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## How peoples' perceptions of their parents' parenting style correlate to their perceptions of their own parenting style

Madelynn M. Roberson  
*Georgia Southern University*

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***How peoples' perceptions of their parents' parenting style correlate to  
their perceptions of their own parenting style***

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

By  
*Madie Roberson*

Under the mentorship of *Dr. Joshua Williams*

Thesis Mentor: *Dr. Joshua Williams*

Honors Dean: Dr. Steven Engel

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**Georgia Southern University**

## Abstract

This study sought to observe how parenting styles may be passed down through generations. Data were collected from the parents of children aged 5 years and younger who were recruited from social media in the Lowcountry area in Georgia. These parents completed a short survey, specifically, the *Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)*. Each parent completed the *PAQ* three times, one for their perception of each of their parents and one for their perception of their own parenting. We measured the results and categorized the parenting styles into Baumrind's three parenting styles: Authoritarian, Authoritative, and Permissive. Once the results were measured we compared parents' perceptions of their own behaviors to their perceptions of their parents' parenting behaviors. From these results, we expected to see a generational continuity of parenting styles. However, our study found no correlations between parenting styles between a grown child's parenting style and their parents.

***How peoples' perceptions of their parents' parenting style correlate to their perceptions of their own parenting style***

With the rise in social media, parenting can often be perceived from the outside as easy, flawless, and perfectly effective when hidden behind filters and editing. As the presence of social media grows, it seems that parents all over are sharing how they choose to discipline their children and potentially advising others to do the same. With such resources, people are better able to learn from one another how to parent rather than only the example given to them by their parents. One could wonder how likely people are to copy their parents' behaviors when parenting their own children since that is what was modeled to them throughout life. A previous empirical study showed intergenerational continuity of parenting, demonstrating that present-day parents tend to use similar parenting strategies or practices that they experienced in their childhood (Chen & Kaplin, 2001). In the current study, we observed, specifically, how one's perception of their own parents' parenting styles related to their perception of their own parenting style.

Many behaviors, outside of parenting specifically, are learned through parent-child relationships. Research has shown how perceived parental acceptance and rejection significantly predict the psychological adjustment of children around the world (Rohner, 1975, 1986, 2004; Rohner et al., 2005). There is also evidence that parental maltreatment upon a child can negatively impact their emotional development and may impact their parenting styles (McCullough et al., 2014). Authoritarian parenting style and chronic family stress

may also serve as important factors in the intergenerational transmission of emotion regulation (Shaw & Starr, 2019). While there is research as to how many qualities and behaviors are passed down intergenerationally, there is little to no research on how parenting styles, as defined by Baumrind (1971) specifically, may be passed down through generations.

In the mid-1960's Diana Baumrind categorized parenting into three styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Kurukkan (2014) reassessed the validity of Baumrind's parenting scale and showed that it continued to be a reliable way to assess parenting styles. The styles vary, and are defined by, levels of demandingness and responsiveness (Ebrahimi, 2017). Authoritative parenting can be seen as parenting with a high level of demandingness and a high level of responsiveness, so while children have expectations to be met, when they fail to meet those expectations they are met with kindness and understanding. An authoritative parent is more likely to explain to a child why a certain behavior is necessary, or why other behaviors are unacceptable. These parents redirect their child's unwanted behaviors rather than reprimand them without explanation. Authoritative parenting has been shown to have more prosocial outcomes in children such as independence, social responsibility, and better emotional stability, and is seen as overall the most beneficial parenting style (Baumrind, 1971; Tripathi & Jadon, 2017). Authoritative parenting recognizes a child's autonomy while also recognizing the authority of the parent.

Authoritarian parents are viewed with a high level of demandingness but a low level of responsiveness. Authoritarian parents teach blind obedience and

respect for authority. Expectations set for children tend to be rigid and when not met, a child's behavior will be reprimanded and not often corrected. Parents that use this method tend to have discontent, detached, and distrustful children (Baumrind, 1971). These children tend to not develop good emotional regulation in later years. Children are not permitted to negotiate or defend their behaviors and they are limited in their autonomy and decision-making, while the primary goal of the parent is to instill obedience and the recognition of their power and authority.

Permissive parenting has a low level of demandingness and a high level of responsiveness. Rules, if present, are flexible and easily controlled by the child. There tend to be fewer expectations held than authoritative and authoritarian parenting. Parents tend to affirm the child's autonomy even when the choices of the child may go against the rules they have put in place. Children who were parented permissively tend to show low self-control and self-reliance, and not do well when they do not get their way (Baumrind, 1971). Children are often able to negotiate their way out of a consequence and maintain control over the rules and how they are enforced.

As mentioned earlier, intergenerational parenting similarities are possible, but not necessarily clearly documented. There is evidence that certain parenting behaviors have some extent of intergenerational continuity, such as constructive parenting behaviors and sensitive parenting behaviors (Belsky et al., 2005; Chen & Kaplin, 2001,). Additionally, while positive parenting has been found to be intergenerational, the definition of positive parenting can be fluid based on the

study consulted (Schofield et al., 2014). However, there is little to no evidence of how consistent perceptions of the previous generation's authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles are with the current generation's perceptions of their own parenting styles. Our aim in this study was to assess intergenerational parenting styles using objectively-defined parenting styles.

In this study, we looked at how people's perceptions of their parents' parenting styles related to perceptions of their own parenting style. To address this question, we surveyed parents of preschool-aged children about their perceptions of their parents' parenting styles and behavior, as well as their perception of their own parenting styles, to explore consistency. Specifically, parents of preschool-aged children completed three *Parental Authority Questionnaires (PAQ; Buri, 1991)*. One was taken to assess how that parent perceived their father's parenting behaviors, another was taken to assess how that parent perceived their mother's parenting behaviors, and the last was to assess how they perceived their own parenting behaviors. We edited the last *PAQ* to point the questions toward their behaviors rather than the behaviors of others. We gathered data primarily through social media, and through convenience sampling. Once all data had been collected, we correlated an individual's parenting style with the scores derived from their perceptions of their parents' styles.

In this exploratory and correlational study, we intended to determine if there are intergenerational relationships in parenting styles and if so, highlight future paths for empirical research.

## Method

### Participants

There were a total of 168 participants in our study. However, we filtered our data into who had completely finished the survey, and who answered that they came from a two-parent, heterosexual household leaving us with 51 participants for final analyses. Data were collected via social media. The survey was open to all parents of children aged birth through five years old. Of the 51 responses we used, 84.3% ( $n = 43$ ) were female, and 15.7% ( $n = 8$ ) did not answer. There was no record of any male participants. The participants were aged 21 to 49 years with a mean age of 33 years ( $SD = 5.39$ ). The majority of our participants identified as White ( $n = 47$ ), two participants identified as Black/African American, and three identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino.

### Measures

In our study, we assessed parenting styles with the *Parental Authority Questionnaire* (PAQ; Buri, 1991). A previous study found the reliability and validity of the PAQ to be strong, which supported our method of assessing parents using this scale (Alkharusi et al., 2011). There were three surveys each with 30 questions (a total of 90 individual responses) on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The participants completed the survey on behalf of both their parents and themselves. Each participant took the original PAQ on behalf of their mother, which used the original wording of the PAQ. Researchers edited the PAQ to suit a father figure and also to fit the individual themselves, to gather father and individual parenting style information.



For example, statements like “As I was growing up, my mother seldom gave me expectations and guidelines for my behavior” were edited to say “As I was growing up, my father seldom gave me expectations and guidelines for my behavior”, and “As my children are growing up, I seldom give them expectations and guidelines for their behavior.” There were 10 corresponding statements for each of the three parenting styles, permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. How each individual scored categorized their parenting behavior into one of those three categories. The lowest score possible for a single parenting style was 10 and the highest was 50. The higher number scored on a certain style, the more reflective of that style one’s behavior is likely to be. After completing the three surveys, each participant was asked a series of demographic questions such as sex, age, and race/ethnicity.

### **Procedure**

Upon approval by the Institutional Review Board to conduct this research, the link survey was uploaded to the researchers’ personal social media pages. The survey was shared by others on the page creating a snowball sampling procedure. The link took participants to the survey on Qualtrics. Once participants entered the survey they immediately read the informed consent document. After agreeing to participate, participants selected the type of household in which they grew up (e.g., single parent, both parents, same-sex parents), which allowed us to filter them into surveys customized for each type of household. So if a participant grew up with only a mother figure they were not assessed on a father figure's behaviors. For this study, we only focused on two-

parent, heterosexual households. After being categorized the participants completed the *PAQ* versions beginning with their perception of their caretakers' parenting behaviors and ending with their perceptions of their behaviors. Following the completion of the three *PAQ* versions, the participants answered demographic questions such as age, biological sex (sex assigned at birth), and race. Last, they read the debriefing document, in which we directed them toward local resources in case any of the topics or statements were uncomfortable or induced anxiety.

## Results

We examined relationships between scores of one's perceived parenting style and scores of their parents' parenting styles with Pearson's correlations. For each individual and their parents, we computed scores for each parenting style: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, according to the *Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)*. Each individual, their father, and their mother were tested across each other category. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the *PAQ* of the individual participants, their father, and their mother.

**Table 1**

*The Means and Standard Deviations of Each Category in the Correlation.*

| Style and Parent     | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|
| Permissive mother    | 21.47    | 6.01      |
| Authoritarian mother | 33.67    | 9.55      |



|                         |    |        |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |   |
|-------------------------|----|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 2. Authoritarian mother | 51 | -.749  | 1     |       |       |       |       |       |       |   |
| 3. Authoritative mother | 50 | .362   | -.604 | 1     |       |       |       |       |       |   |
| 4. Permissive father    | 51 | .112   | -.107 | -.003 | 1     |       |       |       |       |   |
| 5. Authoritarian father | 51 | .091   | .145  | -.114 | -.761 | 1     |       |       |       |   |
| 6. Authoritative father | 51 | -.018  | -.063 | .401  | .528  | -.668 | 1     |       |       |   |
| 7. Permissive self      | 51 | .172   | .091  | -.217 | .077  | .149  | .043  | 1     |       |   |
| 8. Authoritarian self   | 51 | -.211  | .217  | .1    | -.137 | .093  | .052  | -.539 | 1     |   |
| 9. Authoritative self   | 50 | -.331* | .292* | -.076 | -.133 | .120  | -.003 | -.011 | -.195 | 1 |

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*Note.* \* $p < .05$ ;

To further explore this, we considered the individuals' parents as a unit such that we examined relationships between the individuals and their parents when their mothers' and fathers' parenting styles matched. We reasoned that intergenerational parenting styles may be stronger if both parents demonstrated the same style. To categorize matching styles, we grouped together the mother and father scores who had the same highest score in their designated section of the *PAQ*. If the highest parenting style score did not match for both the mother and father, then they were excluded from this analysis.

### **Table 3**

*The Means and Standard Deviations of Each Category After Parents Were Matched*

| Style and Parent     | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|
| Permissive mother    | 22.13    | 6.40      |
| Authoritarian mother | 32.61    | 9.73      |
| Authoritative mother | 30.74    | 9.04      |
| Permissive father    | 24.96    | 7.57      |
| Authoritarian father | 34.78    | 9.55      |
| Authoritative father | 28.83    | 8.62      |
| Permissive self      | 25.09    | 5.40      |
| Authoritarian self   | 25.26    | 7.29      |
| Authoritative self   | 42.91    | 3.71      |

Table 4 shows correlation scores between participants' parenting style scores with their parents' styles when the mother and father styles had been matched. There was still no evidence that parenting behavior in our sample is passed down generationally.

**Table 4**

*Correlation Results From Our First Analysis: A Participant and Their Parents Individually*

| Category              | <i>n</i> | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7     | 8      | 9 |
|-----------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|---|
| 1. Permissive mom     | 23       | 1     |       |       |       |       |       |       |        |   |
| 2. Authoritarian mom  | 23       | -.805 | 1     |       |       |       |       |       |        |   |
| 3. Authoritative mom  | 23       | .326  | -.545 | 1     |       |       |       |       |        |   |
| 4. Permissive dad     | 23       | -.439 | .445  | -.548 | 1     |       |       |       |        |   |
| 5. Authoritarian dad  | 23       | .734  | -.722 | .602  | -.839 | 1     |       |       |        |   |
| 6. Authoritative dad  | 23       | -.424 | .636  | -.228 | .559  | -.684 | 1     |       |        |   |
| 7. Permissive self    | 23       | .290  | -.006 | .006  | .220  | .819  | .244  | 1     |        |   |
| 8. Authoritarian self | 23       | -.289 | .268  | .082  | -.212 | -.093 | .099  | -.688 | 1      |   |
| 9. Authoritative self | 22       | -.01  | .168  | -.193 | .084  | -.004 | -.033 | .383  | -.487* | 1 |

Note. \* $p < .05$ ;

### Discussion

Our study looked at how parenting styles may be passed on throughout generations. We used the *PAQ* to categorize parents, and their parents' scores based on Baumrind's three parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. For example, if a participant's mother's *PAQ* score was highest in the permissive category, that mother was deemed a permissive parent, and so on for each mother, father, and child's score. We proposed that there would be a correlation between how a parent parents and how their parents parented them.

However, we did not discover significant and positive correlations which would have indicated intergenerational parenting styles. This was also true of the situation in which mother and father both matched on the highest parenting

style scores, which we believed would be the ideal situation to observe intergenerational parenting styles.

Given these results did not support the notion of intergenerational parenting styles, from where do parenting styles emerge? There are specific behaviors that are found to be passed down through generations (McCullough et al., 2014; Shaw & Starr, 2019). However, our study that specified parenting style, did not reflect this. Parents in a study from 2001 were following in their parents' footsteps, but it seems that our results found that parents in 2023, may not be following in those steps (Chen & Kaplin, 2001).

In future studies, we may need to break down the question further and inquire further into other factors that may contribute to a parent's behavior towards their children. We could look at religion, socioeconomic status, number of children, location, schooling methods, and how often the child was in the care of their parents. Maybe some parents had found religion or turned from a religion that they were raised in that could be influencing their behavior and beliefs towards parenting. When considering if a child was raised under the care of a nanny or childcare system, one could assume that their parents may not have had a strong influence on their parenting behaviors. Another question we might ask is what behaviors are people trying to avoid in parenting? Some may be effortlessly trying to not be like their parents. A study in 2020 showed that social support has positive effects on aspects of parenting, another aspect our study did not take into account (Rhoad-Drogalis, et al.). As mentioned before, social media's presence has influenced parenting. Another consideration taken in a

recent study is the Covid-19 pandemic and how social distancing, and the rise of social media as means of communication has influenced parent's behaviors. (Alahmadi, 2023). Something else that could be quite influential in parenting behaviors is knowledge of child development and knowledge of parenting styles and their effectiveness. Socioeconomic status has correlated with levels of knowledge of these things as well (September, 2016).

Some limitations to our study may be due to the number of cases that had to be removed. After removing single-parent families, and responses that were not completed, we were left with a small sample size that could have affected our results. The small sample size may affect our ability to generalize this finding to the population as a whole. It was also determined that a shortened *PAQ* (20 questions) may provide better scores for each parenting style, yet we used the 30-question *PAQ* (Kurukkan, 2014). Our participants were also gathered through social media so most people were in the same community producing little diversity in socioeconomic status and geographic location. We assessed specifically parents which limited our knowledge of the other influences of parenting style that could be evident in the participants' lives.

Though this is a small sample of parents and how they parent, this study opens so many doors to further study and questioning about how parenting behaviors are established and passed down through generations. A parent's influence can be great or small and studies like these can begin to educate others on where to look for parental advice, where not to look, and reflect



internally on one's parental style and behaviors and in what ways they could be improved or changed.

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