

The Impact of Different Parenting Styles on First-Year College Students' Adaptation to College

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Abstract: The present study was undertaken to determine the impact of different parenting styles on college students' adaptation to college. During the second week of college, 80 first-year students from two-parent families completed the Tests of Reactions and Adaptations to College, English version and the Parental Authority Questionnaire. Authoritative parenting was related to more positive characteristics in the students studied than either authoritarian or permissive parenting. While permissive parenting was related to better emotional adjustment than authoritarian parenting, the behavioral and belief differences resulting from those two parenting styles were negligible. Comparing mothers and fathers, the fathers' parenting styles had a greater impact on the students than the mothers' parenting styles.

The present study was undertaken to determine the impact of different parenting styles on college students' adaptation to college. Early research into the impact of parenting styles on children's behavior, personality development, and other factors was largely limited to studies involving younger children. Research completed over the past decade or more has extended those investigations into the adolescent and college years (Gonzalez, 2001). Among other factors, parenting styles have been found to be related to perfectionism (Flett, Hewitt, & Singer, 1995), goal orientation (Gonzalez, 2001), self-esteem (Buri, Cooper, & Kircher, 1992), and self-rated happiness (Furnham & Cheng, 2000) in college students. While the influence of parenting styles has not always been uniform, with varying results depending on the gender of the student and the parenting styles of fathers versus mothers is considered, the overall results suggest that different parenting styles should play an important role in the initial adaptation to college of first-year college students.

The present research utilized the three parenting styles originally proposed by Baumrind (1971): authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Authoritative parents are parents who are both demanding and emotionally responsive, assertive, but not intrusive or restrictive; authoritarian parents are parents who are highly demanding and directive, but not emotionally responsive, they set rules and expect them to be followed without exception; and permissive parents are parents who set few rules and demand little of their children. While modifications to Baumrind's original parenting styles have been proposed (e.g., Maccoby & Martin, 1983), the original three parenting styles continue to be used in research settings investigating the impact of parenting on a variety of characteristics in children.

It was predicted that students whose parents were rated higher in authoritative parenting, showing support while maintaining high expectations, would exhibit more positive characteristics relative to college adjustment during the first weeks at college than students whose parents were rated higher in either authoritarianism or permissiveness. It was expected that students of parents higher in authoritarianism would have difficulty adjusting to the freedom evident at college once the highly demanding structure provided by their parents is removed. It was also expected that students of parents higher in permissiveness would also have difficulty adjusting to college because of the lack of developed personal structure in those students.

Method

Participants

A total of 80 first-year college students (24 men and 56 women) attending a private liberal arts college volunteered to participate in the present research. All participants reported being from intact, two-parent families.

Materials

College student participants completed the Tests of Reactions and Adaptations to College, English version (TRAC) and the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ).

The TRAC

The TRAC (Larose & Roy, 1995) is a 50-item test of learning propensity and general adaptation to college. The TRAC yields scores on nine sub-scales grouped into three domains. In the emotional domain the subscales consist of fear of failure and examination anxiety; in the behavioral domain the subscales consist of examination preparation, quality of attention, seeking assistance from peers, seeking help from teachers, and giving priority to college studies; and in the belief domain the subscales consist of belief in effective work methods and belief in easiness. For administration the TRAC is divided into two sections. The first 38 questions are presented as seven-point Likert scales rated from never to always as to how a person feels, thinks, etc. in a given situation. The last 12 questions, again presented as seven-point Likert scales, asks the respondent the extent of agreement to statements from total disagreement to total agreement. Acceptable levels of reliability and validity have been reported for the TRAC (Larose & Roy, 1995).

The PAQ

The PAQ (Buri, 1989; Buri, 1991) is a 30-question test designed for students to rate their parents. The questions are statements about the parent presented as five-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Each student completed a separate PAQ for the mother and the father. The PAQ provides a measure of the extent to which each parent exhibits characteristics of the three parenting styles originally proposed by Baumrind (1971): authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. The PAQ has been used extensively in research has been shown to have acceptable levels of reliability and validity (Buri, 1991).

Procedure

During the second week of their first semester at college, 80 first-year students from intact two-parent families completed the TRAC and rated both their mothers and fathers on the PAQ. The students gave permission to contact their parents to ask them to complete the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 1995). The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire allows the individual to rate both themselves and their spouse or partner, yielding measures on the same three parenting styles as the PAQ. Results from the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire are not included in the present paper.

Results

Because Larose and Roy (1995) reported that during the development of the TRAC significant differences between male and female college students were found on certain subscale scores, two initial analyses were conducted: one compared males and females on the TRAC subscale scores and the other compared males and females on their ratings of their parents on the PAQ. As presented in Table 1, no significant differences were found between males and females on the TRAC subscales, with only one subscale, quality of attention, even approaching significance. Likewise, there were no significant differences found between males and females in PAQ ratings of either mothers or fathers (see Table 2).

Because there were no significant differences between males and females on either the TRAC or PAQ, all other analyses were performed with the data for males and females combined into a single data set.

The three domains assessed by the TRAC, emotional, behavioral, and belief, were analyzed separately. Looking first at the emotional domain, students whose fathers were higher in either authoritative or permissive parenting showed less fear of failure and lower levels of examination anxiety (see Table 3). The opposite result was found relative to fathers' authoritarianism. Father's higher in authoritarianism tended to result in more fear of failure and higher levels of examination anxiety in students. Except for mother's level of permissiveness, which showed a positive correlation with fear of failure, mother's parenting style did not have an impact on the emotional domain.

Turning next to the behavioral domain, as shown in Table 4, fathers' authoritative parenting was positively related to quality of attention, seeking help from teachers, and giving priority to studies, and approached significance for seeking assistance from peers, $r(78) = .18, p = .06$. Similarly, mothers' authoritative parenting was positively related to preparation for exams, quality of attention, seeking help from peers, seeking help from teachers, and approached significance for giving priority to studies, $r(78) = .17, p = .06$. Conversely, fathers' level of authoritarianism was negatively related to seeking assistance from peers, seeking help from teachers, and giving priority to studies. While mothers' level of authoritarianism had little impact, it was negatively related to quality of attention. Fathers' permissiveness was only related to quality of attention, with higher permissiveness resulting in lower quality of attention. Mother's

permissiveness was negatively related to seeking help from teachers and giving priority to studies.

Lastly, turning to the belief domain, fathers' authoritative parenting was positively related with belief in effective working methods and negatively related with a belief in easiness (see Table 5). Mother's authoritative parenting was also negatively related with a belief in easiness. The only other significant results in the belief domain were that authoritarianism in fathers was positively related to a belief in easiness and mothers' level of permissiveness was positively related to a belief in easiness.

Discussion

As expected, higher levels of authoritative parenting predicted to more positive adaptation to college, while higher levels of authoritarianism and permissiveness predicted to poorer adaptation to college. The exception to that general summary is within the emotional domain. In the emotional domain higher levels of both authoritative and permissive parenting by fathers were predictive of more positive outcomes, specifically predicting to lower levels of both fear of failure and examination anxiety. In both the behavioral and belief domains authoritative parenting appeared to be preferential to either of the other parenting styles while there were few noticeable differences between authoritarian and permissive parenting in either the behavioral or belief domains. Comparing mothers and fathers, the fathers' parenting styles impacted a greater number of subcategories of the TRAC than the mothers' parenting styles. In particular, father's had a greater impact on the emotional domain. In the behavioral domain, especially relative to the authoritative parenting style, mothers and fathers had more equal levels of influence on their children's adjustment to college.

When developing the TRAC, Larose and Roy (1995) suggested that it was a measure of personal dispositions that do not imply good or bad immediate adjustment to the academic environment, but that may impact performance as the first year in college progresses. If that presumption is correct, the relationships reported above suggest that different parenting styles have already impacted the development of students' personal dispositions and that those dispositions are exhibited in the students' initial adjustment to college. It is predicted that those dispositions will then ultimately affect the students' long-term performance in college, a prediction that needs to be tested with future research with this or other groups of participants.

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Table 1
A Comparison of Male and Female TRAC Subscale Scores

TRAC Subscale	Male	Female	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Fear of Failure	18.50	20.43	-0.69	.49
Examination Anxiety	27.83	31.43	-1.09	.27
Examination Preparation	28.67	30.21	-1.08	.28
Quality of Attention	28.33	31.14	-1.90	.06
Assistance from Peers	18.25	17.05	0.99	.32
Seeking Help from Teachers	26.75	24.27	1.52	.13
Giving priority to College Studies	20.25	20.63	-0.32	.75
Belief in Effective Work Methods	20.08	21.05	-0.87	.39
Belief in Easiness	13.92	13.77	0.17	.86

df = 78 for all analyses

Table 2
A Comparison of Male and Female PAQ Scores

PAQ Category	Male	Female	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<u>Father Categories:</u>				
Father's Authoritativeness	36.75	36.04	0.43	.67
Father's Authoritarianism	27.25	28.89	-0.87	.39
Father's Permissiveness	21.83	22.98	-0.79	.43
<u>Mother's Categories:</u>				
Mother's Authoritativeness	37.25	36.93	0.21	.83
Mother's Authoritarianism	26.08	27.38	-0.70	.49
Mother's Permissiveness	21.93	24.23	-1.35	.18

df = 78 for all analyses

Table 3

The Impact of Different Parenting Styles on the Emotional Domain

TRAC Subscale	Father's Characteristic			Mother's Characteristic		
	Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive	Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive
Fear of Failure	.42**	-.19*	-.29**	ns	ns	.19*
Examination Anxiety	.34**	-.19*	-.22*	ns	ns	ns

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .05$

Table 4

The Impact of Different Parenting Styles on the Behavioral Domain

TRAC Subscale	Father's Characteristic			Mother's Characteristic		
	Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive	Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive
Examination Preparation	ns	ns	ns	ns	.31**	ns
Quality of Attention	ns	.26**	-.22*	-.25*	.25*	ns
Assistance from Peers	-.23*	ns	ns	ns	.20*	ns
Help from Teachers	-.44**	.36**	ns	ns	.21*	-.44**
Priority to College Studies	-.20*	.34**	ns	ns	ns	-.21*

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .05$

Table 5

The Impact of Different Parenting Styles on the Belief Domain

TRAC Subscale	Father's Characteristic			Mother's Characteristic		
	Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive	Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive
Belief in Work Methods	ns	.29**	ns	ns	ns	ns
Belief in Easiness	.21*	-.19*	ns	ns	-.24**	.27**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .05$

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