Parenting Styles and Raising Delinquent Children: Responsibility of Parents in Encouraging Violent Behavior

Abstract

It has become increasingly more common for parents of violent youth to blame police for having to respond to the violent behavior of youth with force and at times lethal force. At some point parents should assume responsibility for providing their children with appropriate parenting styles that encourage moral and responsible thinking. Parenting styles have provided us with what appears to be more and what appears to be less effective parenting styles for teaching and encouraging children and teenagers to develop more prosocial attitudes and behaviors. Baumrind's work appears to offer a clear guide to address this issue.

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Background

Baumrind and others conducted numerous research studies to identify and evaluate several different parenting styles [1-7]. The focus was on associations made between parental intervention and discipline and later outcome for how the children developed self-esteem, self-control, and overall life functioning. It is important to pay attention to the research literature when guiding or recommending parenting styles. Many people appear to rely on family tradition or make it up as they go as a way to decide how to parent and how to discipline their children. The research is clear when it comes to effective parenting styles: first-physical discipline is the least effective approach and second the relationship between the parent and child is important when implementing effective discipline. Although a child can choose how to behave regardless of what style of parenting the parent chooses to use, research clearly shows what is more effective for positive outcomes. Parenting practices are one of the best predictors of juvenile delinquency.

Two factors have been identified as being important for a child to develop morality (prosocial behavior): parental warmth and demandingness [8-15]. Parental warmth is described as the degree of support offered to a child by the parent. Demandingness is described as the degree of control the parent exerts over their child, (setting standards and expectations of conduct). Sympathy, which appears part of parental warmth and demandingness, appears to have an indirect positive impact on instilling prosocial/moral development in adolescents [16]. Child rearing involving harsh punishment, power-assertive parenting, lax parenting, rejecting or neglectful parenting methods and child abuse are related to antisocial, aggressive and violent behavior in adolescents [17].

Social learning theory also appears to play a role in how the parent operates and how they demonstrate prosocial practices and utilize social rewards [18-21]. Parent-child discussions about moral issues may help instill the same morality in thinking (instilling the parent's beliefs into the child's belief system) and has demonstrated positive effects in teaching prosocial behavior [22,23]. In fact, parent-child conversations concerning prosocial behaviors were significantly associated with adolescents engaging in altruistic prosocial behavior even when doing so had a costly impact on the adolescent [15]. Moral disengagement theory helps offer an explanation of why adolescents may become detached and disengaged from mainstream societal values [24]. If the role models in the home expose children or adolescents to attitudes and beliefs that condone antisocial behavior, the adolescent may become morally disengaged and follow the teachings of the home [25-28]. Harsh treatment and antisocial neighborhood attitudes may help teach the adolescent to disengage from appropriate societal behavior. This is especially true if the early experiences from the home involves parents who are harsh or rejecting caregivers [29,30].

The four types of parenting styles are now discussed [1,2,31].

Authoritative parenting

The parent demonstrates a responsiveness to the child's needs, demandingness (setting expectations of behavior and consequences for noncompliance), monitoring of the child's behavior, providing clear standards of conduct, and discipline based on reasoning rather than based on power assertion or withdrawal of love. Authoritative parents provide home environments rich with strict behavioral supervision with high degrees of emotional support. Within this style of parenting, children are encouraged to behave with prosocial behavior and to reason autonomously about moral problems, to respect adults, and to learn to think independently [32]. Baumrind [32] goes on to comment that the primary two child-rearing goals are to foster moral character and optimal competence. She also adds

that responsiveness is important as well. "Responsiveness refers to the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's needs and demands" [32]. Discipline occurs within the context of a warm, engaged parent-child relationship [32]. Parental warmth (both mother and fathers, but significantly stronger for maternal), sympathy, and prosocial moral reasoning were strong predictors of adolescents' prosocial behaviors [33].

Authoritarian parenting

The parent demonstrates demandingness (setting expectations of behavior and consequences for noncompliance), are less responsive to the child's needs, are more likely to use power assertive discipline, and may utilize love withdrawal to gain compliance. Love withdrawal involves using love as a reward or weapon, that is, when the child does something wrong, love and support are withheld from the child. The parent operates with a "do as you are told" style of discipline and does not often discuss why something was wrong nor does the parent invite moral discussion with the child. The parent may demonstrate some degree of warmth but mostly demands respect from the child.

Permissive indulgent parenting

The parent demonstrates high degrees of responsiveness, a lack of demandingness (failing to set expectations of behavior and consequences for noncompliance), uninvolved parenting, and negative emotionality [34]. The parent demonstrates little control over the child, sets minimal expectations, and rarely disciplines. The parent basically befriends their child, treating the child as though they are equals. It is more important to this type of parent to be liked by their child than to provide structure and/or discipline. The parent allows the child to make their own decisions, set their own rules (e.g., curfew, who they date or see socially, what they eat) rather than provide guidance and education for the child. The parent's own self-esteem and emotional needs are met through interaction with their child as well as through the adult-to-adult relationship with their child.

Permissive neglectful or uninvolved parenting

This fourth parenting style was added by Maccoby and Martin [31]. The parent demonstrates minimal warmth and minimal control over the child. The parent is often rejecting of the child and gives the child minimal if any attention or nurturance. This parent is neglectful in their parenting responsibilities. Basically the parent provides some or most of the physical necessities for the child, but has little if any relationship with their child. The motto "children should be seen but not heard" may apply here. Parents are consumed with their own life and have little time or concern for their children. The child is left fending for themselves with little if any structure in the household. Most of the time the child is basically rejected and ignored by the parent.

Outcomes of the Parenting Styles

Authoritative parenting

This style of parenting predicts the most beneficial and positive outcomes for children and adolescents [35-37]. One result of

the strict behavioral supervision that occurs with high degrees of emotional support is the lessening of engaging in criminal behavior in adulthood [38]. Children and adolescents in these homes demonstrate higher degrees of psychological adjustment [39-42]. Overall the children raised with this style of parenting tend to be more self-reliant, self-controlled, self-assertive, exploratory, and content. They tend to have more self-confidence and life success.

Authoritarian parenting

This style of parenting has some degree of effectiveness but also has some negative impact as well. Parental hostility and rejection foster anger and frustration in children and adolescents which in turn leads to higher levels of antisocial behavior [43]. The children tend to be more discontented, withdrawn, and distrustful. Cross-cultural differences have been found with the type of parenting style. Some research suggests that this style of parenting is more effective for Blacks than Whites, taking into account higher risk environments (e.g., lower social economic status, dangerous neighborhoods) [41,42,44,45]. However, this style of parenting is most effective when parents demonstrate involvement, trust, care, and communication [46]. Many children develop healthy self-confidence and self-esteem but may have somewhat more rigidity in their coping style.

Permissive indulgent parenting

This is one of the more negative and destructive styles of parenting. Children and adolescents reported lower psychological well-being and more depressive symptoms than those raised with authoritative parenting styles [35]. Children and adolescents in these homes demonstrate higher degrees of psychological maladjustment [39-42]. The children tend to be less self-controlled, immature, and demonstrate more antisocial behavior than those raised with authoritative parenting. This style of parenting is associated with significantly higher criminal behavior in adulthood for Blacks than those raised with authoritarian parents, but for Whites there were no significant differences between permissive or authoritarian parenting styles for adult criminality [34]. Anger was commonly associated with uninvolved parenting and linked to adult crime for Blacks. For Whites, they found that both anger and depression along with uninvolved parenting was most linked to adult criminology. Because the child was likely never held accountable for their actions, as adolescents and adults they tend to experience difficulty with rules and resist supervision by others. They do what they want when they want without regard for the rights or safety of others. The child's moral development was limited and therefore they are more likely to engage in violent and antisocial behavior. As adults they tend to have dysfunctional relationships and are more likely to engage in antisocial and violent behavior.

Permissive neglectful or uninvolved parenting

This is perhaps the most negative and destructive style of parenting. Children and adolescents reported lower psychological well-being, more depressive symptoms, and higher rates of substance abuse than those raised with authoritative parenting styles [35]. Children and adolescents in these homes

demonstrate higher degrees of psychological maladjustment [39-42]. This style of parenting is associated with significantly higher criminal behavior in adulthood for Blacks than those raised with authoritarian parents, but for Whites there were no significant differences between permissive or authoritarian parenting styles for adult criminality [34]. Children raised with this style of parenting are at higher risk for developing behavioral disorders. Because of the lack of almost any type of parenting, the sense of rejection combined with the lack of moral development, it is common for this child, adolescent or adult to experience depression, narcissism, and antisociality including violence. It is likely that the parents rarely if ever had any discussion with their child about morality issues and the parent is uninvolved in the child's life unless the child's behavior draws attention to the parent or family, in which cases the parents are likely to disavow the child from the family or vehemently defend the child by portraying them as a victim of the conduct of others or of situational circumstance. Basically the parent views the child as taxing and an inconvenience.

What have we learned?

Emotional and psychological abuse can have far more negative consequences developmentally on children and adolescents than physical and sexual abuse. One of the reasons for this is that emotional and psychological abuse and neglect leave the child and adolescent feeling as though they simply do not matter. In regards to responsiveness of the parent to the child, Baumrind [32] put it best: "emotional neglect and the absence of parental responsiveness have been found to be even more important than harsh, coercive, disciplinary strategies in the etiology of externalizing behaviors [47,48]." Even with harsh corporal punishment, the long-term impact on the child was less if the responsiveness of the parent was present (e.g., involvement with the child, consistency, and respect for the child [48]. This does not condone corporal punishment, but rather adds the importance of parental responsiveness and respect and warmth.

Several factors have been found to be significant in the prediction of criminality for juveniles and adults. These include what is often seen in permissive and authoritarian parenting styles, which include poor parenting practices, emotional negativity such as hostility, rejection, inattentive monitoring, inconsistent discipline, weak parent-child bonds, and a disregard for the rights and safety of the child [49-53]. Social bonding and caring and supportive bonds with parents may help prevent delinquency [38]. What was the impact of the parent's style of parenting on children, adolescents or adult children who engage in deviant or violent behavior? Extrapolating from the above four parenting styles to the outcome, the parenting styles appear to have an important impact.

I understand, as most can, that when a child is arrested or killed, parents want to believe that their child was innocent and often blame others for their child's situation. Parents do not want to believe that their child, regardless of age, would engage in deviant or violent behavior. In the long-run, however, evidence is gathered and portrays a picture of what the child was likely about, their thinking and morality, which may also reflect the parent's

parenting style. Imagine for a moment, that your child is affiliated with a gang. Gangs are nothing more than a criminal enterprise, mostly associated with drug activity and other violent crime. If your child was a member of a gang, you would likely notice your child's personality and behavioral changes. Most prominent would be a change in attire, wearing gang related clothing and colors. In addition, your child would likely be staying out late, missing curfew, and likely using drugs or alcohol. Gang members are also likely to be carrying a weapon. An effective parent would be intervening in this situation.

Yet some condone or ignore what they see. However, whether the parent is condoning or ignoring is really a fine line, and eventually ignoring becomes condoning by failing to properly intervene. A caveat: some parents are great parents, some even attempt to stop their child from engaging in gang related activity, violent behavior, or substance use, yet the child may continue to do so. For these parents I am sympathetic for the helplessness the parent may feel. Sometimes children simply choose their behavior irrespective of good, effective parenting. But for those parents who demonstrate permissive parenting or authoritarian parenting in these circumstances, the parent may aid and abet their child's deviant and criminal behavior.

It is interesting to assess criminals. By engaging in forensic interviews or interrogations, the criminal's thinking becomes very clear, such as how they justify their behavior, and how they accept or fail to accept responsibility for their behavior. Behavior in and of itself is very revealing. If you believe in treating people with respect, you are less likely to hurt others. Why?-because your belief system is about respect, compassion and empathy. To engage in deviant or violent behavior, on the other hand, you must believe that you are justified in doing so, therefore your belief system is about yourself, narcissism, immediate gratification, antisocial thinking, poor problem solving, possible substance abuse, and perhaps psychopathy or sociopathy. The media is rich with examples of parents blaming everyone but themselves for how their children act. Several cases are good examples though this is not an exhaustive list of examples. In the case of Michael Brown, the "unarmed teenager" who was shot and killed by a police officer in Fergusson, Missouri, evidence shows that the shooting was a justified use of force given the circumstances of the case [54]. What was interesting in this case was how Michael Brown behaved. He was under the influence of marijuana, had committed a strong-armed robbery minutes prior to the encounter with the police officer. Imagine the confidence Brown had when he so easily committed the strong armed robbery and then attacked the police officer. The video showing the strong armed robbery shows Brown appearing comfortable with his criminal and violent behavior. This implies thinking that it is alright for him to engage in robbery and that he has the prerogative to do so. Even when he attacked the police officer, and then afterwards continued to walk or run towards the officer even when the officer had him at gun-point. Imagine the arrogance and deviant thinking Mr. Brown must have had at that time. In fact, his confidence and apparent comfortability with this behavior that day would lead one to believe that he was experienced at this violent and criminal behavior.

So what type of parenting likely helped foster Brown's thinking and behavior? After Brown was killed by police, his mother portrayed him as an infant, wearing tee-shirts with pictures of Michael as an infant rather than as the 18 year-old that he was. She also portrayed him as being a good son. His step-father demonstrated antisociality in news appearances. He even encouraged others to burn down the city of Fergusson. One can only assume what type of parenting his mother and step-father provided. I am in no way judging Brown's biological father's parenting as he did not make many television appearances. Brown's mother now travels and speaks across the country portraying her son as a victim of police misconduct when in fact Michael's behavior demonstrated amoral and antisocial conduct. He was likely raised with a permissive-indulgent parenting style.

And one more case. The Another example, Brock Turner, the 20 year-old white male from an affluent family, referred to as the Former Stanford Swimmer. Interesting that a man from a wealthy family gets the nick name of the Former Stanford Swimmer rather than just a sex offender or rapist [55]. He was intoxicated at the time he raped the victim and claimed that he did not believe that having sex with an unconscious woman was rape. What kind of family raises a son to believe that an unconscious woman deserves to be raped, yet that is what he stated.And his father commented that his son should not have to go to prison for "20 minutes of action", which was the duration of the rape [55]. It is obvious his father shares similar views about rape. Perhaps his father was spoiling him with wealth and a sense of not having to be held accountable due to their financial wealth. Perhaps this is indicative of permissive-indulgent or permissive neglectful parenting. How else could his father make such a claim.

The above represents one of many cases of young adults who may well have been impacted by his parent's choice of parenting style. There are far too many juveniles and young adults involved in the criminal justice system that may have been a direct or indirect result of authoritarian or permissive indulgent or permissive neglectful/uninvolved parenting styles. Parenting is a responsibility and is vital to the health of our children, adolescents, and young adults. Let's be clear that the children, adolescents, and adults that engage in amoral, antisocial and/or violent behavior made a conscious choice to do so and therefore are fully responsible for their behavioral choice. However, the parents share in the creation of the amoral, antisocial and violent belief system instilled in their child's environment.

To decrease antisociality in youth we must focus attention on parenting styles. The research has provided a clear and reliable path to increase positive qualities for positive outcomes. Authoritative parenting is the most effective parenting style with authoritarian coming in second. Both of the permissive parenting styles were ineffective in encouraging morality and basically encouraged antisocial behavior, poor psychological health, and poor coping skills. Early intervention in troubled families appears warranted. Effective parenting education may help provide parents with the necessary tools to be the best, most effective prosocial parents possible.

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