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Though extensive research has been done investigating parenting styles and the influence that those styles have on children (e.g., Baumrind, 1971; Buri, 1991; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991), the influence of parents and their parenting styles on their adult children’s assignment of punishment has not been thoroughly examined. To illustrate this relationship, research was conducted measuring the degree and type of punishment that 84 adult participants would allocate for both civic and household offenses. Level of punishment was compared with the perceived parenting styles of the respondents’ parents, as measured by Buri’s (1991) Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ). The adult children of the authoritative fathers issued significantly 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 that various parenting styles have on the behavior and development of their children has been investigated by various researchers (e.g., Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Lopez, Bonenberger, & Schneider, 2001; Pratt, Arnold, Pratt, & Diessner, 1999). Most current research in parenting practices uses Baumrind’s (1971) popular classification system, which categorizes parenting styles according to two dimensions of parental influence: level of expectation (or level of demand upon the child) and 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 but are not responsive are classified as authoritarian; and parents who have low expectations and are not responsive are classified as permissive. Lastly, parents who are low in both dimensions are considered neglectful or uninvolved (Pratt et al., 1999). This final category is generally considered to be an absence of parenting rather than an implemented “parenting style” and was, therefore, not considered in the present study on parenting styles.

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 on social norms and ethical principles. The development of moral reasoning is thought to reach its pinnacle when a person is able to both view a situation from the perspective of another and base decisions on universal principles (Crain, 1985).

The first aspect of moral reasoning, the ability to take the perspective of another person and understand that person’s feelings or intentions, is called empathy. In a study examining how different age levels would assign punishment for various actions, Helwig, Zelazo, and Wilson (2001) found that...
children who have reached a higher stage of moral development tend to take into account intentions of an individual, rather than just the consequences of the individual's actions. Paying attention to intentions suggests an increased level of empathy or an ability to better identify with others.

Empathy is also 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 rewards and some level of deservingness on the part of a recipient (Hoffman, 2000). Distributive justice 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 people to treat others more mercifully. Empathy may encourage an individual to adhere less rigidly to a universal code or concept of justice as he or she makes judgments (see Batson, Klein, Highberger, & Shaw, 1995). Thus, an individual who feels empathy for another tends to show preferential treatment toward that individual and may act contrary to what strict principles of justice would normally warrant.

The second aspect of moral reasoning is that decisions are based on universal principles of morality. Kohlberg (see Crain, 1985) suggests that it is important to both protect individual rights and settle disputes democratically. This may be done successfully as individuals primarily observe a higher level of moral development that provides guiding principles for achieving justice. Crain (1985) further states that these principles require us to treat everyone the same; the principles are therefore universal.

Authoritative parenting tends to facilitate the development of moral reasoning more effectively than any other parenting style (Pratt et al., 1999). This development is likely because authoritative parents typically use induction and reasoning in disciplining their children, thus helping the children to internalize social values and norms (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). As a child internalizes these values, he or she is more able to base decisions on these common values and principles, which is one of the two elements of moral reasoning. Empathy is also facilitated because the parent explains his or her intentions and feelings about certain rules, the child has the opportunity to better understand another individual.

In contrast, authoritarian parenting tends to elicit fear, anger, and anxiety, and it is therefore associated with lower levels of moral development in children. The emotions elicited 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, which may impact moral development more indirectly (Lopez et al., 2001).

Hence, the relationship between parenting style and the degree of empathy—one aspect of moral reasoning—that children develop has been well established by previous research. It is 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 professors who offered it.
There were a total of 84 volunteers: 49 females and 35 males. Most participants were of typical college age—generally ranging from about 20 to 30 years old. Participants were recruited through class visits and distribution of flyers.

Materials

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

Household and Civic Measure of Punishment Allocation. The Household and Civic Measure of Punishment Allocation (HCMPA) 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 differed only in the severity of the offense; all other elements, such as location, type of individuals involved, and reason for the dispute, were kept constant. A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the behaviors in the scenarios did, in fact, differ 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 indicate the degree of punishment that he or she felt would be appropriate. (To see the scale, please see Appendix A, HCMPA.)

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 that participants may mark as either "True" or "False." The questionnaire includes statements like the following: "Before voting I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates." 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. Aside from parent gender, the versions are identical in content and form. The 30 questions in each questionnaire include 10 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. 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 to test 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. For each pilot, the scenarios were rated on a Likert scale from 0 (requiring no punishment) to 6 (requiring maximum punishment). As with the final version of the survey, the participant was also asked to provide an example of the punishment that he or she felt would be appropriate. After each pilot was conducted, the results were examined and the scenarios underwent any necessary revisions to ensure that the scenarios were similar but differed effectively in the severity of the offenses being committed in each. The pilots were conducted with upper-level psychology students prior to conducting the primary research.

When the first pilot was conducted, the scenarios were passed out to 23 participants. They were asked to read the instructions and to complete the survey. The results of the pilot session were then briefly reviewed, and the participants were asked for verbal feedback on the scenarios; feedback was used in making alterations to the survey 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, new versions of the civic scenarios were created, and a second pilot was conducted to evaluate the altered scenarios.

In the second pilot, 12 participants were given one version of the civic scenarios while 10 other participants were given a second version. This was done in order to identify which version 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: for the first altered version of the civic scenarios, \( M = 3.58 \) for the moderate civic scenario and \( M = 6 \) for the severe scenario. For the second altered version of the civic scenario, \( M = 3.2 \) for the moderate civic scenario; the 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 greatest difference from the mean of the severe offense scenario. Once the pilots were completed and differing severity had been established for the different scenarios, the Likert scale was adjusted to range from 0 to 4.

**Study protocol.** The procedures implemented in conducting the research were the same in each of the research sessions. To begin each session, participants were provided with the opportunity to sign up for extra credit and were then given the research packets once everyone was ready to begin. Each research packet was divided into two sections. The first section contained the following materials in the listed order: informed consent form, the civic scenarios from the Household and Civic Measure of Punishment Allocation (HCMPA), the Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960), and the household scenarios from the HCMPA. The second section of the research packet contained the Parental Authority Questionnaires (PAQ) for mothers and fathers (Buri, 1991).

**Instructions.** The research participants were next given the following verbal instructions: “Please read and sign the consent form, then detach and pass forward.” Once the consent forms had been collected, everyone was given 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 your hand. When finished, please put your pencils down and look up.”

After everyone had completed the first section, the participants were 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 your hand. Turn in questionnaires when you are done to a researcher and take a copy of the consent form.

The participants then completed 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 provided 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.

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.

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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 severe scenario. Responses to both scales were combined (with a new scale range of 0-8) and used for further analysis as one variable.

Parenting style variables. Preliminary analyses of the data from this study demonstrated that the authoritative parenting style was most powerful in influencing punishment allocations. After performing a tertile split on all three parenting styles, we found that the only significant effects involved authoritative parenting. Hence, we decided that variables would be constructed to contrast authoritative and non-authoritative parenting styles. The PAQ includes 30 items that demonstrate authoritative, authoritarian, or permissive parenting styles—10 items for each style. Only the authoritative subscale was used to differentiate between authoritative and non-authoritative parents. A score of 40 to 60 on this subscale classified a parent as authoritative, and a score of 10 to 30 classified a parent as non-authoritative. Scores between 30 and 40 were not used because they were neither clearly authoritative nor clearly non-authoritative.

Analysis

Section preface. Statistical tests were performed on data that involved both mothers and fathers. However, throughout the results, statistics concerning the parenting styles of mothers were not found to be statistically significant. Therefore, they are not discussed at length in the subsequent results.
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 effect illustrates a significant difference in punishment allocation between participants with authoritative and non-authoritative fathers. No statistically significant effect was found for authoritative vs. non-authoritative mothers. There was an interaction effect for gender of respondent by fathers, $F(2,49) = 3.35, p < .043$. Regarding this interaction, there were differences in punishment allocation between adult male and adult female children depending on the parenting style of their father.

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. Again, no statistically significant effect was found for mothers’ parenting styles.

Discussion

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 was non-authoritative.

With regard to the varying levels of punishment, 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. A potential hypothesis for this result is that the participants’ views of government and law enforcement roles may have impacted the allocation of punishment in the civic scenarios more than parenting styles did. 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 of the two household scenarios, the influence of the authoritative father on punishment allocation was only significant for the first, less severe scenario. It is possible that because the first household scenario was significantly less severe, 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.

Even though we found that fathers’ parenting styles significantly influenced punishment allocation by their adult children in many cases, we found no such effect for mothers’ parenting styles. It is not
clear why significance was found in the parenting styles of fathers but not of mothers. There are many possible hypotheses for this result. It may be that in many households, each parent punishes different offenses. The HCMPA may have only measured types of offenses that fathers were likely to punish, and therefore the mothers’ influence was not significant. It may also be that many of the participants involved in this study generally perceived the father’s influence to be greater than the mother’s. There may also be some sort of interaction between fathers’ and mothers’ parenting styles that was not examined in this study.

It is additionally possible that children may look more to their fathers for guidelines on appropriate punishment allocation. Children often see their fathers as the enforcers of rules and the disciplinarians, while mothers are often viewed as the nurturing figures in the home (Goldman & Goldman, 1983). In our society men still predominantly make the rules, laws, and judgments—they may consequently be seen as “running” most of our society. If the father is the enforcer of the rules, then it is probable that children may use the father’s methods for punishment allocation. This may explain why the mother’s influence wasn’t found to be statistically significant in this study. As the gender dynamic in our society is changing with time (see Lips, 2004), the gender effect may become less significant. Further changes to the HCMPA and different statistical tests may help in clarifying this difference between parents.

Finally, we hypothesized that of the two elements of moral development (empathy and decision-making based on universal principals or values), empathy would more strongly result from authoritative parenting. However, our results suggest otherwise. The results for authoritative fathers suggest that (1) we overestimated the impact of empathetic development, and (2) perhaps the internalization of social norms has a greater influence than we previously thought.

The children of authoritative parents are more likely to have internalized social norms and values than the children of non-authoritative parents (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). They are also more likely to develop empathy. However, from our sample it appears that social norms and values became more important than empathy. Strongly internalized values lead to an expectation that everyone will follow these values. 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, if a child saw an individual not behaving in accordance with his or her understood, internalized norms and values, the child would expect adverse consequences to follow. Hence, this child would be more likely to perceive the individual as deserving of punishment. This in turn may lead to the more severe punishments observed in the data.

Conclusions

We acknowledge that this study carries certain limitations. Firstly, the HCMPA contains only limited 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 variety of scenarios. Our scenarios addressed only two specific kinds of scenarios. Additional scenarios could provide a broader spectrum of information that could better illustrate why, how, and under what circumstances parenting style influences punishment allocation.

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. Because of this, our sample included a larger
number of participants from authoritative homes than from non-authoritative homes.

In addition to these limitations, it is possible that variables other than the perceived parenting style of the participants' parents influenced the severity of allocated punishment. As mentioned above, participants' views of law enforcement may have influenced the punishment allocation. Our study did not take into account other factors such as this that may influence responses.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provides compelling results and invites further investigation. Additional research could include expanding the HCMPA to test for punishment allocation in a greater variety of situations. Further studies might also consider attitudes toward law enforcement, as well as other potential factors, that may influence a participant's response. A longitudinal study in which parenting styles were actually observed, rather than simply reported by adult children, would further establish and validate the relationship between parenting style and punishment allocation found in our study.

References


Appendix A

The Household and Civic Measure of Punishment Allocation (HCMPA)

Instructions: Read each of the following scenarios and circle the corresponding number, on the provided scale, that best describes the level of punishment you feel should be appropriately administered for the respective offense. Then provide an example of a punishment that you believe would be appropriate and equivalent to the score you provided. There are no right or wrong answers. We are looking for your overall impression regarding each situation.

Civic Scenarios

Scenario 1
An adolescent enters a gas station and gets into a dispute with the clerk over the amount of change received for a purchase. During the dispute, both parties are yelling. While they are arguing, the phone rings and the clerk turns away momentarily, leaving the disputed amount of money on the counter. The adolescent takes the money on the counter and quickly exits the gas station.

What degree of punishment do you believe would be appropriate in this situation?

No Punishment ______ Maximum Punishment

0 1 2 3 4

Please provide an example of a punishment that would be appropriate for this situation:

Scenario 2
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.

What degree of punishment do you believe would be appropriate in this situation?

No Punishment ______ Maximum Punishment

0 1 2 3 4

Please provide an example of a punishment that would be appropriate for this situation:

Scenario 3
An adolescent and their parent are discussing an issue in their home. The conversation escalates into an argument and during the dispute both individuals are yelling. The adolescent becomes especially upset and yells, “I hate you!” and walks away.

What degree of punishment do you believe would be appropriate in this situation?

No Punishment ______ Maximum Punishment

0 1 2 3 4

Please provide an example of a punishment that would be appropriate for this situation:
Scenario 2
An adolescent and their parent are discussing an issue in their home. The conversation escalates into an argument and during the dispute both individuals are yelling. The adolescent becomes especially upset and yells, “I hate you!” then suddenly strikes the parent before walking away.

What degree of punishment do you believe would be appropriate in this situation?

No Punishment ______ Maximum Punishment ______
0 ___ 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___

Please provide an example of a punishment that would be appropriate for this situation: