

# Does Moral Identity Influence the Appreciation of Different Parenting Practices? – Results of a Pilot Study

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## Background

We examine two parenting styles: attachment and authoritarian (Baumrind 1966). Attachment parenting emphasizes emotional sensitivity to children's developmental needs rather than control or coercion (Sears 2001). Authoritarian parenting (Dobson, 1970; Watson, 1928) is more concerned with ensuring appropriate behavior and compliance.

We measured the **moral identities** of Safety (with sub-groups "wallflower" and "bunker"), Engagement, and Imagination (Narvaez, 2008; Narvaez et al. 2012). Our research questions were: Do those with Engagement moral identity or Safety moral identity favor one style or the other? Does priming with a one or the other parenting style influence those with a particular moral identity?

## Hypothesis

1. The Safety Identity will be related to higher ratings of non-attachment parenting and the Engagement Identity will be related to higher ratings of attachment parenting.
2. High Safety Identity will be less influenced by attachment priming but Engagement Identity will be more influenced by priming for non-attachment.

## Method

### Participants

- Pretest: 18 adults (8 male)
- Pilot study: 89 undergraduate students & adults (23 males)
- Main study: Ongoing. Envisaged are ~1000 participants

### Measures

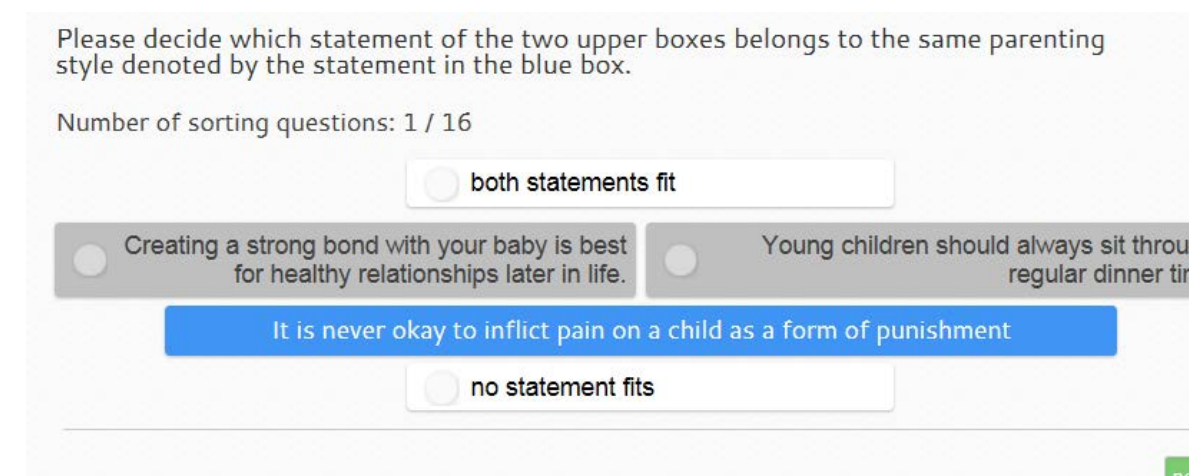
- Triune Ethics identities (Narvaez, Brooks & Hardy 2012)

### General Procedure

Participants completed an internet-based survey that included questions about parenting experience and parenting preferences, moral identities. Participants watched a narrated video showing a typical parenting scene with a 2-year old and answered questions concerning the video. Afterwards they completed a sorting task (see below). There were two randomly-assigned conditions for the video (1) One narrative emphasized an attachment parenting style (2) the other emphasized an authoritarian parenting style.

## Sorting paradigm

We pretested a set of 114 parenting statements garnered from literatures of attachment and authoritarian parenting materials. 18 respondents sorted the statements into two groups (plus undecided) and described the groups. 16 out of 18 subjects sorted the statements along the expected two groups and the data of them were used to choose 2 x 24 statements that were reliably attributed either to attachment or to non-attachment parenting style. In the sorting paradigm, participants were presented with a triplet of three statements representing parenting practices from either style according to the figure: the task is to decide which one of the two upper statements fits better to the lower statement. The statements were randomized such that the subjects had to decide whether a given statement fit the same parenting style or a different style. The number of wrong classifications (e.g., an attachment-statement that has been considered to fit to a non-attachment statement) measures the effect of priming.



We used linear regression for correlation analysis. For statistical comparison, we used the T-test or the Kolmogorov-Smirnov-Test if the data failed a test for normal distribution.

109 persons provided data, 20 dropped out at the moral identity questionnaire, 5 during the video and the sorting paradigm, 8 completed only a part of the sorting. We excluded the data of those who did not answer the moral identity questions that were necessary to address hypothesis 1. The 18.3% drop-out rate is low for online studies, confirming a successful design.

The main study is ongoing, we report the results of a pilot study intended to validate the methodology and to provide preliminary data with respect to our hypotheses.

## Results

Experienced and preferred parenting style were correlated ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, participants tended to prefer greater attachment parenting in comparison to the style they experienced themselves as children (41 preferred more attachment parenting compared to their own experience, 13 preferred less).

The data on video assessment confirmed the priming effect of the two narratives: Although the subjects considered that both narratives adequately described the scene ( $\Delta$ median: 0,  $p = 0.83$  KS), subjects that saw the attachment narrative considered the actions of the parents to be more adequate than those who saw the non-attachment narrative ( $\Delta$ median: 1,  $p < 0.001$ , KS).

With respect to hypothesis 1, the pilot data did not reveal significant correlations between moral identities and parenting experiences or preferences. **In support of hypothesis 2: participants high in Engagement made significantly more sorting errors after viewing the non-attachment narrated video ( $\Delta$ : 0.14,  $p = 0.02$ ).**

## Conclusions and Implications

The pilot data confirmed the validity of the online survey design (low dropout rate) and of the priming used to influence video assessment and statement sorting. The pilot data did not support hypothesis 1 but supported hypothesis 2. Combined with the other results this suggests that moral identities allow for flexibility with respect to parenting style preferences. In particular, more authoritarian parenting experiences may trigger a preference for attachment parenting for own or future children. The data of the main study will allow to address these issues in more detail, including an in-depth analysis of the sorting results.

## References

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