

Parenting Styles, Guilt, and College Adjustment¹
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ABSTRACT

College women completed measures of parenting style, guilt, and college adjustment. Results provided partial support for a model, derived from control-mastery theory (a cognitive psychoanalytic theory), relating the child's interpretations of parental behavior (development of guilt) to adult adjustment outcome. Subgroups of participants were also classified as having authoritative, authoritarian, permissive-indulgent, or permissive-neglectful parents. Authoritative parenting was generally associated with good outcome (adjustment and guilt), while authoritarianism and neglectfulness were associated with poorer outcome. Indulgentness was equal to authoritativeness on all adjustment variables except academic adjustment, where those with authoritative parents were better adjusted. Authoritative parents were seen as more consistent in discipline than authoritarian and neglectful parents; but indulgent parents were seen to be as consistent as authoritative ones.

Despite the wealth of research in parenting style, there has been relatively little attention to adult outcomes, and less to processes of developmental influence (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). We didn't investigate process of developmental influence directly, but we did use a contemporary cognitive-psychoanalytic theory (J. Weiss's control-mastery theory, 1986) to propose that some parenting behaviors are interpreted by the child to form pathogenic beliefs (forms of guilt), which influence subsequent adjustment (Shilkret & Nigrosh, 1997).

We also studied the relationship between parenting style, as perceived by college students, and their adjustment to the college environment, with the expectation that authoritative parenting would be related to good adjustment and neglectful parenting to poor adjustment. Permissive parenting was differentiated into indulgent versus neglectful styles (Maccoby & Martin, 1983); we expected that indulgent permissiveness would not be as adverse in later adjustment as neglectful permissiveness. Further, we examined the hypothesis that authoritarianism would lead to good academic adjustment, while indulgent-permissiveness would lead to good personal and social adjustment (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbush, 1991) in a college population.

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METHOD

Three measures were completed by 141 college women (18-20 years): (1) Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991); this classifies parenting styles as perceived by students by the Baumrind types (1971). We added items to discriminate a 4th, permissive-neglectful style; (2) The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ, Baker & Siryk, 1989), which yields subscales for Academic, Social, Personal/Emotional Adjustment, and Attachment (to college)/Goal Commitment; (3) The Interpersonal Guilt Questionnaire (O'Connor, et al., 1996), with subscales for Survival Guilt (guilt about one's accomplishments), Separation Guilt (guilt about independence from family and recognition of parents' faults), Omnipotence Guilt (undue responsibility for others), and Self-Hate Guilt (about being worthy). We also asked about the consistency of discipline. (Scales are illustrated in appendix.)

FINDINGS

Correlations (for all 141 participants, see Table) showed that Authoritativeness was negatively associated with Survivor and Self-Hate Guilt scores (as expected), but positively associated with Separation Guilt. Perhaps authoritative parenting, while protecting a child against guilt about surpassing a parent and poor self-concept, ties the child to the parent more than other styles. Authoritarianism, in contrast, was positively associated with all guilt measures except Separation Guilt. Our speculation, using Weiss's cognitive-psychoanalytic theory, is that the authoritarian parent is ultimately perceived by the child as weak, even narcissistically vulnerable, leading to difficulties in surpassing the parent (for fear it will show up the parent), as well as to poor self-esteem. Indulgentness was associated only (negatively) with omnipotent responsibility (and the overall guilt measure), suggesting this style might protect the child from feeling excessively responsible for others. Neglectfulness was associated with low Separation Guilt, but high Self-Hate Guilt, suggesting little difficulty in achieving autonomy, in principle (perhaps a consequence of an avoidant attachment), but poor self-concept (and lower adjustment also, see below). Multiple regression analyses showed that neither Authoritarianism nor Indulgentness predicted adjustment independent of the overall guilt variable. For the other two parenting styles, both parenting style score and guilt predicted adjustment, independent of the other. That is, there was some support for the model of guilt as a mediator between parenting style and college adjustment outcome.

ANOVAs on the students with the 20 highest-scoring parent pairs of each of the 4 styles showed that authoritativeness yielded better adjustment than authoritarianism (and neglectfulness) on all adjustment variables (all results at $p < .05$ or better). Children of indulgent parents were, as expected, significantly better than those of authoritarian parents in Personal/Emotional adjustment. College students with indulgent parents were, in fact, as well adjusted as those of authoritative parents Socially and Personally/Emotionally; but not as well adjusted Academically. There was no evidence in this sample that authoritarianism would lead to better Academic adjustment than indulgentness. Authoritarianism was associated with scores as low as neglectfulness in Social, Personal/Emotional, and Total adjustment.

Neglectfulness was lower than indulgentness in Social adjustment and Total SACQ scores. In a rating of disciplinary consistency, authoritative parents were seen as more

consistent than authoritarian and neglectful parents; but indulgent parents were seen as consistent as authoritative ones.

ANOVA's for the guilt scales for this subgroup of participants were similar, with authoritativeness and indulgentness generally associated with lower guilt than the other two styles. Authoritarianism was associated with higher levels of Survivor Guilt, Omnipotence Guilt, and Self-Hate Guilt than indulgentness, similar to the overall correlational findings. Authoritativeness yielded the lowest level of Self-Hate Guilt, but indulgentness yielded the lowest level of Omnipotence Guilt.

These results generally suggest the importance of distinguishing varieties of permissiveness; the significance of parenting styles for adult adjustment in college; and the importance of guilt as a possible mediating variable developmentally.

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EXAMPLES FROM MEASURES
Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ, after Buri, 1991)

10 items for each of 4 parenting styles, rated on 5-point Likert scales, separately for mother and father

Authoritativeness:

My mother always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever I felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable.

As I was growing up, my father directed the activities and decisions of the children in the family through reasoning and discipline.

Authoritarianism:

Whenever my mother told me to do something when I was growing up, she expected me to do it immediately without asking any questions.

As I was growing up I knew what my father expected of me in the family and he insisted that I conform to those expectations simply out of respect for his authority.

Indulgent-Permissiveness:

My mother has always felt 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.

Most of the time as I was growing up my father did what the children in the family wanted when making family decisions.

Neglectful-Permissiveness (some of our additions):

As I was growing up, my mother was uninvolved in my life and she took little notice in what I did.

My father was more interested in his own concerns than in my concerns.

EXAMPLES FROM MEASURES

Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ, Baker & Siryk, 1989) 67 items, rated on 9-point Likert scales.

Academic Adjustment:

I have been keeping up to date on my academic work.

I have not been functioning well during examinations.

Social Adjustment:

I am very involved with social activities in college. I have several close social ties at this college.

Personal-Emotional Adjustment:

I have been feeling tense or nervous lately. I have been having a lot of headaches lately.

Attachment [to college] /Goal-Commitment:

Lately I have been having doubts regarding the value of a college education. I wish I were at another college or university rather than this one.

EXAMPLES FROM MEASURES

Interpersonal Guilt Questionnaire (IGQ, O'Connor, et al) 67 items, rated on 5-point Likert scales

Survival Guilt (about accomplishments; 22 items):

I am uncomfortable talking about my achievements in social situations.

It makes me very uncomfortable to receive better treatment than the people I am with.

Separation Guilt (15 items):

I feel that bad things happen to my family if I do not stay in close contact with them.

It is difficult to see my parents' flaws.

I am very reluctant to express an opinion that is different from the opinions held by my family or friends.

Omnipotence Guilt (excessive responsibility for others; 14 items):

I worry about hurting other people's feelings if I turn down an invitation from somebody who is eager for me to accept.

I worry a lot about the people I love even when they seem to be fine.

Self-Hate Guilt (about being worthy; 16 items):

I deserve to be rejected by people.

I feel there is something inherently bad about me.

Table. Correlations between Parenting Style Scores and Guilt Scales

	Surviv	Sep	Omnip	S/Hate	InGuilt
A'tative	-.166 ^d	.321 ^a	-.057	-.390 ^a	-.124
A'tarian	.270 ^c	.002	.300 ^b	.356 ^a	.319 ^a
P-Indul	-.164	-.063	-.154	-.092	-.157
P-Neglect	.101	-.273 ^b	-.059	.326 ^a	.059

N = 141 college women

Parenting style scores (Buri measure, as modified):

A'tative	Authoritative
A'tarian	Authoritarian
P-Indul	Permissive-Indulgent
P-Neglect	Permissive-Neglectful

Interpersonal Guilt Questionnaire scales:

Surviv	Survival Guilt
Sep	Separation Guilt
Omnip	Omnipotent Responsibility Guilt
S/Hate	Self-Hate Guilt
InGuilt	Interpersonal Guilt (Σ of all except S/Hate)

^a < .0001

^b < .001

^c < .01

^d < .05