

The Effects of Parental Styles and Daycare
on Preschooler's Self-Esteem

by

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the effects of parental styles and daycare on the self-esteem of 61 four-year-olds. Parental style was assessed using the Parental Attitudes Toward Childrearing Questionnaire, which measured warmth, encouragement of independence, strictness and aggravation. The children's self-esteem was assessed using the Pictorial Self Concept Scale in which the child placed pictures depicting different characteristics into piles of "like me", "sometimes like me" and "not like me". Significant correlations were found within the four independent parental style factors. However, no significant correlations were found between either daycare or parental styles and self-esteem. These findings may be due to the lack of variability among subject's scores caused by a biased subject pool.

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The increased use of daycare in the United States during the 60's and 70's has led social scientists to conduct a large number of studies to determine its effects on preschool children. Much of this research (Howes and Rubenstein, 1981; Taylor, 1978; Tzelepis, Gibling and Agronow, 1983) has focused on early social competence in young children. A number of studies have found that daycare may facilitate social development. Harper (1978) compared daycare versus non-daycare children's social adjustment and self-concept. He found that when he controlled for the effects of family socioeconomic status and family structure complexity, daycare centers "provide resources and experiences relevant to enhancing the social and psychological development of children".

There is also a wealth of literature on the effect of parental styles, or methods of childrearing, on children. Baumrind, in her classic 1968 study, focused attention on parental styles and children's social and achievement behaviors. She used factors such as amount of control or strictness, warmth, use of reasoning, consistency and use of punishment to define three parental styles: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. Baumrind says,

The authoritarian parent attempts:
to shape, control and evaluate the behavior
and attitudes of the child in accordance with
a set standard of conduct, usually an absolute
standard, theologically motivated and formulated
by a higher authority. She values

obedience as a virtue and favors punitive, forceful measures to curb self-will at points where the child's actions or beliefs conflict with what she thinks is right conduct. She believes in inculcating such instrumental values as respect for authority, respect for work and respect for the preservation of order and traditional structure. She does not encourage verbal give and take, believing that the child should accept her word for what is right (p. 261).

The authoritative parent, by contrast with the above, attempts:

to direct the child's activities, but in a rational, issue-oriented manner. She encourages verbal give and take, and shares with the child the reasoning behind her policy. She values both expressive and instrumental attributes, both autonomous self-will and disciplined conformity. Therefore, she exerts firm control at points of parent-child divergence, but does not hem the child in with restrictions. She recognizes her own special rights as an adult, but also the child's individual interests and special ways. The authoritative parent affirms the child's present qualities, but also sets standards for future conduct. She uses reason as well as power to achieve her objectives. She does not base her decisions on group consensus or the individual child's desires; but also, does not regard herself as infallible or divinely inspired (p. 261).

The permissive parent attempts:

to behave in a nonpunitive, acceptant and affirmative manner towards the child's impulses, desires, and actions. She consults with him about policy decisions and gives explanations for family rules. She makes few demands for household responsibility and orderly behavior. She presents herself to the child as a resource for him to use as he wishes, not as an active agent responsible for shaping or altering his ongoing or future behavior. She allows the child to regulate his own activities as much as possible, avoids the exercise of control, and does not encourage him to obey externally defined standards. She attempts to use reason but not overt power to accomplish her ends (p. 256).

A variety of investigators have examined parental styles and a number of child behaviors at different age levels. Frankel and Dullart (1977) found that in homes with moderately or highly controlling parents there was a greater incidence of rebellion and, also, that in high control homes, subjects displayed low emotional and behavioral autonomy. Parental styles have also been studied by Baumrind (1967) as they relate to instrumental competence in preschool children. This is defined as self-reliant, self-controlled, explorative and comfortable. In Baumrind's study it was found that children who were the most instrumentally competent were those with authoritative parents. Children with authoritarian parents were significantly less instrumentally competent while children of permissive parents were the least instrumentally competent. Social class (Kohn, 1959), parental work conditions (Pearlin and Kohn, 1966) and maternal employment (Goldberg and Easterbrooks, 1985) have been found to have a significant effect on parental styles. Goldberg and Easterbrooks used the Parental Attitudes Toward Childrearing Questionnaire, which measures parental warmth, encouragement of independence, strictness and aggravation, to study the effects of early maternal employment on marriage partners and their toddlers. They found that mothers not employed outside the home held warmer childrearing attitudes than mothers employed full-time and were more strict than mothers employed

part-time.

Studies have shown that both daycare and parental styles have an effect on children's social behaviors and self concept. It may have been possible that there was an interaction of these two effects. It could also have been that the parental styles in the home affected the way daycare affected the child.

The focus of the present study was the effects of parental style and daycare on the self-esteem of preschoolers. Self-esteem has been defined as "the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself" indicating "the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy." (Coopersmith, 1967). Little research has been done to assess the direct effect of daycare on the self-esteem of preschool children. Also, although there has been research conducted on the effect of parental styles on the self-esteem of older children and adolescents (Whaley-Klahn and Loney, 1977), less research has been centered on preschool children in this area. Since Story (1979) found that the body self concepts of four-year-olds were stable, it was also possible that self-esteem was also stable, and therefore testable, in four-year-olds.

In the present study it could have been found that children in daycare had higher self-esteem than those who were not in daycare because daycare provided the child with an op-

portunity for more positive social interaction with the child's peers. It could also have been found, as was found with older children and adolescents, that preschoolers with authoritative parents had the highest self-esteem, those with authoritarian parents had significantly lower self-esteem and children with permissive parents had the lowest self-esteem of the three groups. This study also attempted to ascertain the interaction of the effects of daycare and parental styles. For example, it could have been that if a child had an authoritarian or permissive parent and attended daycare, he might have had higher self-esteem than a similar child who did not attend daycare, simply by virtue of not experiencing his parents' methods of childrearing all day.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 61 four-year-olds and their parent(s). The names of the subjects were originally obtained from 1981 newspaper birth records. We were able to obtain addresses and phone numbers for approximately half of the names obtained and were able to actually contact about 1/10 of those for whom we had phone numbers because many of the people had moved. Two of the children were found to be untestable. One of these children was being treated for an emotional disturbance and was unable to concentrate on the task. The mother of the other child had instructed him that we wanted him to tell us which pictures he liked and the experimenters were

unable to convince him that we wanted to know which pictures were like him. Both parents were tested when available, however, in many cases only one parent was home. The subjects obtained were largely of middle to upper-middle socioeconomic status. Therefore, a subject bias may be present in this study because people of lower socioeconomic status could not be reached due to their lack of telephones and those of middle socioeconomic status that were obtained were the more stable, i.e. less transient, of the original subject pool. A further indication of this bias is that in only two of the families were the parents divorced.

Measures

The Pictorial Self-Concept Scale (Bolea et al., 1971) was used to assess the children's self-esteem. This test consists of 50 cartoon drawings which depict different characteristics, such as happy, sad, strong, weak, etc.. Two sets of cards were used. The set depicting a girl was used for female subjects and the set depicting a boy was used for male subjects. Three pieces of construction paper (a large blue, a middle-sized pink and a small yellow) were used to help the children sort the pictures into piles of "like me", "sometimes like me" and "not like me". Because this scale was devised for children in kindergarten through the fourth grade, certain modifications had to be made in order to administer the test to four-year-olds. The measure was administered individually, as opposed to the suggested group administration.

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For many of the subjects, explanations of the pictures had to be provided and for the children 4 years-6 months and younger, the "sometimes like me" category was not used at all as these children did not seem to understand the concept of sometimes. In the scoring of this scale, each of the cards was weighted by Bolea making some cards more positive or more negative than others. Figure 1 depicts an example of a positive and a negative card. Each of the three categories (like me, sometimes like me and not like me) was averaged individually. Then scores from cards in the "like me" category were multiplied by 3 and scores in the "sometimes like me" category were multiplied by 2. The three scores from each of the categories were then averaged. High scores were negative and low scores were positive.

The parental style measure used was the Parental Attitudes Toward Childrearing Questionnaire (Goldberg and Easterbrooks, 1984). This was a three page questionnaire consisting of 51 statements which the parents rated on a scale of one to six. One meant "strongly disagree" and six meant "strongly agree". This scale measured warmth, encouragement of independence, strictness and aggravation, which were determined by the authors of the scale using factor analysis. Figure 2 gives examples of statements from each of the categories. In the scoring, the answers given under each category were averaged, resulting in a score from one to six for each of the categories.

Procedure

Appointments for testing times were made by phone, as all testing was done in the child's home. One of two pairs of experimenters went to the children's homes to perform the testing. Pairs of one female and one male worked together for safety purposes. The children were tested in a separate room from the parents whenever possible in order to keep their answers confidential. To facilitate this, one experimenter worked with the child while the other worked with the parents. The male experimenter tested the boys and the female experimenter tested the girls. The parents were first asked to read and sign a consent form. Then the parent was asked a series of questions by the experimenter in order to obtain the following information: parents' names, ethnic origin, parents' occupations, parents' education (last grade completed), child's name, child's birthday, present and past daycare (type of daycare and length of time spent in daycare), if formerly but not presently in daycare -- the reason for removing the child from daycare, and the parents' ages. The parent(s) then completed the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Only the mother's scores were used in calculating the results since too few father's scores were available for comparison. Pearson product correlations were made between the four independent factors relating to parental styles and between each of the independent factors and self-esteem.

Significant correlations were found between several of the independent parental style factors. Warmth was found to be significantly correlated with independence ($r = .45, p < .0002$) strictness ($r = .27, p < .04$) and aggravation ($r = -.29, p < .02$). Independence was significantly correlated with aggravation ($r = -.32, p < .01$) and was marginally correlated with strictness ($r = -.24, p < .06$). Strictness was also found to be significantly correlated with aggravation ($r = .44, p < .0004$).

No significant correlations were found between warmth, encouragement of independence, strictness and self-esteem. However, aggravation was found to be marginally correlated with self-esteem ($r = .23, p < .07$). Recall that low scores on self-esteem indicate high self-esteem. Therefore, parents who are high on aggravation have children who are high in self-esteem. (See Table 1).

Groupings of the four parental style factors were then used in an attempt to categorize the parents as authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. Parents who scored low on warmth and encouragement of independence and high on strictness and aggravation were classified as authoritarian. Authoritative parents were those who scored high on warmth and encouragement of independence and strictness but low on aggravation. Parents who scored high on warmth and encouragement of independence and low on strictness and aggravation were classified as permissive. The ratings of high and low

were determined by dividing the scores from each of the factors at the median. Table 2 shows the scores used for determinations of high and low for each of the parental style factors. However, only 26 of the subjects were classifiable according to this method. Nine were authoritarian, six were authoritative and eleven were permissive. The number of subjects in each category was not adequate for drawing correlations between the categories and self-esteem, but there do not appear to be any significant differences between the groups. (See Table 3).

Pearson product correlations were also made between the daycare variables of number of hours per week spent in daycare and number of months spent in daycare and each of the four independent parental style factors. Correlations between the daycare variables and self-esteem were also studied. No significant correlations were found between either of the daycare variables and any of the four parental style factors. Similarly, no significant correlations were found between the daycare variables and self-esteem. (See Table 4).

The ranges of variability within the four independent parental style factors were very low. The standard deviations for warmth, encouragement of independence, strictness, and aggravation were .26, .46, .52 and .62 respectively. The highest standard deviation, that of .62 for aggravation, is also where significance was found when correlating this factor with self-esteem.

The variability among the self-esteem scores, although larger than that of the parental style scores, was also low. The range was from 34.11 to 62.93. However, only one child scored a 62.93. The second highest score, which fell much closer within the range if the other scores was 53.17.

DISCUSSION

When the four independent factors of parental styles (warmth, encouragement of independence, strictness and aggravation) were correlated with each other, the findings were as expected. Warmth was significantly correlated with independence, strictness and aggravation. As warmth increased, encouragement of independence increased. A warmer parent would be expected to allow her child more freedom to be independent than a parent who is less warm. Along the same lines, as warmth decreased, strictness increased. A parent who is strict would probably be less warm than one who is less strict. Also, as warmth decreased, parental aggression increased. One would expect that an aggravated parent would be less warm than a parent who is not aggravated. Encouragement of independence was significantly correlated with aggravation and marginally correlated with strictness. As aggravation increased, encouragement of independence decreased. An aggravated parent is less likely to encourage her child to be independent than a parent who is not aggravated. As would be expected, as strictness increased, encouragement of independence decreased. A strict parent

would not encourage her child to be independent as much as a more permissive parent would. Finally, strictness was found to be significantly correlated with aggravation. As strictness increased, aggravation increased. One would expect a strict parent to be more aggravated and vice versa.

When the four independent parental factors were correlated with self-esteem, only one significant correlation was found. Aggravation was found to be marginally correlated with self-esteem. As aggravation increased, self-esteem increased. There were no significant correlations between warmth, encouragement of independence, strictness and self-esteem. It is surprising that warmth and strictness were not found to be correlated with self-esteem since in his 1967 study Coopersmith found that "high self-esteem in children is related to parental firmness, strict and demanding procedures, parental guidance, and an affectionate treatment of the child." (Whaley-Khlan and Loney, 1977).

A possible reason for not finding correlations is that the sample was so restricted. Only 61 subjects were tested and there was very little variability among their scores on the various items. Since Kohn (1959) found that social class differences produce differences in parental styles, this lack of variability could be because almost all of the subjects were white, middle to upper-middle class. Only one Black and two Hispanic families were tested but these were also of middle class. The subjects also shared the characteristic

of being relatively stable in that they had not moved from the area in at least four years. Another similarity is that in only two families were the parents divorced. Pearlin and Kohn (1966) and Kohn and Schooler (1969) found that parental work conditions cause differences in parental styles. So, it also seems significant that 45% of the mothers had graduated from college, with 14% of the 45% having obtained a Masters or Ph.D. and 61% of the fathers had graduated from college with 34% of the 61% having obtained a Masters or a Ph.D..

It would be interesting to see this study replicated with a more varied subject pool. Plans are made to continue this study next year both using the same sample to test the stability of the children's self-esteem and increasing the sample size. It is hoped that with the larger sample size obtained through kindergartens that more variability will be found between the subjects.

FIGURE 1

Examples of Picture Cards from the
Pictorial Self Concept Scale

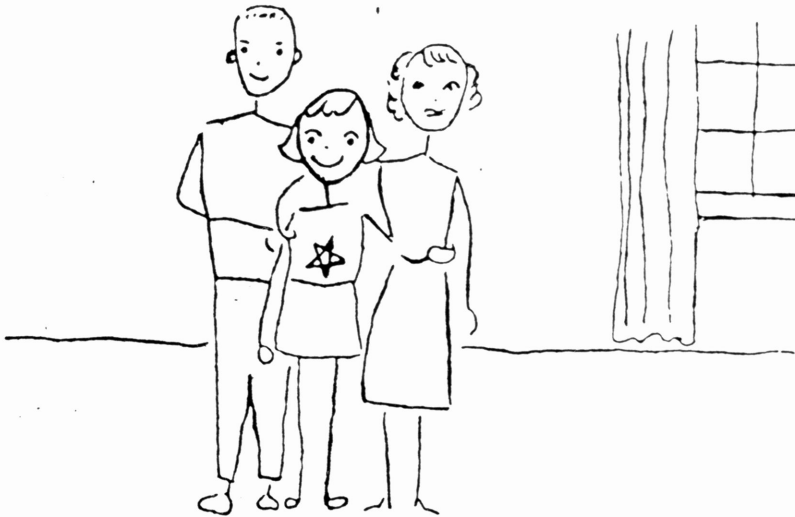


Figure 1 (a) A positive card

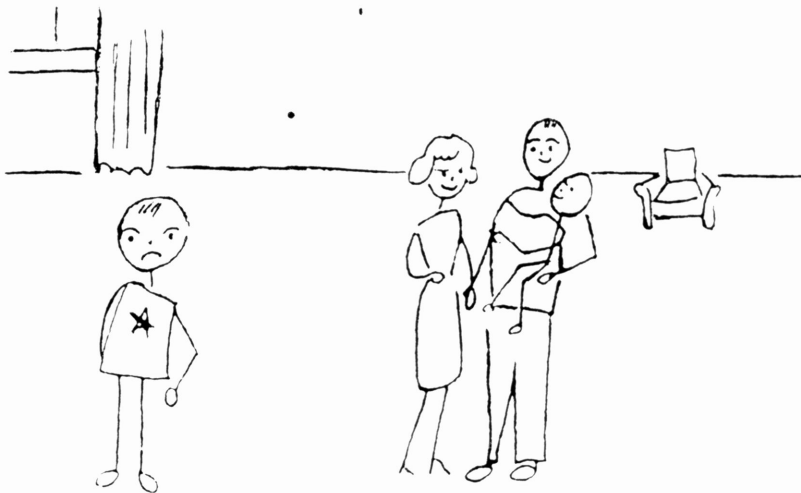


Figure 1 (b) A negative card

FIGURE 2
Examples of Parental Style Categories from
the Parental Attitudes Toward
Childrearing Questionnaire

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly disagree | Moderately disagree | Slightly disagree | Slightly agree | Moderately agree | Strongly agree |

WARMTH

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (9) I feel a child should be given comfort and understanding when (he) (she) is scared or upset.
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (13) I express affection by hugging, kissing, and holding my child.
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (35) I feel that my child and I have warm, intimate times together.

ENCOURAGEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (46) I encourage my child to be independent of me.
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (20) I let my child make many decisions for (himself) (herself).
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (32) I encourage my child to be curious, to explore, and to question things.

STRICTNESS

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (33) I have strict rules for my child.
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (37) I threaten punishment more often than I actually give it.
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (6) I punish my child by putting (him) (her) off somewhere by (himself) (herself) for a while.

AGGRAVATION

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (11) I find that taking care of a young child is much more work than pleasure.
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (4) I often feel angry with my child.
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 (25) I feel my child is a bit of a disappointment to me.

TABLE 1

Pearson Product Correlation Coefficients Between
Parental Style Factors and Self-Esteem

| | W | I | S | A |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| E | -0.03630 0.7812 | 0.16251 0.2108 | 0.05425 0.6779 | -0.23172 0.0724 |
| W | | 0.45481 0.0002 | -.26524 0.0388 | -0.28815 0.0243 |
| I | | | -.24219 0.0600 | -0.31711 0.0128 |
| S | | | | 0.442420 0.0004 |

E = Self-esteem scores, W = Warmth,
I = Encouragement of independence,
S = Strictness, A = Aggravation.
Bold print indicates significance.

TABLE 2

Scores from the Parental Attitudes Toward Childrearing
Questionnaire Used for Grouping

| | Low | High |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Warmth | 5.6 and below | 5.7 and above |
| Encouragement of Independence | 5.2 and below | 5.3 and above |
| Strictness | 2.7 and below | 2.8 and above |
| Aggravation | 2.9 and below | 3.0 and above |

TABLE 3

Comparison of Parental Style Groups and
Their Children's Self-Esteem Scores

=====

| | A | B |
|---------------|----|-------|
| Authoritarian | 9 | 45.60 |
| Authoritative | 6 | 49.38 |
| Permissive | 11 | 46.34 |

=====

A = the number of parents in that category

B = mean of children's self-esteem scores

TABLE 4
Pearson Product Correlation Coefficients Between
Parental Style Factors and Daycare

| ===== | | |
|-------|---------------------|--------------------|
| | H | M |
| ----- | | |
| E | 0.008700 0.94690 | -0.01720 0.8953 |
| ----- | | |
| W | -0.00823 0.9498 | 0.053240 0.6836 |
| ----- | | |
| I | 0.073090 0.5756 | 0.138150 0.2883 |
| ----- | | |
| S | 0.029280 0.8228 | -0.11833 0.3637 |
| ----- | | |
| A | 0.050970 0.6965 | -0.11253 0.3879 |
| ----- | | |

E = Self-esteem scores
W = Warmth
I = Encouragement of independence
S = Strictness
A = Aggravation
H = Number of hours per week spent in daycare
M = Number of months spent in daycare

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