules and regulations of behavior simply because someone in authority had established them. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I know what my mother expects of me in my family, but I also feel free to discuss those expectations with my mother when I feel that they are unreasonable. 

12. My mother feels that wise parents should teach their children early just who the boss is in the family. 

13. My mother seldom gives me expectations and guidelines for my behavior. 


15. My mother consistently gives me direction and guidance in rational and objective ways. 

16. My mother gets very upset if I try to disagree with her. 

17. My mother feels that most problems in society would be solved if parents would not restrict their children’s activities, decisions, and desires as they are growing up. 

18. My mother lets me know what behavior is expected of me, and if I don’t meet these expectations, she punishes me. 

19. My mother allows me to decide most things for myself without a lot of direction from her. 

20. My mother takes my opinions into consideration when making family decisions, but she will not decide something simply because I want it. 

21. My mother does not view herself as responsible for directing and guiding my behavior. 

22. My mother has clear standards of behavior, but she is willing she is willing to adjust those standards to my needs. 

23. My mother gives me direction for my behavior and activities and she expects me to follow her direction, but she is always willing to listen to my concerns to discuss that direction with me. 

24. My mother allows me to form my own point of view on family matters and she generally allows me to decide for myself what I am going to do.
25. My mother feels that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don’t do what they are supposed to as they are growing up.

26. My mother often tells me exactly what she wants me to do and how she expects me to do it.

27. My mother gives me clear direction for my behavior and activities, but she is also understanding when I disagree with her.

28. My mother does not direct the behavior, activities, and desires of me.

29. I know what my mother expects of me in the family and she insists that I conform to those expectations simply out of respect for her authority.

30. If my mother makes a decision in the family that hurts me, she is willing to discuss that decision with me and to admit if she makes a mistake.

PART 2: FATHER
1. My father feels that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do.

2. Even if I don’t agree with him, my father feels that it is for my own good if I am forced to conform to what he thinks is right.

3. Whenever my father tells me to do something, he expects me to do it immediately without any questions.

4. Once family policy is established, my father discusses the reasoning behind the policy with me.

5. My father always encourages verbal give-and-take whenever I feel that family rules and restrictions are unreasonable.

6. My father feels that what children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want.

7. My father does not allow me to question any decision he has made.
8. My father directs the activities and decisions of the children of the family through reasoning and discipline.  
   1 2 3 4 5

9. My father feels that more force should be used by parents in order to get their children to behave the way they are supposed to.  
   1 2 3 4 5

10. My father does not feel that I need to obey rules and regulations of behavior simply because someone in authority had established them.  
   1 2 3 4 5

11. I know what my father expects of me in my family, but I also feel free to discuss those expectations with my father when I feel that they are unreasonable.  
   1 2 3 4 5

12. My father feels that wise parents should teach their children early just who the boss is in the family.  
   1 2 3 4 5

13. My father seldom gives me expectations and guidelines for my behavior.  
   1 2 3 4 5

14. My father does what I want when making family decisions.  
   1 2 3 4 5

15. My father consistently gives me direction and guidance in rational and objective ways.  
   1 2 3 4 5

16. My father gets very upset if I try to disagree with him.  
   1 2 3 4 5

17. My father feels that most problems in society would be solved if parents would not restrict their children's activities, decisions, and desires as they are growing up.  
   1 2 3 4 5

18. My father lets me know what behavior is expected of me, and if I don't meet these expectations, he punishes me.  
   1 2 3 4 5

19. My father allows me to decide most things for myself without a lot of direction from him.  
   1 2 3 4 5

20. My father takes my opinions into consideration when making family decisions, but he will not decide something simply because I want it.  
   1 2 3 4 5

21. My father does not view himself as responsible for directing
and guiding my behavior.

22. My father has clear standards of behavior, but he is willing to adjust those standards to my needs.

23. My father gives me direction for my behavior and activities and he expects me to follow his direction, but he is always willing to listen to my concerns to discuss that direction with me.

24. My father allows me to form my own point of view on family matters and he generally allows me to decide for myself what I am going to do.

25. My father feels that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don't do what they are supposed to as they are growing up.

26. My father often tells me exactly what he wants me to do and how he expects me to do it.

27. My father gives me clear direction for my behavior and activities, but he is also understanding when I disagree with him.

28. My father does not direct the behavior, activities, and desires of me.

29. I know what my father expects of me in the family and he insists that I conform to those expectations simply out of respect for his authority.

30. If my father makes a decision in the family that hurts me, he is willing to discuss that decision with me and to admit if he makes a mistake.
Appendix B

Self-Reported Delinquency Survey (Elliot & Ageton, 1980)

*How many times in the last year have you:*

1. Purposely damaged or destroyed property belonging to your parents or other family members.
2. Purposely damaged or destroyed property belonging to a school.
3. Purposely damaged or destroyed other property that did not belong to you (not counting family or school property).
4. Stolen (or tried to steal) a motor vehicle, such as a car or motorcycle.
5. Stolen (or tried to steal) something worth more than $50.
6. Knowingly bought, sold, or held stolen goods (or tried to do any of these things).
7. Thrown objects (such as rocks, snowballs, or bottles) at cars or people.
8. Run away from home.
9. Lied about your age to gain entrance or to purchase something: for example, lying about your age to buy liquor or to get into a movie.
10. Carried a hidden weapon other than a plain pocketknife.
11. Stolen (or tried to steal) things worth $5 or less.
12. Attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting or killing him/her.
13. Been paid for having sexual relations with someone.
14. Had sexual intercourse with a person of the opposite sex other than your wife/husband.
15. Been involved in gang fights.
16. Sold marijuana or hashish ("pot," "grass," "hash").
17. Cheated on school tests.
18. Hitchhiked where it was illegal to do so.
19. Stolen money or other things from your parents or other members of your family.

20. Hit (or threatened to hit) a teacher or other adult at school.

21. Hit (or threatened to hit) one of your parents.

22. Hit (or threatened to hit) other students.

23. Been loud, rowdy, or unruly in a public place (disorderly conduct).

24. Sold hard drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, and LSD.

25. Taken a vehicle for a ride (drive) without the owner's permission.

26. Bought or provided liquor for a minor.

27. Had (or tried to have) sexual relations with someone against their will.

28. Used force (strong-arm methods) to get money or things from other students.

29. Used force (strong-arm methods) to get money or things from a teacher or other adult at school.

30. Used force (strong-arm methods) to get money or things from other people (not students or teachers).

31. Avoided paying for such things as movies, bus or subway rides, and food.

32. Been drunk in a public place.

33. Stolen (or tried to steal) things worth between $5 and $50.

34. Stolen (or tried to steal) something at school, such as someone's coat from a classroom, locker, or cafeteria, or a book from the library.

35. Broken into a building or vehicle (or tried to break in) to steal something or just to look around.

36. Begged for money or things from strangers.

37. Skipped classes without an excuse.

38. Failed to return extra change that a cashier gave you by mistake.

39. Been suspended from school.
40. Made obscene telephone calls, such as calling someone and saying dirty things.

*How often in the last year have you used?*

41. Alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, and hard liquor).

42. Marijuana-hashish ("grass," "pot," "hash").


44. Amphetamines ("Uppers," "Speed," "Whites").

45. Barbiturates ("Downers," "Reds")

46. Heroin ("Horse," "Smack")

47. Cocaine ("Coke")

Thank you for completing our survey!
If answering the questions has left you troubled, upset, or in need of someone to talk with, please feel free to contact the Project Director:

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She is a Clinical Child Psychologist and will be happy to help you.