

Predictive Power of Parenting Styles on Children's Social Skills: A Brazilian Sample

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between parenting styles and children's social skills, establishing significant correlations between those two constructs. A total of 202 children, 7 to 10 years old, male and female, attending second to fourth year of government schools in São Paulo, Brazil, were participants of this research. They collectively completed Children's Social Skills Test (THAS-C) and Parental Styles Inventory (IEP). Results suggest that positive parental styles are predictors of altruism, while negative parental styles are predictors of assertiveness, conversation, and social confidence. Regarding general social skills, variables that offered the best probable model were positive monitoring, lax discipline, moral behavior, and physical abuse (the higher the general social skill, the lesser the abusive parenting styles). As a conclusion, it seems that different social skills are related to positive and negative parenting styles, reinforcing the idea of a social skill as an attribute of behavior.

Keywords

parenting styles, social skills, educational practices, educational psychology, development

Introduction

Seminal studies in parental styles conducted by Baumrind and Black (1967) concluded that intellectually stimulating parental practices are associated with child's competence, calling that an authoritative pattern of parenting. That pattern also includes some tension, that is, firm discipline, punitiveness, maturity demands. However, Baumrind (1972) observed that fathers of Afro-American girls were authoritarian and mothers practiced firm enforcement. As a result, girls were more independent, resistive, and dominant. Darling and Steinberg (1993) proposed a model defining parenting style as "a constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and that, taken together, create an emotional climate in which the parent's behaviors are expressed" (p. 488), including goal-specific (parental practices) and non-goal directed behaviors (gestures, tone of voice, and expressions of emotions).

Many studies in parental styles, over the years, have shown differences in authoritative and authoritarian attitudes, and apparently, authoritative styles were related to academic achievement, psychosocial maturity, and cooperation with peers (Baumrind & Black, 1967; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Most of the studies relate the importance of parental abilities for the development of prosocial behaviors, if parents

use positive reinforcement, problem-solving skills, supervision, and positive monitoring of their children (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Such abilities, as well as immediately affecting parental relations, also tend to improve child's self-esteem, decreasing the possibility of antisocial behaviors. Connell and Prinz (2002) suggested that parenting styles predict high levels of social abilities. Structured and child-needs responsive' parent-child interactions were positively related to school readiness, social abilities, and receptive communication. Engels, Dekovic, and Meeus (2002) observed that democratic and authoritarian/restrictive styles predict children's prosocial behaviors and sociometric status. Concerning maternal educational techniques, Lagacé-Séguin and Coplan (2005) stated that mothers' emotional coaching might work as a protective factor for dysregulated children, helping them to

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cope with difficulties in future peer interactions. Lengua, Honorado, and Bush (2007), using the Social Skills Rating Scale, observed that different parental variables emerged as significant predictors of social competence. Parental responsiveness was positively related to cooperation among children, as shown by Landry, Smith, and Swank (2006) study. Results of Aunola and Nurmi's (2005) research showed that mothers' high level of psychological control, combined with high affection, predicted increase in children's behavioral problems at school. However, mothers' behavioral control associated with low levels of psychological control was related to lessen behavioral problems.

Chen, Chang, He, and Liu (2005) suggested that prosocial cooperative group functioning tends to strengthen the role of maternal support in social and academic adjustment, whereas antisocial-destructive functioning damages the role of parental support. Thus, peer relations provide a social context to socialization and development of social behavior and moderate the effects of parental practices on children's social adjustment. Gottman, Fainsilber-Katz, and Hooven (1997) explained that social skills related to social competence among peers in high school are not the same as the younger children, as there are more teachers in advanced school years, as well as more opportunities to be with peers, with less adult scrutiny.

Bornstein and Bornstein (2007) emphasized that the concept of what a good parenting style should be varies in different cultural and socioeconomic aspects, and show that an authoritarian and flexible style is good for the White middle-class nuclear family child, but may not be the best for children raised in other circumstances. The authors suggest that a balance between responsiveness and task orientation and an authoritarian style tends to produce better social competence in children. Again, those results may not be applicable to different cultures.

Glick, Hanish, Yabiku, and Bradley (2012) assessed the influence of parental practices in social development of preschool children, in a longitudinal research with immigrants. Parental practices were associated to adaptation time (less behavioral problems) and sociability levels of the children. Parental responsiveness and emotional support were positively associated to sociability. However, there were evidences or nonlinear coefficients for children from different cultures, being lower associations in children born outside United States (non-Hispanic Afro-American and White).

Rinaldi and Howe (2012) study showed that self-reported parental styles explained 44% of variance in children's externalizing behavior, and mothers' permissive styles and fathers' authoritarian styles predicted externalizing behaviors; authoritative styles predicted adaptive behaviors.

Taylor, Conger, Robins, and Widaman (2015) also analyzed the relationship between social support and parental educational behaviors perceived by the parents with children's social competence in a longitudinal design until adolescence in Mexican families. Results showed that fathers

and mothers tend to contribute in different ways to children's social development, indicating that, for fathers, parental proximity and positive monitoring were good predictors for the development of social competence in children, whereas social support was for mothers. Those aspects were also verified by Trommsdorff, Cole, and Heikamp (2012) and Leidy, Guerra, and Toro (2010).

Research in parental styles suggests the importance of parent-child relations to promoting socially adequate behaviors, as well as those disagreeable to people's interaction in different contexts. However, there is still a lot of controversy concerning what sort of parental style tend to favor which aspect of children's social behavior. Consequently, this research was designed to investigate those aspects, hypothesizing that positive parental styles will promote socially adequate behaviors, opposite to negative parental styles.

Method

Participants

A total of 202 children, 7 to 10 years old ($M = 8$ years, $SD = 0.88$), from second to fourth grade primary school, male and female (52.5% male), participated in this research.

Instruments

Parental Styles Inventory (IEP). There are 42 questions (Gomide, 2006) corresponding to two positive educational practices (positive monitoring and moral behavior) and five negative practices (negligence, physical and psychological abuse, lax discipline, inconsistent punishment, and negative monitoring). Items were assessed by a 3-point Likert-type scale, responses being *always* (2), *sometimes* (1), and *never* (0). Therefore, each educational practice could have a maximum of 12 points and minimum 0, summing up the subject's responses in each factor.

Positive monitoring is understood as a group of educational practices involving attention and recognition from parents to children, as well as affection and care display, mainly associated to life situations when the child needs most. Gomide (2006) defined moral behavior as the educational practice of values, such as honesty, generosity, justice, transmitted by parents to children, discriminating right from wrong through positive models, in an affectionate relationship.

Inconsistent punishment happens when parents punish or reinforce their children's behaviors according with the parents' mood states, incoherently to the children's behaviors. In this sense, parents' emotional states will determine educational practices, not the child's actions. The child learns to discriminate the parents' mood states, and does not learn whether the behavior was adequate or not. Negligence appears when parents do not attend to their children's needs, are absent in their responsibilities, omit help, or interact

without affect. Parental practices involving lax discipline mean that the parents' rules are not followed. They threaten the children, but withdraw when faced with oppositional or aggressive behaviors, and the rules lose their value. Negative monitoring is defined by parents' excessive control over their children's lives and great amount of repetitive instructions. Family environment is hostile and stressed, and there is no dialogue, once children try to protect their privacy, avoiding talking to parents (Gomide, 2006).

Children's Social Skills Test (THAS-C). There are 23 items (Bartholomeu, Silva, & Montiel, 2014) to be answered in a 3-point Likert-type scale, corresponding to three dimensions: civility and altruism, resourcefulness and self-control in social situations, and assertiveness with confronting.

First dimension, civility and altruism involve abilities such as thanking for praise, saying sorry, helping friends, praising friends, expressing positive feelings to peers, and being polite when manifesting an opinion. Resourcefulness and self-control in social interaction need to have their indicators inverted to be assessed; negative situations suggested are the ones when the child is exposed to new, unknown, or threatening situations, such as being criticized, speaking in front of the classroom, ending a conversation, introducing to an unknown group. Finally, the third dimension, assertiveness with confronting, includes defending own rights and opinions and is a predictor of resistance to group pressure, stating self-esteem, even at the risk of a negative reaction from the other.

Items are specific to a given situation. Thus, some indicators were developed according to school contexts.

Procedures

After principals and teachers signed a document allowing the research to be conducted within the schools premises, as well as parents agreeing their children to participate in the study, data were collected during class times. Aims of the study were explained to the children and any doubts about the instruments were clarified. Children completed both the THAS-C and IEP.

This research was approved by the University Ethics Committee, process number 810/2011.

Data were collected in classrooms, after authorization by the institution and signing of consent letters by the participants or the legally responsible of them, in periods allowed by the teachers. The aims of the research were explained to the participants and tests were collectively completed, with doubts being answered by the examiners. Information concerning social skills and parental styles were collected in first place. As the Test of Social Skills in Children is a simpler and easier instrument to be answered, it was the last one to be completed.

This research was designed as a correlational study, because instruments are self-reported and there was no

variable control, or manipulation, and no randomization of sample. As a result, no causal relations are supposed to be established, but only associations between those variables.

Results and Discussion

First, the associations between results of IEP and THAS-C were analyzed, using a Pearson correlation test. Results are shown in Table 1.

Results show that assertiveness is positively related to parental styles of inconsistent punishment and negligence, suggesting that some of the children who are more assertive tend to perceive their parents as having inconsistent and negligent educational practices. This is a curious data, and a more detailed analysis from the outliers (post-regression analysis described below) revealed that the low correlation coefficient is justified in more assertive children. In those cases, the pattern revealed in this sort of perception of parental practices in fathers was more regular, showing the found association. Hence, it is possible that more assertive children tend to report problems they face with their parents and also observe not only positive but also negative aspects associated to parental practices and talk about them more easily than low assertive children.

On the other hand, civility and altruism were significantly and positively associated to positive monitoring, moral behavior, negligence, and lax discipline, meaning that children possessing well-developed abilities of being grateful, apologizing, helping friends, expressing positive feelings, being polite may have parents using positive or negative educational styles. The problem of self-report is manifest again, as higher associations are observed in higher social skilled children, who tend to perceive more inadequate parental practices. There were also positive and negative correlations in exposure to strangers and negative monitoring, as well as exposure to strangers and moral behavior. Those results suggest that either a positive educational practice or a negative one may be associated to socially adequate behaviors.

Finally, general score in THAS-C was significantly and positively correlated to positive monitoring, moral behavior, negligence, and lax discipline, reinforcing previous correlations, suggesting that positive and negative parental styles may be associated to children's good behaviors.

As expected, there were significant correlations between IEP and THAS-C variables, including positive as well as negative aspects of parenting styles. Those results indicate that socially adequate skills are not always associated to a positive parenting style's pattern (Lagacé-Séguin & Coplan, 2005). However, as suggested by other studies (Bornstein & Bornstein, 2007; Chen et al., 2005; Gottman et al., 1997), other cultural aspects must be taken in consideration, such as environmental differences and group behaviors in classrooms, all of them not controlled in this research.

According to definition, social skills are learned and can be trained. Consequently, the possibility of certain behaviors

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between IEP and THAS-C Measures.

Variables	Assertiveness	Exposure to strangers	General	Civility and altruism
Inconsistent punishment				
<i>r</i>	0.34	0.13	0.17	0.15
<i>p</i>	0.01	0.31	0.19	0.24
<i>n</i>	62	64	62	62
Negative monitoring				
<i>r</i>	0.19	0.33	0.18	0.09
<i>p</i>	0.13	0.01	0.16	0.48
<i>n</i>	65	66	64	65
Positive monitoring				
<i>r</i>	-0.028	0.17	0.53	0.56
<i>p</i>	0.83	0.18	0.00	0.00
<i>n</i>	59	61	59	59
Moral behavior				
<i>r</i>	-0.038	0.26	0.50	0.48
<i>p</i>	0.77	0.03	0.00	0.00
<i>n</i>	64	66	64	64
Neglect				
<i>r</i>	0.23	0.24	0.34	0.32
<i>p</i>	0.07	0.06	0.01	0.01
<i>n</i>	62	64	62	62
Lax discipline				
<i>r</i>	-0.011	0.08	0.27	0.30
<i>p</i>	0.93	0.55	0.03	0.02
<i>n</i>	61	63	62	62
Abuse				
<i>r</i>	0.16	0.01	-0.15	-0.18
<i>p</i>	0.21	0.92	0.22	0.15
<i>n</i>	63	65	63	63
IEP				
<i>r</i>	-0.35	-0.07	0.08	0.11
<i>p</i>	0.01	0.62	0.58	0.40
<i>n</i>	55	57	56	56

Note. IEP = Parental Styles Inventory; THAS-C = Children's Social Skills Test.

being learned in social interactions in schools, independent of parenting styles, may be an explanation of the associations found in this study, although they must suffer further investigation, mainly considering that group effect tend to moderate the relation between parenting styles and social skills (Chen et al., 2005). Another question to be raised concerns children's emotional problems stemming from each parenting style, mediated by social skills, according to Engels et al. (2002).

Although analyses have produced important discussion material, they do not specifically describe the predictive power of each parenting style on each social skill. Consequently, after establishing correlations between instruments' measures, a backward model linear regression was conducted, aiming to investigate which parenting style would better explain each aspect of children's social skill. This procedure has the advantage of inserting all predicting variables (parenting styles) in a model, keeping only the ones

that explain the higher independent variable variance (social skills factors). A summary of final models presenting significant ANOVA and variance percentage on each gender is showed in Table 2, as well as *F* values, significance levels, and total degrees of freedom. Table 3 shows regression coefficients and significance levels, as well as information on multicollinearity between predicting variables, obtained in tolerance and VIF statistic levels, meaning that the nearer 1.00 for the first index, the better, as the second is not too high. Data are adjusted, with no multicollinearity, as none condition index is higher than 15.

Concerning assertiveness, the model that included negative monitoring and physical abuse was the best to explain this feature of social skill. Coefficient tendency suggests that physical abuse decreases children assertiveness, but negative monitoring increases it (negative monitoring scores tended to increase 0.27 in each point of Assertiveness scale). It is intriguing to consider that a hostile and stressed environment, combined with an excessive parent control tend to be associated to assertiveness. Those results support Anthony et al. (2005) study.

It must be considered that information was collected in children with a tendency to be more assertive. It is also interesting to note that the internal consistency of the parental styles self-report factors tended not be so high as in Glick et al. (2012) study, that showed alpha values between .5 and .6 for self-reports in parental styles measures. Alpha values in Aunola and Nurmi (2005) varied from .66 to .82 and in Lagacé-Séguin and Coplan (2005) varied between .83 and .71. Those last authors attest problems in employing measures of self-report to assess parental styles, because although being useful when working with children, the amount of information people report on parental styles is insufficient, as they may not be concentrated in specific details and features.

Literature associating parenting styles and social skills varies a lot regarding children, and studies state those relations, whereas others totally deny them. Those differences probably stem from methodological issues, not only in gathering information procedures but also in cultural and socio-economic aspects, as Bornstein and Bornstein (2007) suggested that some behaviors are means of adaptation to environment. Some researchers such as Engels et al. (2002); Engels, Finkenauer, Meeus, and Dekovic (2001); Gomide, Salvo, Pinheiro, and Sabbag (2005); Pacheco, Teixeira, and Gomes (1999) employed self-report questionnaires, while other like Connell and Prinz (2002), who found positive patterns of parent-child interactions and prosocial behaviors, used situational tasks, as assessment. Nevertheless, the present study found those patterns employing children self-reports, a relatively new approach in literature.

Social confidence and conversational ability were explained in a better fashion by parenting styles based in inconsistent punishment and negative monitoring. However, all coefficients showed a negative relation, suggesting that,

Table 2. Summary of Meaningful Models of Linear Regression Using Backward Method.

Number	Model	R	η^2	η^2 (adjusted)	Estimated standard error	generate levels (gl)	F	p
1	Assertiveness × Parenting Styles	.337	.113	.099	1.56830	187	7.974	.000
2	Conversation and Social Confidence × Parenting Styles	.417	.174	.160	2.20205	186	13.032	.000
3	Altruism × Parenting Styles	.583	.340	.318	3.69628	179	15.383	.000
4	Social Skill × Parenting Styles	.542	.294	.274	4.65679	177	14.738	.000

Table 3. Linear Regression Coefficients and Statistics for Colinearity Diagnosis.

Model	Non-standard coefficient		Standard coefficient		Colinearity diagnosis		
	B	SE	β	t	p	Tolerance	variance inflation factor (VIF)
1							
(Constant)	2.713	0.456		5.950	.000		
Inconsistent puniton	0.115	0.064	.143	1.796	.074	.750	1.333
Negative monitoring	0.217	0.057	.272	3.801	.000	.923	1.084
Physical abuse	-0.150	0.055	-.212	-2.732	.007	.787	1.270
2							
(Constant)	8.226	0.809		10.173	.000		
Moral behavior	0.142	0.082	.128	1.727	.086	.810	1.234
Inconsistent puniton	-0.402	0.082	-.340	-4.892	.000	.922	1.084
Negative monitoring	-0.240	0.088	-.207	-2.731	.007	.777	1.287
3							
(Constant)	6.492	1.773		3.662	.000		
Positive monitoring	0.594	0.159	.275	3.725	.000	.676	1.479
Moral behavior	0.660	0.165	.317	3.999	.000	.586	1.706
Neglect	0.411	0.127	.224	3.226	.001	.766	1.305
Lax discipline	0.497	0.147	.211	3.370	.001	.944	1.059
Negative monitoring	-0.278	0.154	-.130	-1.800	.074	.708	1.412
Physical abuse	-0.271	0.146	-.138	-1.852	.066	.668	1.498
4							
(Constant)	16.470	2.243		7.343	.000		
Positive monitoring	0.682	0.204	.256	3.352	.001	.684	1.461
Moral behavior	0.491	0.192	.194	2.551	.012	.693	1.443
Neglect	0.303	0.159	.136	1.902	.059	.781	1.280
Lax discipline	0.617	0.188	.213	3.283	.001	.944	1.060
Physical abuse	-0.583	0.181	-.243	-3.227	.001	.705	1.418

opposite to assertiveness, conversational ability and social confidence tend to decrease in the presence of parental styles perceived as inconsistent, punitive, and negative monitored. Each score of Conversation and Social Confidence scale corresponds to a decrease in 0.34 in inconsistent punishment. Apparently, parents who do not provide clear educational parameters randomly reinforce children, as well as monitor and control children’s activities with repetitive instructions, hostility and stress tend to be associated with children’s problems in conversation and social confidence. Maybe those social skills tend to develop more positively in contexts that offer clear parameters, as well as open and caring dialogue (Lengua et al., 2007).

Finally, parenting styles of moral behavior, followed by positive monitoring, neglect, and lax discipline, offered the best explanation for altruism, with significant coefficients. Each score in Altruism scale increased 0.32 in Moral Behavior Parenting Style scale. Those results are in accordance to Gomide et al. (2005) study that showed associations in expressions of positive feelings (a feature of altruistic people) with positive monitoring and moral behavior, confirming the role of those two styles in supporting prosocial attitudes.

Regarding general social skills, variables that offered the best probable model were positive monitoring, lax discipline, moral behavior, and physical abuse (the higher the

general social skill, the lesser the abusive parenting styles). Lax discipline is an intriguing variable predicting social skills, but Lagacé-Séguin and Coplan (2005) showed that an open and affectionate style tend to produce an overemphasis in children's emotional socialization. In general, positive monitoring seemed to be the style that produces more socially adequate behaviors, in accordance to Patterson et al. (1992) study. In fact, positive monitoring incorporates a series of behaviors, such as attention and affection and caring displays, being recognized by children who tend to express similar behaviors.

It is important to highlight Aunola and Nurmi's (2005) study, as the authors revealed that parental style based in behavioral restraint tended to produce less social problems, related to psychological control, which in some ways was also confirmed by this study.

On the contrary, the extent of this educational style to favor assertiveness development must be the object of further studies. Authoritarian parental style patterns tend to be associated in literature to problems of expression of personal opinions, mainly in teenagers (Engels et al., 2002; Pacheco et al., 1999).

Nevertheless, it must be asserted that data in this study, although establishing a hierarchy in associating and explaining those variables, do not present enough design to test causal assumptions, and new studies with more control and manipulation of independent variables are necessary, as well as a sample randomization.

Final Considerations

Initial hypotheses were partially confirmed because positive parenting styles were only good predictors for altruism as a social skill. Conversational abilities were related to the absence of a negative parenting style, but not to a positive one, and assertiveness was related to a negative parenting style.

Data on this study question the association of certain types of negative parental styles with social skills, despite limitations of correlational design. Despite low coefficients, it seems that for some children, the perception of a parental negative style of educating does not necessarily imply that they are not developing social skills. That may be a result of those skills being learnt at school, as well as at home and other social groups that children participate in. Consequently, new investigations must be conducted aiming to explore the effect and role of each of the children's social groups (such as the family, the school, peer groups) on their social skills, testifying the interactive role of those skills, as they only have meaning when expressed in agreement to a specific context's demands. And, at the same time, it reinforces the most expressive and adaptive feature of social behavior. Bornstein and Bornstein (2007) explained that positive parental styles not being associated with good social skills in children may not be constant in different cultures, as

the development of social skills imply in analyzing what is socially apt in a given context.

It is important to note that despite the assessment of children's perception being necessary to have an idea of how he or she characterizes his or her parents (which will have an impact on his or her way of dealing with them and with the world), children who are more socially skilled tended to express both positive and negative opinion regarding their parents, in accordance of self-reporting format employed in this study and that explains part of the results. In fact, literature studies in general show slightly low internal consistency (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005; Lagacé-Séguin & Coplan, 2005).

Therefore, despite the possible explanations, new studies should be designed, particularly using a longitudinal perspective, trying to test the hypothesis of this research.

It must be observed that social skills are related to positive and negative parenting styles, reinforcing the idea of a social skill as an attribute of behavior. Despite being related to personality, it forms a more stable trait that could be learned by the child in contexts other than home, such as school, for example (Bartholomeu, Carvalho, Silva, & Machado, 2011; Bartholomeu, Montiel, & Pessotto, 2012).

Some limits of the study must be noted. The first is related to both instruments being self-report measures. Some kind of observations of parent-child relations could provide other clues to parenting effects. The second problem stems from parents not being assessed; their position on parenting could be of interest to compare with children's viewpoints. The third limit concerns the fact that the study is not longitudinal. Many effects of parenting styles can be better observed throughout childhood, more than cross-sectionally. Further studies should address those issues.

Nowadays, great number of children spend more and more time at school, and from younger ages, leading to the speculation that the impact of schooling is relevant to developing socially competent skills. That should be another area for future investigations.

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