

The Difference Relationship between Alcohol Consumption Habits and Parenting Styles

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Abstract

This study was designed to look at the relationship between alcoholic drinking behavior and parenting styles. The purpose of our study was to examine if heavy drinking habits have a direct influence on parenting styles. The participants (n=63) took a survey about their parenting styles and personal lifestyle habits, including the amount of alcohol consumption they engaged in. To assess parenting style, participants took the Parental Authority Questionnaire. To analyze our data we used a 2x3 Mixed ANOVA. We found a main effect for parenting style. Parents tended to answer the survey questions in a way that was indicative of authoritative parenting. We also found a significant interaction between parenting styles and drinking habits. As participants drank more, their parenting style became more permissive ($p=.01$). Another variable that significantly influenced the interaction was education ($p=.04$). Our results demonstrate that as parents drink more, their parenting style shifts to more permissive.

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The Relationship between Alcohol Consumption Habits and Parenting Styles

In today's society adults have a lot of stress: economic strain, deteriorating environment, political unrest, and a variety of other issues. One common way to cope with this stress is to consume alcohol (Rice & Arsdale, 2010). Alcohol is easily available and inexpensive, so almost everyone over the age of twenty-one has access to it. Although alcohol may seem like a legal and innocent method to escape the stressors in life, it can have negative effects on important behaviors. Not can drinking alcohol negatively affect the drinker's life, but also the life of those around the drinker. Specifically children of adults are vulnerable to the behavior of a parent who consistently engages in heavy drinking.

Previous research by Huckstadt (1987) examined men who were alcoholics, non-alcoholics, and recovered alcoholics and the participants were assessed on their drinking related locus of control. The results provided significant support insofar that non-alcoholics were most internal when compared to alcoholics and recovering alcoholics. The findings also show that the locus of control is most external when looking at an alcoholic. This finding demonstrates that non-alcoholics are better at controlling their behavior than people who have or are currently abusing alcohol. Because these individuals who are alcoholics have difficulty in managing their own behavior, it seems that managing the behavior of their children would not be successful.

It is widely accepted that alcoholism affects a person physiologically, but it also can provoke an alcoholic to neglect every day duties including the duties of being a parent (Haugland, 2005). In turn, neglecting parenting duties in a number of ways can ultimately affect the way an individual parents as a whole. By looking at how abusing a substance such as alcohol can affect a person's everyday actions and how it potentially interferes with everyday duties, one can conclude that an alcoholic would be much different in the way they live their lives and how

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those difference may have a negative impact on those who interact with alcoholic individuals, especially children.

Parental problem drinking has shown to have an indirect relationship with negative events in a child's life. For instance, Roosa (1993) found that problem drinking is associated with an increase in marital conflict between spouses. Growing up in an environment where there was a lot of fighting will have an adverse effect on a child. In this study, Roosa specifically found a significant correlation between a mother's increase in problem drinking and decrease in quality parenting, such as inconsistent discipline and high levels of child stress. Previous research also shows a link between parental problem drinking and marital conflict, which leads to ineffective parenting (Keller et al., 2005). Keller and colleagues found that increased alcohol consumption by one or more parent leads to ineffective parenting due to this marital discord. They found that marital discord on its own was not reflective of parenting problems, but parenting problems due to heavy drinking by one or both parents led to child maladjustment and behavior problems. For example, when parents consume alcohol, their behavior is more likely to be offensive to their spouse; they may flirt with others or engage in criminal or embarrassing actions. This type of behavior is likely to lead to conflict within the spousal relationship. This conflict has been shown to have an adverse effect on the child, which demonstrates the indirect relationship between parental problem drinking and parenting techniques. It is commonly known that parental problem drinking has a negative effect on the child's general well being. The research question then becomes what exactly is the relationship between parental drinking habits and parenting style. So when considering the outcome of children, it is important to look at not only parental drinking habits, but also how these habits effect child rearing practices.

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According to Dianna Baumrind (1966), there are three classic parenting styles: permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. Permissive parents are defined as being non-punitive, uninvolved in their children, and often let their parents get away with a lot of bad behaviors. Authoritarian, on the other hand, are parents who attempt to shape and control their child's behavior and are punitive when their child's behaviors do not meet their expectations. Authoritative mixes the first two parenting styles insofar that they collaborate with their child. They are punitive but explain their reasoning to their children so that they can learn from their mistakes. These three parenting styles different across all parents and can have different affects on their children similar to the affects of alcoholism.

In a longitudinal study using British women born in 1946, researchers assessed these women on their overall well being at different ages throughout their lives. They also asked these women to recall their parents and fit them into the three classic parenting styles of permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. The study concluded that women whose parents were authoritative had better levels of well being throughout their lives (Huppert et al., 2010). Although this is a retrospective study, and there could be other confounding variables, such as a cohort effect, the association between authoritative parenting style and well being suggests that the parenting style that one prescribes to has an lasting effect on the well-being of their child. These effects of parenting styles may not only internally affect on the child later in life, but they may also have an external effect on their behaviors at a very young age. For instance, classroom behavior of kindergarteners and first graders were assessed by their teachers while their parents completed a survey to determine their parenting style. Children whose mothers were authoritarian were perceived as less well behaved than other children whose parents were either authoritative or permissive (Reine, 2001).

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Previous research shows that heavy drinkers are more likely to be permissive in their parenting style than light or non-drinkers (Van der Zwaluw et al., 2008). To further examine this relationship, Van der Zwaluw and colleagues assessed parents' alcohol consumption habits through a self-report survey by the parents and asked children questions about how their parents were rearing them. For example, one question asked, "Do you need your mother's permission to stay out late on a weekday evening?" and another asked, "Does your mother show that she loves you?" Then, using answers from both the children and the parents, the results showed that parents who engage in heavy drinking are less likely to monitor their children and provide emotional support. This study did not specifically use the same three parenting styles used in Baumrind's original conception of types of parenting. However, many of the traits associated with different types of parents in the Van der Zwaluw and colleagues' study were reflective of the three parenting styles.

We have seen from previous research that parental problem drinking has adverse effects on the child. It is possible that parents who are heavy drinkers rear their children in specific ways that lead to these outcomes. We hypothesize that parents who engage in heavy drinking are more likely to engage in permissive or authoritarian parenting styles and that light or non-drinkers are more likely to engage in authoritative parenting styles.

Method

Participants

The sample for this survey included 63 participants (Male: 10, Female: 50, Did not wish to answer: 3). The total number of participants came to 63 after having to eliminate those who indicated that they did not have any children or if they did not complete the survey. The participants were obtained on the designated websites that our survey was located, *Psychological*

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Research on the Net (<http://psych.hanover.edu/research/exponnet.html>) and *Facebook* ([facebook.com/rhanslits](https://www.facebook.com/rhanslits) & [facebook.com/stephcollins711](https://www.facebook.com/stephcollins711)). Due to the website being located online, there was a diverse sample of individuals (69.8% Caucasian, 11% African American, 19.2% Other). Participant's ages ranged from 18-63 years old.

Materials

In order to assess each participant's parenting style, the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) was used. The questionnaire was found to be a reliable measure of parenting styles as indicated by the results from the alphas provided by the researchers. Cronbach alpha was ran for each category of parenting style for the original questionnaire: permissive ($\alpha=.74$), authoritarian ($\alpha=.86$), and authoritative ($\alpha=.83$). The questionnaire was constructed for children to assess their parent's style of parenting. However, for our purposes, we adjusted the questions to be aimed towards parents assessing their own parenting style (see Appendix I, Table 1 for a list of items). We ran Cronbach alpha for each parenting category and found that our edited questionnaire was also reliable based on our participants (Permissive $\alpha=.785$, Authoritarian $\alpha=.832$, Authoritative $\alpha=.722$). The questionnaire contains thirty questions in total, ten permissive questions, ten authoritarian questions, and ten authoritative questions. The participant answered each questions on six point Likert scale (0- strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree). The scores for each category can be added up for each parenting style and whichever category yields the highest score out of a possible fifty, indicates the individual's parenting style. For our study, we looked at all three scores of our participants in order to assess them as a parenting profile instead of looking at only the parenting style they used most often.

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Another survey was also included assessing personal habits of our participants. The questions used for this study were the questions pertaining to alcohol consumption habits. There were three main questions assessing an individual's alcohol consumption habits. The first question was "how many standard alcoholic beverages do you consume a day?" We categorized the participant as a heavy drinker if they indicated that they drank two or more standard alcoholic drinks per day. The second question was "On nights when you are in a social setting, how many standard drinks do you consume?" We considered the participant a heavy drinker if they answered four or more. The last question was "Do you ever drink because you are experiencing difficult emotions?" We considered the participant a heavy drinker if they answer "often" or "always." (See Appendix I, Table 2 for a list of items and full scale of possible responses). The participant was considered as a heavy drinking participant if they indicated a high enough score in one of the three questions. Our definition of a heavy drinker is actually probably a moderate to heavy drinker; we used a loose definition due to small sample size of heavy drinkers. The participants were reminded what a standard drink was considered before answering the alcohol consumption habits questions.

Procedure

Interested participants located the survey on the designated website. The title of the survey was "Effects of Personal Habits on Parenting Styles" so that our participants would not know exactly what we were looking at before completing the survey. Once they clicked the link, they were taken to our informed consent page. If they agreed, they were asked to fill out some demographics. Once this was complete, they were assessed on their parenting styles and personal habits (only drinking habits were used for analysis). Parenting style assessment and personal habits were in random order for each participant to avoid order effects. When they

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completed the survey, they were thanked and debriefed and also provided with a link to find the results of the study.

Results

We hypothesized that parents with heavy drinking habits would be more likely to be permissive and authoritarian while non-drinker and light drinkers would be more authoritative.

Once we found that our questionnaire was reliable, we looked at the scores of our participants for each category. The participants could score anywhere from zero to 50 for each parenting style. The higher they scored the more indicative it was that they fit into that style of parenting. However, for our results, we used all three scores because we wanted to look at how the characteristics of each parenting style fluctuated as our participant began to drink more. Our participants were categorized as a heavy drinker if they indicated that they drank more than two standard drinks per day, more than four standard drinks in social settings, and if they often or always drank because they were experiencing difficult emotions. The participants that drank less than 2 standard drinks per day, less than four standard drinks in social settings, and never or rarely drank due to difficult emotions were categorized as light drinkers.

We ran a 2x3 mixed Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to look at our independent between subjects variable, which was heavy or light drinkers. Our within subjects dependent variable was parenting styles. We found a significant interaction, $F(1, 61)=5.73$, $p=.01$, between heavy drinkers and parenting styles (See Figure 1 for a graph of results). The X-axis on the results graph represents a scale of scores from the Parental Authority Questionnaire. The Y-Axis represents the score of the three parenting styles that we

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assessed our participants on. Looking at the bars, blue represents the light drinkers and the red bars represent the heavy drinkers. As previously mentioned, we looked at our participants' scores in all three categories so we could look at how they fluctuate as they begin to drink more. The interaction that was found indicates that as a parent begins to drink more, the more permissive they become in their parenting styles. The trend can be seen on the graph as the red bar (the heavy drinkers) rises above the blue bar (the light drinkers) in the permissive category. There was also a main effect for parenting style, $F(2,60)=118.52, p<.001$. Parents were more likely to answer the Parental Authority Questionnaire in ways that indicated that their parenting was more authoritative, as opposed to permissive or authoritarian.

Figure 1. Relationship between parenting styles and drinking habits

After we found the significant interaction in our first ANOVA, we ran a follow up analysis on some of the other variables we obtained from our participants in the demographics section of the survey. We ran a 3-way mixed ANOVA for education. Our participants we divided up into lower education, (N=35), and higher education, (N=28). The higher education group was participants with an associate's degree to a doctoral degree and the lower education group was participants who had some college experience without receiving a degree and below. The ANOVA resulted in another statistically significant interaction $F(2,60)=3.39, p=.04$. Both lower education and higher education showed a similar trend to our initial results. However, the trend was more significant for the higher education group (see Figure 2 and Figure 3 for a graph of results). Figure 3

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shows the results in the higher education group. The characteristics of permissive parenting style rises a significant amount when the parent beings to drink more. This is the same result found after running our first ANOVA, but it in the higher education group the trend is more extreme. When we ran the three-way mixed ANOVA, the higher education group was much more likely to become permissive in their parenting style and much less likely to be authoritative when they appeared to consume more alcohol.

Figure 2. Lower Education

Figure 3. Higher Education

Discussion

We hypothesized that parents that engaged in heavy drinking would be more likely to subscribe to a permissive or authoritarian parenting style. There was a significant interaction between parenting styles and drinking habits that showed when parents drink more, their parenting style becomes more permissive, but not more authoritarian, therefore our hypothesis was partially supported.

When a person consumes more alcohol their ability to reason decreases. Therefore when they attempt to discipline their child, they may struggle with explaining why they disapprove of certain behavior. In a previous study by van der Vorst and colleagues (2006), it was suggested that parents who drink might feel less credible because they drink. Parents may feel guilty for engaging in drinking and therefore feel as if they are not able to set rules because they are providing a negative example. When a parent does not set rules for their child, they

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become disengaged and allow the child to do whatever he or she wants, regardless of the appropriateness of the behavior.

When people consume alcohol, their judgment is clouded, so a parent under the influence of alcohol may think that something a child does is appropriate but if they were sober they would realize that the behavior was not. Also, the parent could experience a shift in priorities. They may become more focused on obtaining alcohol and drinking alcohol than monitoring the behavior of their children. They would be more likely to let delinquent behavior slide, because they would be focused on their own habit and not the behavior of their children.

Furthermore, if a parents drinks outside of the home, they would spend less time with their child and therefore pay less attention to their child. Previous research shows that heavy drinkers will focus their attention on alcohol-related stimuli over other non-alcohol-related stimuli. This means that a parent who engages in heavy drinking will focus more on obtaining or drinking alcohol (alcohol-related stimuli) than on their child (a non-alcohol-related stimulus) (Field et al., 2004). This could lead to attention deprivation within the child. The child may then act out and develop behavior problems to regain this attention. Lack of parental involvement has been significantly associated with behavioral problems in children (Ham, 2005).

Haugland (2005) found that children with one or more parents who engage in heavy drinking are exposed to the behavior of the parent while he or she was drinking, the recovery stage of drinking excessively, and even a heightened risk for violence and family quarrels. This leads to a disruption in routines and rituals, like reading to a child in bed at night or having a family dinner in the evening. For example, if a parent drinks excessively

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one night, they are likely to be in the “recovery” or hangover stage the next morning. They may feel too sick to get out of bed, let alone get their child dressed and ready for school. These would lead to a lack of involvement and guidance within a child’s life, which are characteristics of permissive parenting.

Although we were not looking at education as a factor, originally, we did find this to further our results when we added it in as a variable. It leads to the question why would individual’s parenting style be more affected by alcohol consumption when they have obtained a high level of education? One possible explanation for this is an experience of cognitive dissonance. An individual with a degree or advanced degree has higher expectations than those who did not obtain a degree. They will have more responsibilities in their occupation and will be expected to perform their duties skillfully. There are certain attitudes and beliefs one must hold to succeed in what is expected of them. However, when an individual begins to drink more, their new behavior does not match their beliefs and attitudes on what behaviors they should be engaged in. Instead of changing the new behaviors, they let go of their expectations and responsibilities and become more permissive not only in their occupation, but also within their family as well.

There were some limitations to our study. First of all, we had only three questions regarding alcohol consumption habits, so it was difficult to categorize someone as a heavy drinker based on these few questions. Furthermore, we had a small sample of heavy drinkers based on these three questions. Originally our sample was even smaller, so we had to adjust our definition of heavy drinking. If the participants met the requirements for heavy drinking in one of the three questions about alcohol on our survey, we classified them as heavy drinkers. Our study probably looked at parents who engaged in moderate to

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heavy drinking, as opposed to just heavy drinking. In future research we would like to see a sample that is more indicative of problematic drinking, such as targeting alcoholics who are parents.

Our study was not gender-specific. Males and females have different levels of alcohol consumption that meet the requirements for heavy drinking. For example, one question included on our survey assessing alcohol consumption habits was “How many drinks do you consume per day?” The actual measures to be considered a heavy drinker are one or more drinks a day for females and two or more drinks a day for males. In our study, we used both definitions to reduce complexity. Therefore our possible answers were 0, 1-2, 3-4, and 5 or more. So if any participant selected one to two drinks per day we categorized them as a heavy drinker, regardless of gender. In future studies it would be interesting to look at gender differences in parenting styles and consumption habits and the interaction between both variables. Another limitation regarding gender is the fact that our sample was overwhelmingly female (n=79.4%). Not only does having a majority of women participants affect our sample of heavy drinkers, it also affects the diversity of parenting styles in our sample. We ended up with a large amount of authoritative parents (when looking at individual categories) and this could be because in traditional female parenting roles, they tend to be with the child more often. In order to separate this factor more, it would be important in the future to add specific questions asking who is the primary caregiver, are you married or divorced, how involved were you in rearing your child, etc. Although there were these limitations, they could be easily adjusted and worth looking at in replicating this study.

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Appendix I

1. As a parent, I feel that in a well-run home, children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do. *
2. Even if my children didn't agree with me, I felt that it was for their own good if they were forced to conform to what I thought was right. **
3. Whenever I asked my children to do something as they were growing up, I expected them to do it immediately without asking any questions. **
4. As my children were growing up, I always discussed the reasoning behind family policy with my children. ***
5. I always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever my children felt family rules and restrictions were unreasonable. ***
6. I always felt that what children need is to be free to make up their own minds and do what they want to do even if this does not agree with what I might have wanted. *
7. As my children grew up, I did not allow them to question any decisions I made. **
8. I directed the activities and decisions of my children through reasoning and discipline. ***
9. I feel that more force should be used by parents in order to get their children to behave the way they are supposed to. **
10. As my children grew up, I did not feel that they needed to obey rules and regulations of behavior simply because someone in authority had established them. *
11. My children knew what I expected of them but they were also free to discuss those expectations with me when they felt that they were unreasonable.***
12. I feel that wise parents should teach their children early just who is boss in the family. **
13. I seldom gave expectations and guidelines for my children's behavior. *
14. When my children were growing up, I did what my children wanted when making family decisions.*
15. As my children grew up, I consistently gave them direction and guidance in rational and objective ways. ***
16. When children were growing up, I would get very upset if they tried to disagree with me. **
17. I feel that most problem in society would be solved if parents would not restrict their children's activities, decisions, and desires as they are growing up. *
18. I let my children know what behavior I expected of them and if those expectations were not met they were punished. **
19. I allowed my children to decide most things for themselves without a lot of direction from me. *
20. I took the children's opinions into consideration when making family decisions but did not decide for something simply because the children wanted it. ***
21. I did not view myself as responsible for directing and guiding my children's behavior as they grew up. *
22. I had clear standards of behavior for my children in our home but I was willing to adjust those standards to the needs of each individual child in the family. ***
23. I gave my children direction for their behavior and activities and I expected them to

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follow my direction but I was always willing to listen to concerns and to discuss that direction with my children. ***

24. I allowed my children to form their own points of view on family matters and I generally allowed them to decide what they were going to do. *

25. I feel that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don't do what they are supposed to. **

26. I often told my children exactly what I wanted them to do and how I expected them to do it.**

27. I always gave my children clear direction for behaviors and activities but I was also understanding when they disagreed. ***

28. I did not direct the behaviors, activities, and desires of the children in the family. *

29. My children knew what I expected of them in the family and I insisted that they conform to those expectations simply out of respect for my authority. **

30. As my children were growing up, if I made a decision in the family that hurt my children I was willing to discuss that decision with my children and admit if I had made a mistake. ***

*Permissive **Authoritarian ***Authoritative, 0 = Strongly Disagree – 5=Strongly Agree

Table 1: Adjusted Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991)

1. How many standard alcoholic beverages do you consume a day?

- 0-1 ▪2-3 ▪4-5 ▪6+

2. On nights when you are in a social setting, how many standard drinks do you consume?

- 0-1 ▪2-3 ▪4-5 ▪6+

3. Do you ever drink because you are experiences difficult emotions?

- Never ▪Rarely ▪Often ▪Always

Standard Drink: 12 oz. of beer, 5 oz. of wine, 1.5 oz. of hard liquor

Table 2: Alcohol Consumption Habits Questions