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College Students' Experienced Parenting Style Influences the Level of Difficulty in Career  
Decision-making

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in Psychology

By

Carlota Cruces Serrano

Under the mentorship of Dr. Joshua L. Williams

ABSTRACT

Career choice can be a difficult process for young adults, and parental involvement is a key factor in students' career development. In this study, we examined whether college students' degree of decidedness differs with respect to parental styles, following Baumrind's (1967) classification: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. The authoritative style tends to be associated with better outcomes overall due to parental figures seeking discipline and control while embracing an autonomy-supportive environment. We recruited 200 first and second-year college students to complete the Parent Authority Questionnaire to determine the parenting style exercised by their parents (Buri, 1991). Then, they completed the Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire (Gati et al., 1996) to measure specific career decision difficulties. We hypothesized that participants who experienced authoritarian parenting would encounter more difficulty in career decision-making than those who experienced authoritative parenting, due to the high psychological control, firm discipline, and lack of compromise and communication evident in the authoritarian parenting style. Moreover, we hypothesized that participants exposed to a permissive parenting style, characterized by parents' aloofness and lack of control or discipline, would encounter more difficulty in career decision-making than those who experienced authoritative parenting. Results show that there is an underlying connection between experiencing a permissive-authoritative parenting style combination and having more difficulty in career decision-making, as opposed to any other parental combination.

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## College Students' Experienced Parenting Style Influences the Level of Difficulty in Career Decision-making

Career choice is one of the most crucial and perhaps complex decisions in the life of a young adult. It is a process of self-exploration and determination to find the career path that most aligns with our desires and future accomplishments. Erikson (1968) suggested that career decision-making is one of the greatest challenges that young adults face regarding identity development. It is our experiences, desires, and reasons for action that shape our characters and sense of self. Orndorff and Herr (1996) established that most students, especially first- and second-year college students, have not been exposed to a variety of existing careers. Due to that lack of information, individuals may not feel confident enough in their decision and venture down a path that does not meet their interests. However, the existing literature presents parental involvement as a key factor in career development (Collins et al., 2000; Orndorff & Herr, 1996; Young, 1994). Given that career choice is strictly connected to an individual's education, parental intervention can be expected. Yet, the degree of intervention and control of these figures in the future endeavors of young adults can be broken down according to the parental style exercised.

Diana Baumrind identified four child-rearing practices that differed amongst parents: warmth expressions, discipline strategies, maturity expectations, and communication (Baumrind, 1966). She then classified parenting into three distinct styles, following each dimension's characteristics. Authoritarian parenting is characterized by high psychological control, firm discipline, and lack of compromise and communication between parent and child (Berger, 2017). This prototype of the caregiver seeks to shape, control, and evaluate the child's attitude and behavior (Baumrind, 1966). Permissive parenting provides a warm and nurturing education. However, permissive parents tend to be highly uninvolved and do not impose control or

discipline on the child (Berger, 2017). Baumrind (1966) indicated that parents under this classification are not usually a model for the child to follow. Authoritative parenting is the style that oscillates between the two previous ones. Parents under this category demand a certain level of discipline by establishing rules and limits, as well as control (Baumrind, 1996). However, they are distinctive in their flexibility and openness to listen to the child's needs and desires (Berger, 2017). Previous studies found that children's development is more prosperous when parents use similar styles of parenting, especially those who use more nurturing, supportive, and authoritative techniques when raising the child (Baumrind, 1967; Roopnarine et al. 2006). Furthermore, a study by Tavassolie et al. (2016) asserted that authoritative parenting is associated with more positive behavioral outcomes, unlike authoritarian and permissive, where children tend to exhibit greater behavioral difficulties.

A child's autonomy or freedom to act willingly, according to their desires, varies within each of the parental approaches. Baumrind (2005) proposed a direct connection between the type of parenting style and the child's sense of autonomy. Autonomy, in the context of development, can be defined as one's desires to experience freedom in their choice without limitations (Vansteenkiste et al. 2010). Therefore, these individuals will engage more deeply with self-reliance when making decisions. Joussemet and Koestner (2008) identified autonomy-support as a crucial aspect in the parent-child relationship, where parents provide structure and open communication while respecting the interests and attitudes of the child. Autonomy-supportive parents therefore do not seek to impose goals on their children, but rather it is something that children should experience and evaluate. However, Baumrind (1996) suggested that parents' behaviors concerning the child's behavioral expectations usually emerge from two factors. The first key factor is responsiveness, which is the degree to which parents encourage individuality

and self-assertion in a nurturing and supportive environment. The second key factor is demandingness, those who monitor their children's activities and seek for the child to socially integrate through maturity and behavioral demands (Baumrind, 2005).

Career decision-making is a complex and difficult issue for young adults to tackle. Gati et al. (1996) recognized the difficulty of making this decision and developed the taxonomy of the "ideal decision-maker." The ideal decision-maker is aware of the need to make a career decision, is willing to do it, and is capable of making the right choice (Gati et al., 1996). Since education and career-choice are essential aspects in the development of an adolescent, the involvement of parents in the decision process can be expected (Young, 1994; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). However, the level of control exerted by the different parenting styles can influence the future career path of these young adults. Collins and Russell (1991) suggested that parents are capable of influencing aspects of the child's identity and that the influence they exert is linked to the changing parent-child relationship developed throughout adolescence. Parents' level of control determines the level of autonomy that adolescents experience when making decisions. According to Berk (2006), authoritarian parents tend to make decisions for their children, suppressing their independence, and rarely trying to adopt the child's perspective. Permissive parents, characterized by their lack of involvement, give children ample freedom in decision-making, even when they are unprepared for it. Furthermore, children of permissive parents are characterized by a great sense of dependency and over-reliance on adult figures (Berk, 2006). Gati et al. (2000) explained that any alteration to the ideal decision-maker model may in turn change the trajectory of the individual's decision. These two parenting styles, therefore, can be considered challenging to the young adults' decisions, leading them to choose the less ideal career path or one that least resembles their interests. Young (1994) expresses the need for

parents to understand that any kind of involvement in this process has to be subject to open communication between parent and child, where the wishes and attitudes of the young adults prevail; a behavior which grants self-determination and self-reliance to the child.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether college students' degree of decidedness in their career choice differs with respect to parental styles and their level of involvement. First year and second year psychology students completed a Parent Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), developed to measure Diana Baumrind's parental prototypes. The questionnaire consists of 30 items that determine the degree of authoritarianism, permissiveness, and authoritativeness exercised by both parents (Buri, 1991). In addition, they completed the Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ), proposed in the taxonomy of Gati et al. (1996). This questionnaire includes 44 items, each one measuring a specific career decision difficulty presented in the taxonomy (Gati et al., 1996).

### **Hypotheses**

1. Children who experience authoritarian parenting will encounter more difficulty in career decision making.
2. Children who experience permissive parenting will encounter more difficulty in career decision making.
3. Children who experience authoritative parenting will encounter less difficulty in career decision making.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

After obtaining permission from the Georgia Southern Institutional Review Board, we recruited 204 first and second-year psychology students through SONA (Psychology's Online Research Management System). Out of the 204 participants, we excluded 115 based on self-

reported parental relationship identification as the focus of this study was only on two primary parental figures of the same biological sex (e.g. excluded individuals who reported having one primary parental figure, etc.;  $n = 60$ ), incongruent responses in catcher questions ( $n = 37$ ), incomplete survey responses ( $n = 17$ ), and incongruent validity response in CDDQ-R ( $n = 1$ ). The final sample size was 89 ( $M_{age} = 19.91$ ,  $SD_{age} = 3.94$ ), 58 of which were female, and 28 were male. They further self-identified as White (68.5%), African American/Black (19.1%), Asian (3.4%), American Indian/Alaska Native (1.1%), Hispanic/Latino/Spanish Origin (1.1%), Middle Eastern/North African (1.1%), and another race or ethnicity (2.2%). Participants completed the study as part of a research participation module or extra credit towards an introductory psychology course.

### **Materials and Procedure**

Participants signed up for the study through SONA (Psychology's Online Research Management System). Then, participants received a link that directed them to the informed consent document. After having read the informed consent document, agreeing to participate, participants completed the survey online, delivered through the Qualtrics software. The first part of the online questionnaire contained the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), developed by Buri (1991) and used to classify participants according to the levels of parenting style(s) experienced. The PAQ measures participant-reported levels of the three parenting-style prototypes identified by Baumrind (1967). The questionnaire contains 10 items targeted at each of the parenting styles (30 items), both parents being assessed individually from the child's perspective. The scores can range from 10 to 50, the higher the score, the greater the appraised level of parental authority (Buri, 1991). Buri's Likert-type questionnaire reported adequate content validity concerning the structure and construction of the scale, as well as good internal

consistency coefficients (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .74 - .87$ ) and adequate test-retest reliability values (.77 - .92, two-week period, Alkharusi, et al., 2011).

The second part of the survey consisted of the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ-R; Gati et al., 1996), used to evaluate students' career decision-making difficulties. For the purpose of this study, we used the CDDQ-R, a revised version consisting of 34 items (using a 9-point response scale). Each item represents one of the 10 difficulty groupings comprising the three major categories: The *lack of readiness* subscale has three subcategories related to students' engagement in making career-specific decisions: lack of motivation to engage in the process, general indecisiveness regarding all types of decisions, and dysfunctional beliefs about career decision-making. The *lack of information* subscale includes lack of knowledge about the steps involved in the process, lack of information about the self, lack of information about the different occupations, and lack of information on how to obtain additional career related information. The last subscale, *inconsistent information*, has three subcategories of difficulties in using the information: unreliable information, internal conflict within the individual (e.g., conflicting preferences), and external conflicts, that involve disagreements with significant others (Gati, 2008). Each participant's difficulties comprise a 10-point scale score profile which corresponds to the 10 difficulty categories, representing the mean of the responses to the items within it (Gati, 2008). Gati et al. (1996) reported high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ) for the entire CDDQ scale, as well as .63, .94, and .89 for the three difficulty categories. Further studies found similar results (Gati & Osipow, 1998; Gati, et al., 2000; Levin et al., 2020). Moreover, the CDDQ-R has good construct and concurrent validity, as well as test-retest reliability values, ranging from .67 to .80 (Gati, 2008).



Finally, the online survey included some basic demographic information and two, short, non-validated measures created by the research team to further analyze the level of influence students' parents exert in their career decision-making process. The first question allowed participants to indicate in a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Agree*) how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "When making a career-related decision, I consult my parents." The following question requested participants to indicate who they were most likely to consult with first when making career-related decisions.

### **Analysis**

In addition to basic descriptive statistical procedures, we used a 3 (Mother Style: Authoritarian v. Permissive v. Authoritative) x 3 (Father Style: Authoritarian v. Permissive v. Authoritative) factorial ANOVA to statistically test hypotheses related to career decision-making difficulty (as measured by the CDDQ-R).

### **Results**

*Table 1* includes a breakdown of the mean and standard deviation scores for parenting styles and the frequency of classification for each parental style based on students' self-reports.

#### **CDDQ-R – Total Score**

There was no main effect of mother style in level of difficulty experienced by participants,  $F(2, 80) = .164, p = .849, \eta^2 = .004$ . There was no main effect of father style in level of difficulty experienced by participants,  $F(2, 80) = 1.302, p = .278, \eta^2 = .032$ . There was an interaction between mother and father style and the participants level of difficulty in career decision-making,  $F(4, 80) = 3.577, p = .010, \eta^2 = .152$ , see *Figure 1*.

Within the father style condition, those participants with a permissive father experienced more difficulty in career decision-making when the mother was authoritative as opposed to the

mother being authoritarian ( $p = .045$ ). Within the mother style condition there were marginally significant differences in difficulty in decision-making. Those participants with an authoritative mother experienced more difficulty in career decision-making when the father was permissive than when he was authoritative ( $p = .070$ ). When the mother was permissive, participants experienced more difficulty when the father was authoritative as opposed to authoritarian ( $p = .084$ ).

### **CDDQ-R – Lack of Readiness**

There was no main effect of mother style in participants' lack of readiness,  $F(2, 80) = .161, p = .852, \eta^2 = .004$ . There was no main effect of father style in participants' lack of readiness,  $F(2, 80) = .041, p = .960, \eta^2 = .001$ . There was no significant interaction between parenting styles and participants' lack of readiness in career decisions  $F(4, 80) = 1.555, p = .194, \eta^2 = .072$ .

### **CDDQ-R – Lack of Information**

There was no main effect of mother style in participants' lack of information,  $F(2, 80) = .503, p = .607, \eta^2 = .012$ . There was no main effect of father style in participants' lack of information,  $F(2, 80) = 2.548, p = .085, \eta^2 = .060$ . There was an interaction between mother and father style and participants' lack of information in career decisions,  $F(4, 80) = 4.338, p = .003, \eta^2 = .178$ , see *Figure 2*.

Within the father style condition, participants experienced more difficulty engaging in career specific decisions when there was a lack of information when an authoritative father figure and a permissive mother were involved, than with an authoritative mother ( $p = .021$ ). When the father was permissive and the mother authoritative, participants showed greater difficulty in career decisions when there was a lack of information in the process, than with an

authoritarian mother ( $p = .029$ ). Within the mother style condition, there was a marginally significant difference in career decision-making difficulty when there was a lack of information. Participants experienced more difficulty engaging in the process when an authoritative mother and a permissive father were involved, as opposed to an authoritative father ( $p = .059$ ). When the mother was permissive, participants experienced more difficulty when the father was authoritative as opposed to authoritarian ( $p = .018$ ).

### **CDDQ-R – Inconsistent Information**

There was no main effect of mother style in participants' engagement in the process when inconsistent information was present,  $F(2, 80) = .026, p = .975, \eta^2 = .001$ . There was no main effect of father style in participants' engagement in the process,  $F(2, 80) = .769, p = .467, \eta^2 = .019$ . There was no significant interaction between parenting styles and participants' engagement in making career decisions when inconsistent information is present  $F(4, 80) = 2.147, p = .083, \eta^2 = .097$ .

## **Discussion**

Past research shows that career decision-making can be an intricate process associated with young people's identity development (Erikson, 1968). Furthermore, it highlights the lack of information about the variety of existing careers, which can lead to difficulty and indecisiveness in making career-specific decisions (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). Young (1994) presents parents as a key element in career development. Given the interconnectedness between a child's education and career choice, parental involvement can be assumed. How involved these figures are, depends greatly on the parenting style that characterizes them, based on Diana Baumrind's (1966) three-dimensional model: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. In the current study, we evaluated whether college students' degree of decidedness in their career choice was

influenced by the parenting style and parental level of involvement experienced. We examined three specific hypotheses, finding support for only one.

We expected participants who reported experiencing an authoritarian and/or permissive parenting style to have higher scores in the Career Decision Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ-R), as opposed to those who experienced an authoritative style. In our data, we only found a consistent significant interaction in CDDQ-R Total and *Lack of Information* scales scores. Participants in the sample who reported having a permissive and authoritative parenting style combination, based on PAQ scores, had significantly more difficulty in career decision-making than any other parental combination. This interaction is partially in agreement with our expectation that permissive parenting would lead to more difficulty in career decision-making.

Speculations as to why this consistent parental combination had the highest scores in career decision-making, could be based on the existing literature that establishes permissiveness as the parenting style with the poorest behavioral outcomes during adolescence, as opposed to authoritarian and authoritative styles (Hibbard & Walton, 2014; Panetta, et al., 2014; Tavassolie, et al., 2016). Given the nurture and support but low demandingness and lack of structure that characterizes this parenting style, it may be that college students experience more difficulty making career-specific decisions when they lack a parental figure that does not serve as a role model. Additionally, previous research establishes that adolescents experience more positive behavioral outcomes when the parenting styles are in agreement (Collins, et al., 2000; Maccoby, 1992). That is, the interaction and combination of the styles allow for the development of a structured and secured environment. Combinations, such as two authoritative parents or one authoritarian and one permissive, show positive outcomes for the child (Panetta, et a., 2014). In the case of this study's results, one authoritative and one permissive parent, it may be that the

discordant interplay between the two styles leads students in this sample to experience more difficulty in career decision-making, as opposed to any other combination.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to the study that warrant mentioning. First, a larger sample size would have provided greater statistical power to detect more significant differences considering the parenting style experienced, the combination and interaction of the styles, and the role parents play in their children's career decision-making process. Second, participants in this sample were recruited from introductory psychology courses and we asked no questions about their specific degree path or declared major. Research speculates that the degree of difficulty across majors can differ, such as STEM majors whose completion can require years and their demandingness can lead to stressful educational experiences (Rice, et al. 2015). Inclusion and identification of other college majors could allow detection of differences in students' degree of difficulty making career decisions. Furthermore, the sample was predominantly White (68.5%) which may not address any potential underlying cultural differences across students. Levin et al. (2020) found that participants from India and China showed the highest scores in career decision-making difficulty. In a similar study, Taiwanese students reported more difficulties than American students in all three sub-scales and the CDDQ Total score scale (Mau, 2001). Having a larger sample size with greater racial/ethnic variation would be ideal to detect major differences across students from different cultural backgrounds. Last, parenting styles were determined based on the participants' PAQ scores, a self-report measure, and thus participants' perception of the parenting style experienced should be interpreted cautiously. Even though the main focus of the study was to examine college students'

parenting style perception, future research could benefit from obtaining parents' perceptions of their own parenting style.

Despite the weakness in the study, this study found that students who experience a permissive-authoritative combination seem to experience more difficulty in career decision-making as opposed to other parental combinations. There could be a general trend for permissive parents to hinder their children's career decisions to a greater degree, most likely due to their marked aloofness, lack of control, and low demandingness. Moreover, it may be that the highly different characteristics specific to each style make this combination intensify the degree of difficulty for the young adult in making career-related decisions. Future research would benefit from including a larger sample size with a less homogenous racial/ethnic makeup and include parents own parenting style perception.

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*Table 1.* Mean scores for parenting styles and classification based on parenting style reported.

	Mean ( <i>SD</i> )			Classification (Frequency)		
	P	AN	AT	P	AN	AT
Mother	24.13 (6.59)	34.83 (7.88)	34.52 (8.32)	15	47	27
Father	26.77 (6.85)	34.40 (8.00)	34.51 (7.49)	25	39	25

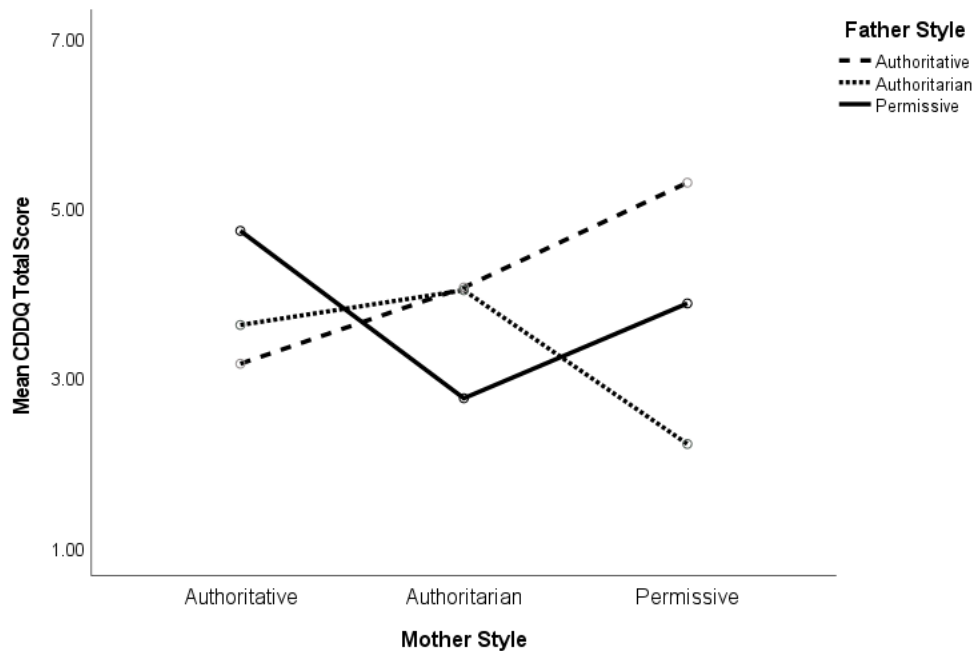


Figure 1. CDDQ-R Total mean scores for the 3 (Mother Style: Authoritarian v. Permissive v. Authoritative) x 3 (Father Style: Authoritarian v. Permissive v. Authoritative) factorial ANOVA.

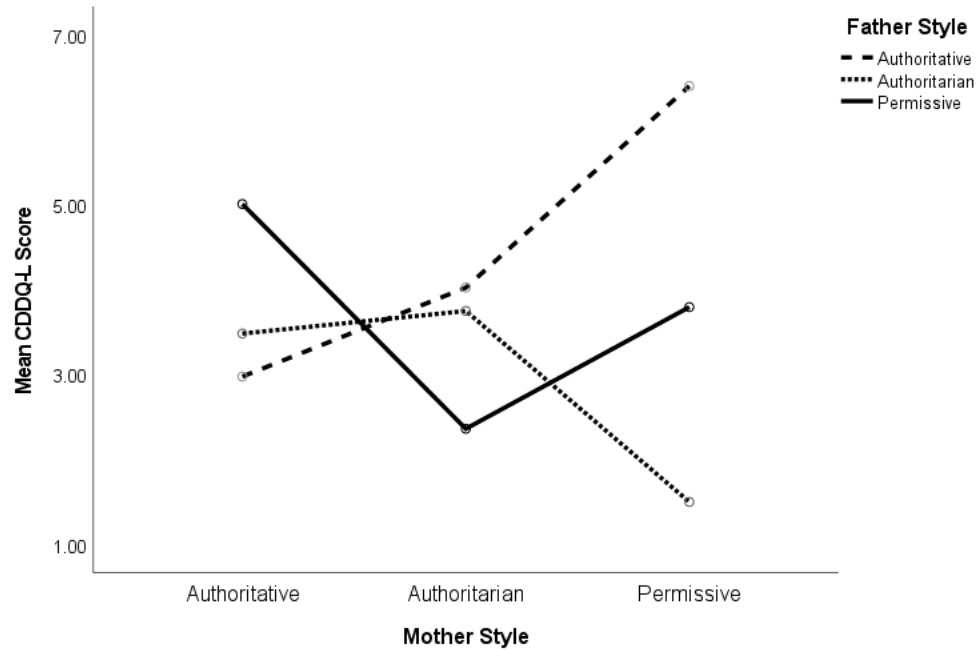


Figure 2. CDDQ-R Lack of Information mean scores for the 3 (Mother Style: Authoritarian v. Permissive v. Authoritative) x 3 (Father Style: Authoritarian v. Permissive v. Authoritative) factorial ANOVA.