

Parenting Style Preferences, Parenting Style Experiences and Moral Identity: International Differences

Anna Fish, Markus Christen, Karley Denkhaus,
Maria Guzman, Ashley Lawrence, Travis Pruitt, Caroline Thompson, Darcia Narvaez



Introduction

Parenting can be attributed to different styles (Baumrind, 1966), among them are attachment and authoritarian parenting. **Attachment parenting** emphasizes emotional sensitivity to children's developmental needs rather than control or coercion (Sears 2001). **Authoritarian parenting** is more concerned with ensuring appropriate behavior and compliance (Dobson, 1970; Watson, 1928). As parenting experiences are expected to influence the moral identity of individuals, we analyzed connections between personal parenting experiences, parenting preferences, and the appreciation of parenting styles. We also examined moral orientations proposed by Triune ethics theory, specifically, the Safety Ethic with sub-groups "Wallflower" (internalizing) and "Bunker" (externalizing), Engagement Ethics (relational attunement), and Imagination Ethic (thoughtful abstraction); Narvaez, 2008, 2012; Narvaez et al. 2013). We analyzed group differences between Indians and Americans.

Participants and Procedure

Participants: 914 undergraduates and adults (283 males)

Participants had three tasks:

(1) **Complete** an internet-based survey about parenting experience, parenting preferences, and moral orientation.

(2) **Watch** one of two randomly-assigned narrated videos showing a typical parenting scene with a 2 year old boy and answer questions about the video. Video narration emphasized either an attachment parenting style (1) or an authoritarian parenting style (2).

(3) **Sort parenting statements** garnered from literatures of attachment and authoritarian parenting materials that were identified in a pretest as reliable indicators of either style. See illustration.

Analyses: We used univariate linear regression (own parenting experience as independent variable). For statistical comparison, we used the Mann-Whitney-test. p-value-convention: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Please decide which statement of the two upper boxes belongs to the same parenting style denoted by the statement in the blue box.

Number of sorting questions: 1 / 16

both statements fit

Creating a strong bond with your baby is best for healthy relationships later in life. Young children should always sit through regular dinner time

It is never okay to inflict pain on a child as a form of punishment

no statement fits

next

ILLUSTRATION: Three randomized statements were presented, one initial statement (from either style) and two choices (one of each style); and the task was to decide which of the two choices fits with the initial statement. 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.

Results

Parenting Style: Experienced and preferred parenting style were correlated ($r = 0.326^{***}$). Participants tended to prefer greater attachment parenting in comparison to the style they experienced themselves as children (52.2% preferred more attachment parenting compared to own experience, 15.4% preferred less).

Priming: There were no priming effects on the number of sorting errors. No moral identity made significantly more sorting errors than any other.

Parents vs. Non-Parents: Parents ($n = 469$; 75.9% female, $M_{age} = 38.9$) experienced significantly less attachment parenting compared to non-parents ($n = 445$; 62.0% female, $M_{age} = 26.5$ (Δ median: 1^{**}) but want to have significantly more attachment for their children compared to non-parents (Δ median: 2^{***}). (parents: $r = 0.240^{***}$; non-parents: $r = 0.469^{***}$).

Indians vs. Americans: The largest national groups were compared: Indian ($n = 133$, 37.6% female, $M_{age} = 32.5$ and American ($n = 685$, 74.1% female, $M_{age} = 32.5$). Indians experienced more attachment parenting (Δ median: 3^{***}) and also wanted it more for their children compared to Americans (Δ median: 2^{***}) (Indians: $r = 0.770^{***}$, Americans: $r = 0.256^{***}$).

Statements: Statements that most reliably represented attachment parenting referred to holding and breast-feeding (e.g., "Creating a strong bond with your baby is

best for healthy relationships later in life."). Statements most representative for authoritarian parenting referred to detachment and alienation (e.g., "A child throwing a distress tantrum should be put in a room alone").

Moral orientation: Overall there were no differences for priming or for parent/non-parent. Further, there was no relation between moral identity and parenting experience. Examining group differences, however, Indians were more *bunker* (Δ median: 3^{***}) and more *wallflower* compared to Americans (Δ median: 3^{***}). They were also higher in *imagination* than were Americans (Δ median: 1^{**}). These cultural differences may reflect cultural values or other factors.

Conclusions and Implications

The results suggest that parenting experienced is related to parenting preferences and to moral orientations. Greater authoritarian parenting experience is related to a preference for attachment parenting for own or future children in Americans but not in Indians. Higher bunker and wallflower moral identity in Indians may be related to less secure life conditions in India compared with the United States. Higher imagination in India may be due to a collectivist culture. These ideas need testing.

References

- Baumrind, D. (1966). Effects of Authoritative Parental Control on Child Behavior, *Child Development*, 37(4), 887-907.
- Dobson, J.C. (1970). *Dare to Discipline*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House
- Narvaez, D. (2008). Triune ethics: The neurobiological roots of our multiple moralities. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 26, 95-119.
- Narvaez, D., Brooks, J., & Hardy, S. (2013). *A Multidimensional Approach to Moral Identity: Early Life Experience, Prosocial Personality, and Moral Outcomes*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Sears, W. (2001). *The Attachment Parenting Book: A Commonsense Guide to Understanding and Nurturing Your Baby*. New York: Little, Brown and Company
- Watson, J. B. (1928). *Psychological Care of Infant and Child*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Acknowledgements: We thank L. Christen and M. Ruprecht Christen for participating in the video produced for this study.
More information: christen@ethik.uzh.ch