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

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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

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 \((52.2\% \text{ preferred more attachment parenting compared to own experience, 15.4\% preferred less})\).

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

Indians vs. Americans: The largest national groups were compared: Indian \((n = 133, 37.6\% \text{ female}, M_{\text{age}} = 32.5 \text{ and American } (n = 685, 74.1\% \text{ female}, M_{\text{age}} = 32.5)\). Indians experienced more attachment parenting \((\Delta \text{ median: 3**})\) and also wanted it more for their children compared to Americans \((\Delta \text{ median: 2**})\) \((\Delta \text{ median: 3**})\) and more wallflower compared to Americans \((\Delta \text{ median: 3**})\). They were also higher in imagination than were Americans \((\Delta \text{ median: 1**})\). 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


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