

BRIEF REPORT

Parental Styles and Religious Values Among Teenagers: A 3-Year Prospective Analysis

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ABSTRACT. The authors examined the effect of Grade 7 parental styles on Grade 10 religious values. The authors surveyed 784 participants (382 boys, 394 girls; 8 unreported) in Grade 7. The mean age of the group at Time 1 was 12.3 years ($SD = 0.5$ years). Time 2 occurred 3 years later when students were in Grade 10 (372 boys, 375 girls). In addition to assessing parental styles at Time 1, we also controlled for a number of Time 1 variables thought to possibly influence Time 2 religious values, namely, self-esteem, trait hope, and students' levels of conscientiousness. Time 1 measures (except self-esteem) were significantly correlated with Time 2 religious values, but only parental authoritativeness and hope significantly predicted religious values. The authors discuss these results with reference to the nature of parental styles and hope and their impact on religious values.

Keywords: adolescents, parental styles, religious values

The purpose of this study was to assess the relations between adolescents' recollections of parental styles and their religious values 3 years later. Parke (2004) acknowledged that parents are an important socializing force in the lives of their children, yet little research has focused on the links between parental styles and the religious beliefs and outlook of their children.

Baumrind (1971) spearheaded the development of research into parenting styles and their effects on children, delineating a number of different

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styles, namely, authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and rejecting–neglecting child-rearing strategies. Authoritative parents were viewed as demanding, but exercising firm control in a warm and loving environment. Furthermore, those adolescents who recalled their parents as displaying an authoritative style were more likely to have good academic grades one year later (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991) and be low on sensation seeking and drug use (Pilgrim, Luo, Urberg, & Fang, 1999). In contrast, authoritarian parenting has been associated with low self-esteem (Furnham & Cheng, 2000) and higher levels of ADHD (Lange et al., 2005).

General Design and Rationale of the Present Study

We present longitudinal data spanning 3 years linking recalled parental styles with adolescents' religious values. Various theories of religious development have posited adolescence as an important milestone in the development of a religious outlook (Fowler, 1981). Therefore, we suggest that it is appropriate to gauge the religious values of teenagers in midadolescence. We anticipated that events or experiences recorded at earlier times in the adolescent's life (Time 1) would be predictive of religious values later in the adolescent's life (Time 2).

On the basis of previous research, we specifically expected perceptions of authoritative parenting at Time 1 to be significantly related to adolescents' religious values 3 years later (Time 2). Recalled parental influences were assessed in Grade 7 together with a number of other personality measures. Religious values were assessed 3 years later when students were in Grade 10. Because some of the personality measures assessed at Time 1 could affect religious values in Grade 10, it was thought appropriate to control for some of these Time 1 variables in our analyses.

One such variable is self-esteem, found to be related to higher authoritative parenting and lower authoritarian parenting (Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, & Mueller, 1988). Higher self-esteem is also associated with a belief in God, attending church, and praying (Francis & Kaldor, 2002). As religious values in Grade 10 could be predicated on Grade 7 self-esteem, we thought it prudent to control for this variable.

On the basis of a meta-analysis, Saroglou (2002) concluded that conscientiousness is a significant predictor of higher religiosity. This view has been verified by a study accessing data from the Terman Longitudinal Study in which it was concluded that conscientiousness among adolescents was the only personality factor to predict adult religiosity 19 years later (McCullough, Tsang, & Brion, 2003). This personality dimension is also associated with authoritative parenting. Baumrind (1971) suggested that authoritative parents socialize their children to be socially responsible and achievement oriented. Therefore, we decided to control for conscientiousness at Time 1.

Last, we also controlled for trait hope at Time 1 (Snyder, Rand, & Sigmon, 2002). Given that hope and authoritative parenting are both associated with

high levels of adjustment and social and interpersonal competence (e.g., Snyder et al.), we reasoned that hope would be significantly related to parental styles (in particular, to authoritarianism). Thus, we controlled for the influence of hope on our outcome measure.

Method

Participants

Participants attended a number of schools in one of the Catholic Diocese of New South Wales in Australia. The Diocese is centered on the city of Wollongong, with a population of approximately 250,000 people, but also reaches into south-western metropolitan Sydney, thereby ensuring the socioeconomic and cultural diversity of the sample. Our sample represented a diverse range of key demographic indicators and closely resembled national distributions regarding fathers' occupational status (for a more detailed exposition of our sample, see Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2007).

Students were surveyed in the middle of their first year of high school, Grade 7, and then annually after that. At Time 1, more than 784 students (M age = 12.30 years, SD = 0.49 years) participated in the study (382 boys and 394 girls; 8 did not indicate their gender). The second time point occurred 3 years later in Grade 10 (Time 2; M age = 15.40 years, SD = 0.52 years) when students completed a measure of religious values. Using coded questionnaires, we were able to directly match the Time 1 and Time 2 data of 747 students (372 boys and 375 girls; 95.3% follow up) and we present the results for the matched students only.

Time 1 Measures

Parental authority questionnaire. The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991) assesses adolescents' perceptions of parental permissiveness, authoritarianism, and authoritarianism. Demonstrating the validity of these measures, Furnham and Cheng (2000) found they correlated in the expected direction with independent measures. For example, authoritarianism was the strongest predictor of self-reported happiness, whereas authoritarianism predicted low self-esteem. Because of space pressures in our questionnaire, we used a shortened version (15 items) of the original PAQ (30 items). Each of the three parenting styles was assessed separately for mother and father using five items per scale. Each item was scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Regarding the 10-item scales, for permissiveness, α = .71; for authoritarianism, α = .80; and for authoritarianism, α = .76. Sample items are "My mother/father lets me get my own way" for permissive, "My mother/father expects that we do as she/he says immediately and without asking questions" for

authoritarian, and “If I think a family rule is wrong, my mother/father will discuss it with me” for authoritative.

Self-esteem scale. The well-known Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979), which has excellent reliability and validity, was administered at Time 1. It measures global self-esteem, thereby providing good indication of general rather than specific views of the self. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with statements about the self. High scores indicate high self-esteem and on the present occasion internal consistency was .86.

Conscientiousness. This conscientiousness measure (Heaven, Ciarrochi, & Vialle, 2007), administered at Time 1, was designed for use with Australian high school students. It comprises 16 items (e.g., “I try to be careful when I do things”) and has good internal consistency and validity, being a significant predictor of good academic grades over time. Responses were indicated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*a lot like me*), whereas negative items were reverse scored. For this scale, alpha coefficient was .83.

Children’s hope scale. The 6-item Children’s Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 2002) measures agency and pathways aspects of hope and has demonstrated reliability and concurrent validity (sample item: “When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it”). Responses were indicated on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*none of the time*) to 6 (*all of the time*). This measure was administered at Time 1 and yielded a Cronbach’s coefficient alpha of .82.

Time 2 Measure

The religious values measure (Braithwaite & Law, 1985) was taken from a general values survey adapted for Australian respondents and was administered 3 years after the Time 1 measures. The items assessed an individual’s intrinsic religious values by asking participants to indicate the extent to which they adhere to three guiding principles in their life. These are “Being saved from your sins and at peace with God,” “Being at one with God or the universe,” and “Following your religious faith conscientiously.” Responses were indicated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*I reject this as a guiding principle*) to 7 (*I accept this as of the greatest importance*). Responses were summed to create a total religious values scale. The alpha for this scale was .93, indicating that the three items were highly homogenous.

Procedure

We obtained school, parental, and student consent to administer our questionnaires, which were approved by the university ethics committee and Schools

Authority. Questionnaires were completed in class in the presence of one of the authors or a school teacher. Questionnaires were completed in about 50 min without discussion. Students were fully debriefed at the end of the testing session.

Results

There was high concordance between adolescent reports of mother's and father's parenting styles. These ranged from $r = .57$ ($p < .001$) for authoritative-ness and permissiveness to $r = .64$ ($p < .001$) for authoritarianism. These measures were therefore combined to form family parenting measures. There were no significant gender differences on the religious values measure, $F(1, 770) = 0.11, ns$.

Religious values at Time 2 were significantly positively related to the following Time 1 variables: family authoritative-ness and hope, both $r_s = .18$, conscientiousness, $r = .16$ (all $p_s < .001$; all Cohen's $d < .4$), and family authoritarianism, $r = .08$ ($p < .05$). Religious values were significantly negatively related to family permissiveness, $r = -.11$ ($p < .01$).

To determine the best predictor of religious values, we ran a hierarchical linear regression entering variables in blocks. We entered the personality variables of self-esteem, conscientiousness, and hope at Step 1, followed by the three parenting variables at Step 2. The overall model was significant, $F(6, 591) = 6.15, p < .001$, and explained a total of 4.9% (adjusted) of the variance of religious values. Hope was the only significant predictor at Step 1 ($\beta = .16$), $t = 2.91, p < .01$, whereas at Step 2, the significant predictors were hope ($\beta = .14$), $t = 2.57, p < .01$, and parental authoritative-ness ($\beta = .13$), $t = 3.02, p < .01$.

Discussion

The present study was designed to determine the extent that perceptions of parental styles among Grade 7 students predict their levels of religious values in Grade 10. We controlled for possible confounding personality factors at Time 1, namely, self-esteem, conscientiousness, and hope. Although all of the Time 1 factors were related to Time 2 religious values, only hope and authoritative-ness explained unique variance in religious values.

That authoritative-ness was a significant longitudinal predictor of religious values extends earlier cross-sectional work by demonstrating that authoritative-ness has long-term relations with adolescent religious beliefs. These data show that, despite the many challenges that youth face, their perceptions of parental authoritative-ness in the early teenage years may play an important role in predicting later proreligious values. Thus, it would seem that religious values in teenagers are susceptible to perceptions of their parents' parenting styles.

The effects of authoritative-ness noted in this study are in line with the views of Baumrind (1971). She explained the importance of an authoritative parenting style for instilling social responsibility in the child. Although Baumrind did not suggest

that authoritativeness is associated with religiosity in parents or children, it seems likely that intrinsic religious values are more likely to take hold in individuals who are socially responsible rather than irresponsible. It would also seem that authoritative parents who practice a warm and democratic parenting style, yet also set firm boundaries within which behavior is to occur, provide their children with a similar model of what God is like and hence increase the possibility that children raised in such families will adopt religious values. Only future qualitative research will be able to assess this possibility.

Hope measured in Grade 7 was a significant predictor of religious values in Grade 10. This result is reminiscent of studies which have concluded that high-hope individuals are less likely to suffer an existential vacuum or to believe that "there is no meaning or purpose in the universe (Snyder et al., 2002, p. 267). It may very well be that religious values of the type assessed in this study assist high-hope individuals, in that such values provide additional structure and meaning to their world. As far as we have been able to ascertain, we are the first to demonstrate the link between trait hope and religious values, and our findings add to the many previous studies into trait hope that have demonstrated the importance of this variable for positive psychological adjustment and overall well-being (Snyder et al.).

Limitations, Recommendations, and Conclusions

As this study relies only on adolescent self-reports, future researchers should include observers' reports of parenting. In addition, all participants attended Catholic schools which may have biased our results to some extent. For example, we are not sure of the extent to which the parents themselves held religious values and what influence this may have had on their children. Regardless, our data suggest that students' recollections of their parental experiences have long-term predictive power on the religious values of our participants, even after controlling for possible confounding individual difference factors. Although children are not born with a religious faith (Holden, 2001), it is clear that family climate and parental behaviors are important determinants of the later religious values of young people.

AUTHOR NOTES

Patrick C. L. Heaven is a professor of psychology and head of the School of Psychology at the University of Wollongong. He is interested in personality factors associated with adolescent adjustment and well-being. **Joseph Ciarrochi** is an associate professor at the University of Wollongong. He researches character strengths and factors associated with well-being. **Peter Leeson** is a lecturer in psychology at the University of Wollongong and has research interests in personality and individual differences.

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