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Investigating the Relationship between Parenting Styles and Delinquent Behavior

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ABSTRACT
Although numerous studies have examined the connection between delinquent behavior and parenting styles in children and adolescents, limited research has been done to determine if there is an ongoing relationship between these variables in the college population. This study included 38 college students and examined the relationship between parenting styles; families studied were authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and uninvolved. It was predicted that authoritarian parenting practices would be highly correlated with delinquent behavior, particularly for students with a difficult temperament and low family cohesion.

Introduction

Parenting is a complicated occupation that requires many different skills that work in concert to influence a child's behavior. It can be argued that parents start developing their parenting style even before their first child is born. It is within the first year or two that parents begin to attach to a parenting style that works best for them. Many researchers have noted that it isn't the specific discipline practices that are important in predicting child welfare but rather the overall pattern of parenting (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). When researchers attempt to describe these patterns most rely on Diana Baumrind's concept of parenting styles. In her view, "parenting style is used to capture normal variations in parent's attempts to control and socialize their children" (Baumrind, 1991a, p. 349). There are two points that are crucial in understanding her definition of parenting styles. First, the parenting style typology doesn't include deviant parenting, such as abusive and/or neglectful homes. Second, it is assumed that the primary role of the parents is to influence, teach and control their children.

Baumrind's parenting styles are focused on two main elements of parenting: parental responsiveness and parental demandingness. Parental responsiveness, also referred to as parental supportiveness and warmth, refers to "the extent in which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attentive, supportive, and compliant to children's needs and demands" (Baumrind, 1991b, p. 62). Parental demandingness, also referred to as behavioral control, refers to " the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys" (Baumrind, 1991b,

p. 61-62). Categorizing parents according to whether they are high or low on parental responsiveness and demandingness creates four parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent, and uninvolved.

Parenting Styles

Authoritarian parents are highly controlling in the use of authority and rely on punishment but are not responsive. They value obedience and do not tolerate give and take relationships with their children. Authoritarian parents do not expect their children to express disagreement with their decisions and rules and do expect them to obey without explanation (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Authoritative parents are warm and communicate well with their children; they are both demanding and responsive. Parents of this style are able to stay in authority and expect maturity from their children. They respect their children's opinions and independence while also maintaining their own positions. This parenting style permits children enough freedom of expression so that they can develop a sense of independence but know the boundaries of rules and obey them. Both authoritative and authoritarian parents have high expectations of their children but use control in different ways (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Indulgent parents are warm and accepting but their main concern is not to interfere with their children's creativity and independence; these parents are more responsive than demanding. They demand little in terms of obedience and respect for authority. They are nontraditional and lenient, do not require mature behavior, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontations (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Uninvolved parents are both low in responsiveness and demandingness. In extreme cases, this parenting style might include both rejecting-neglecting and neglecting parents. This parenting style is viewed as the worst of the four. Parents in this style do not establish rules nor do they even care in which direction the child's behavior is headed (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

In order to fully understand the difference in parenting styles, an example from Maccoby and Martin (1983) indicates how each parent demonstrates how they would react to a situation. In the situation, Sally age eight is playing with Kelly age nine, and Sally gets on Kelly's bike without permission and rides away.

> An authoritarian parent would say, "Come back this second and give Kelly back her bike immediately." An authoritative parent uses the opportunity to teach the child and says, "The bicycle belongs to Kelly. I know you want to ride it, but why don't you talk it over with her and try to work out a system so that you can have a turn." An indulgent parent would believe that Sally should be allowed to express her impulses freely and does not use the opportunity to solve the problem. An uninvolved parent would simple overlook the whole situation. (p. 48-51)

Parenting Styles and Behavior

Baumrind's parenting styles have been found to predict child well being in terms of social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development, and problem behavior. Research using parent interviews, teacher interviews, and child report consistently finds these characteristics associated with each parenting style (Baumrind, 1991a). Children of authoritarian parents tend to lack social competence in dealing with other children, frequently withdraw from social contact and rarely take their own initiative, look to outside authority to decide what is correct, and often lack spontaneity and intellectual curiosity. Sons show more difficulties than daughters, and sons are more likely to show anger and defiance towards people in authority. Children of authoritative parents tend to be more self-reliant, self-controlled, willing to explore, and content than other groups. Daughters are more independent than sons; sons are more socially responsible than daughters and associated with better school performance in high school. Children of indulgent parents tend to: be relatively immature, exhibit poor impulse control, and have difficulty accepting responsibility for their own actions and acting independently. Children of uninvolved parents tend to lack social competence in many areas, be overly independent, have difficulty determining right and wrong behavior, and experience school problems (academic and behavioral).

Previous Studies

When considering parenting styles and child behavior, there is ample research to indicate that parenting styles are related to delinquent behavior in children and adolescents. However, there is little research that questions the relationship between parenting styles and delinquent behavior in college students. A study done by Weiss and Schwartz (1996), based on the four typologies, consistently yielded results indicating that parenting styles can enhance or diminish acceptable behavioral outcomes in children. In previous studies, authoritative parenting has been associated with positive behavioral outcomes including increased competence, autonomy, and self esteem as well as better problem solving skills, better academic performance, more self-reliance, less deviance, and better peer relations (Barnes, 2002; Baumrind, 1991b; Bystritsky, 2000; Linder, Hetherington & Reiss, 1999; Lomeo,

1999; Petito & Cummings, 2000; Steinberg, Darling, & Fletcher, 1995). In contrast, the authoritarian style has been linked with negative behavioral outcomes including aggressive behavior, decreased emotional functioning, depression and lower levels of self-confidence (Barnes, 2002; Beyers & Goossens, 2003; Pychyl, Coplan, & Reid, 2002; Scales, 2000).

The indulgent parenting style has been related to future delinquency and aggression. Poor supervision, neglect, and indifference are all indulgent parental practices that play a crucial role in engaging in future delinquency. Adolescents from indulgent homes report a higher frequency of involvement in deviant behaviors, such as drug use and alcohol use, school misconduct and emotional, impulsive, nonconforming behaviors (Durbin, Darling, Steinberg, & Brown, 1993; Miller, DiOrio, & Dudley, 2002). With an uninvolved parenting style, children tend to look for acceptance in other places and associate with peer groups with similar family backgrounds (Mounts, 2002). Also, if family environments fail to provide structure, then child conduct problems are more likely to be maintained or worsen.

While many researchers have found a clear relationship between parenting style and the behavioral outcomes of children, other studies have found that there is no clear relationship between parenting style and child psychopathology (Havill, 1996; Olafsson, 2001; Revie-Petterson, 1998). Thus, it is important to note that the influence of parenting style is often moderated or mediated by a number of variables such as temperament (Owens-Stively et al., 1997), gender (Beyers & Goossens, 2003), the child/teen's perception of the parenting style (Paulson, 1994; Slicker, 1998), socioeconomic status and ethnicity (McCarthy, 1995), the age of the child (Harris, 1998; Revie-Pettersen, 1998), religiosity (Feinman, 2001; Lindner & Hetherington, 1999), and family structure or cohesion (Bystritsky, 2000; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1999).

Delinquent behavior stems from several factors including: poor academic achievement, low self esteem, lack of acceptance from peers, and unstable family environments. These factors not only influence a person during the transition to adolescence but during the transition into college as well. College is seen as a life journey that many face during the end of adolescence. If parenting styles have an influence on the delinquent behavior of children and adolescents, then it seems likely that they impact the behavior of college students as well. Hickman, Bartholomae, and McKenry (2000) found this to be true when looking at college students. This study found that students with authoritative parents demonstrated greater levels of academic competence, more self-control, and better adjustment. Students of authoritarian and permissive parents demonstrated poor academic grades, poor college adjustment, and lower self-esteem. The same study also indicated that children who have authoritative parents engage in less aggressive behavior than their peers who have experienced other parenting styles. In addition, harsh childhood discipline is strongly associated with the later development of delinquent behavior.

The purpose of this research was to further examine the relationship between parenting styles and delinquent behavior in college students in an effort to replicate previous findings. This research project attempted to improve on the existing literature by controlling for a number of variables such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, religiosity, family structure, temperament, and the different parenting style perceptions of the parents and students. To control for age effects, participants included college students aged 18 and older and their parents or primary caregivers. Hypotheses of the study were as follows: (1) delinquent behavior and psychological problems would be higher in students who report experiencing authoritarian and indulgent parenting styles; (2) difficult child temperament would be related to negative parenting styles; (3) gender would also impact outcomes: males would react more negatively to authoritarian parenting whereas females would react more negatively to indulgent and uninvolved parenting; (4) student perception of parenting style would have more of an impact on behavior than parent perception of parenting style.

Method

Participants

The sample included 38 participants both male (17) and female (21) students and 18 parents. The mean age of the students was 23 with a range from 18-43. The students were recruited from psychology and sociology classes at Grand Valley State University. At least one parent of each participant was also asked to participate.

Instruments

The student and parent each completed a demographic questionnaire that included questions about the number of parents in household, number of children in home, socio-economic status (SES), and religious involvement. The parent demographic questionnaire also included questions about past delinquency in the parent, as well as family history of emotional and behavioral problems. In addition, the parent demographic questionnaire inquired about the parent's perception of the child's temperament, as well as problem behaviors noted in the child prior to attending college. The student demographic questionnaire also included questions about the

student's history of delinquency, and any history of family problems. Emotional and behavioral problems were further explored using the *Achenbach Adult Behavior Checklist* (Achenbach, 1991), which the parent completed on the child/student and the *Achenbach Self Report* (Achenbach), which was completed by the student. Both of these measures have approximately 172 items and use open-ended questions and questions that are answered on a three-point scale (0=not true, 1=somewhat or sometimes true and 3=very true or often true) and both render standardized scores on several scales including: Total Problem Score, Internalizing Behavior Score, Externalizing Behavior Score, Anxious/Depressed, Withdrawn, Somatic Complaints, Thought Problems, Attention Problems, Aggressive Behavior, Rule-Breaking Behavior, and Intrusive. Reliability and validity information available from the manual (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2003) indicate that these are acceptable measures.

Parenting styles were evaluated using the *Parental Authority Questionnaire* (Buri, 1991). The *Parental Authority Questionnaire* (PAQ) is composed of 30 questions geared to identify the parenting styles used in the home. It includes a five-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) and the individual gives an opinion for each statement. Results of several studies (Buri, 1991) have supported the PAQ as a psychometrically sound and valid measure of Baumrind's parental authority prototypes. Both the parent and the student completed the PAQ.

The *Temperament and Character Inventory* (Cloninger et al., 1994) is a 226 item, true-false questionnaire that measures seven dimensions of personality: novelty seeking, harm avoidance, reward dependence, persistence, self-directedness, cooperativeness, and self-transcendence. A recent study by Brandstrom, Richter, and Nylander (2003) indicated that the seven-factor model is valid and reliable.

The health in one's family of origin was measured through the *Family of Origin Scale* (Hovestadt, Anderson, Piercy, Cochran, & Fine, 1985). This measure contains 125 questions that use a 5-point Likert scale (5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree) that asks for information about how well the family of origin functioned. The Family of Origin Scale has a good internal consistency and good validity (Hovestadt et al., 1985).

Procedure

The participant's identity remained confidential; each parent and student pair was assigned a research number and informed consent documents were stored separately. When the students came in to participate, they first completed the informed consent form document. Then the students completed the questionnaires (the student demographic survey, child's version to the Parental Authority Questionnaire, The Temperament and Character Inventory, The Family of Origin Scale, and the Adult Self-Report), which took about two hours to complete. After each student finished the questionnaire packet, he or she was given a parent packet and asked to place his or her code number on each form and address the envelope. Each student received course credit for his or her participation. Each student received a debriefing form, which further explained the nature of the study and the influence of parenting styles.

Using the information provided by the student, the parent questionnaire packet was mailed to the parent. This packet included an informed consent form, a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the material, the parents demographic survey, the Adult Behavior Checklist, the parent's version of the Parental Authority Questionnaire, and a debriefing form. The parents were asked to return all documents within 10 days in order to be entered into two raffles for $50 gift certificates to Grand Valley State University's bookstore.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The purpose of the demographic survey was to help measure delinquency that wasn't being reported in the Adult Self-Report and to collect information such as age, school classification, GPA, and gender. On this form, delinquency was measured categorically. The participants marked "1" for yes and "2" for no. The responses for each item were summed; therefore a higher number meant less reported delinquency. The total possible points were 50. Delinquency rates were low. For past delinquency $M=45$, $SD=4.44$. For present $M=45$, $SD=2.6$. The average GPA was also higher than expected M=2.97, $SD= .58$. In this study, the only two parenting styles that were found among our student participants were authoritarian (17) and authoritative (21).

Of the 18 parents who responded, half were male and half were female. Seventeen parents indicated that they were authoritative and one was authoritarian. The mean number of children in the home was 2.83, $SD=.10$, and about half of the parents reported that the student was the first-born and the other half third-born. The mean income was between $46,000 and $55,000 annually. Religious affiliation was reported as Catholic (7), Protestant (9), or not participating (1). The average church attendance was reported as twice a month to twice a week. Students self-reported higher levels of delinquency in childhood and adolescence than parents reported on the student. Parent reports of their own delinquency indicated higher levels than reported for children. The most common incidents included shoplifting, unprotected sex, underage drinking, truancy, and drug use.

The number of stressors experienced by the family, as reported by the parents, was relatively low. About 22% of the sample reported a history of illness, job loss, job change, financial worries, death, learning problems, anxiety, or depression.

When comparing the student reports of parenting style to the parent reports, only half of the 18 pairs agreed on the style (8 pairs authoritative, 1 pair authoritarian). The other half included students who reported authoritarian parents and parents who self-identified as authoritative.

Hypothesis One

Since only two parenting styles were found among our participants, hypothesis one was only partially tested. A one-way ANOVA of the Parental Authority Questionnaire and Adult Self-Report revealed a significant difference *(F (1, 36) =16.83, p<.00)*. Figure 1 shows the adult self-report score for both parenting styles. As the graph displays, those participants who reported experiencing an authoritarian parenting style had a higher delinquency score than the authoritative group.

Hypothesis Two

A one-way ANOVA (TCI score x PAQ) revealed that the most difficult temperaments were associated with the authoritarian parenting style (see fig. 2). The three scales that showed a significant difference were novelty seeking (F (1, 36)=9.1, p=.01), self-directiveness (F (1, 36)=6.8, p=.01) and cooperation (F (1, 36)=16.9, p<.00). The figure also shows that authoritative parenting style was correlated with the more positive items (cooperation and self-directiveness) and the authoritarian style was correlated with the more negative items (novelty seeking and harm avoidance).

Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis three was not supported at all. There were no gender differences found on the Temperament and Character Inventory, the Adult Self-Report, or the demographic survey.

Hypothesis Four

No significant differences were found using parent data and student ASR scores. Thus, parent reports of past delinquency, temperament, socio-economic status, religion, family stress, and parenting style did not significantly impact the students self-report of problem behaviors.

Additional Analysis

In an effort to examine variables that moderate or mediate the relationship between parenting style and college students behavior, family cohesion was examined. Table 1 includes the means and standard deviations for the two groups on each scale. Higher scores means better cohesion. The authoritative families have consistently higher scores.

Table 2 summaries the result of a series of one-way ANOVAS. Respect, responsibility, feelings, conflict, and empathy were significant at the $p \leq .05$ level. Clarity and openness were significant at the $p \leq .10$ level. To examine the relationship between parenting style and problem behavior while controlling for family cohesion a partial correlation analysis was conducted. The results indicated a significant relationship between parenting style and problem behavior. Authoritative parenting style is negatively correlated with problem behavior *r=-.56, p<.00*.

Conclusions and Limitations

The results of the study indicate that there is a relationship between the student's perception of parenting style and the student's self-report of psychological problems and acting out behavior in college. Students who reported experiencing an authoritarian parenting style report more problems. These students also report having more difficult temperaments.

Attempts to examine cause and effect relationships and moderating or mediating variables were largely unsuccessful due to a small sample size. For example, many of the mediating variables were assessed only on the parent data sheet (socio-economic status, stressor, childhood temperament, and religion) and only 18 parents responded. In addition, only two parenting styles were represented: authoritative and authoritarian. Although the student sample was approximately equally divided among these variables, the parent sample was skewed toward authoritative. In fact, most student-parent pairs did not agree on parenting style. Therefore, it still remains unclear what impact parent perception of parenting style has on adult behavior. However, previous studies have found that as children age their impressions have a greater impact (Paulson, 1994; Slicker, 1998). Of note are the other discrepancies that existed between parent and child reports. The parents seem largely unaware of the delinquent behaviors their children engaged in during childhood and adolescence and, in some cases, they appear to be unaware of current problems their children are having. The parents that did respond tended to be intact families with college age children who reported few problems. The families were middle class and regular church attendees. Therefore, there was little variability in the parent data which may have contributed to the lack of significant results.

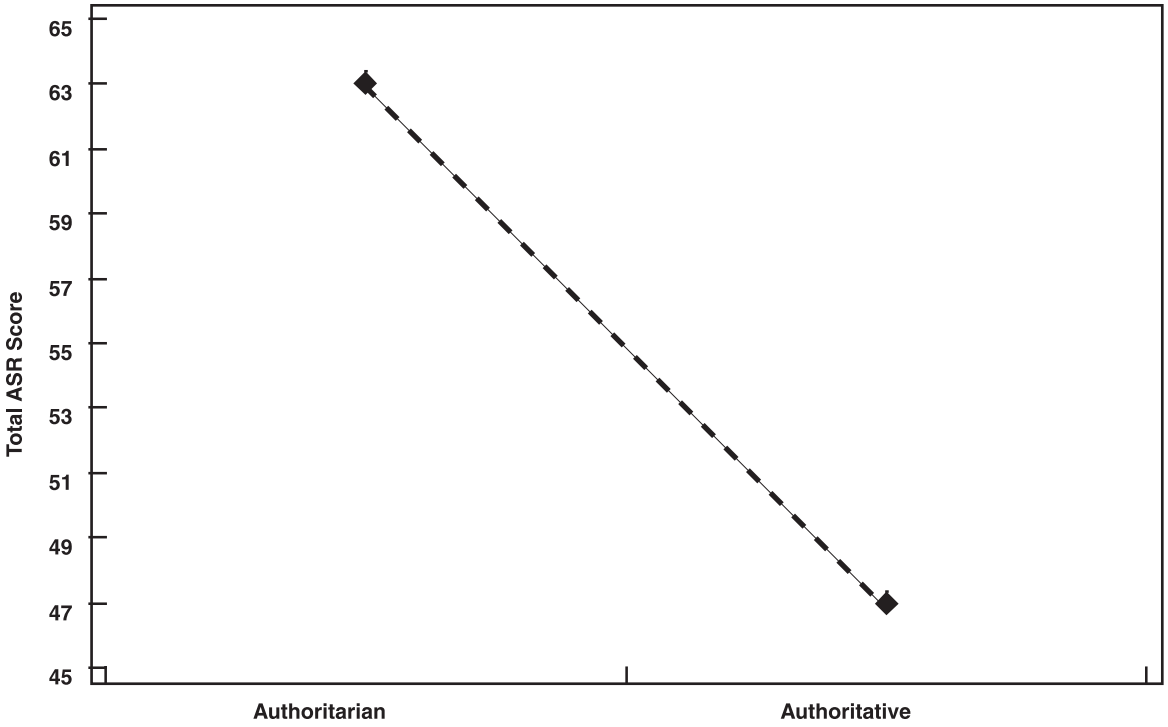
The other finding of note was the significant relationship between parenting style and family cohesion. Authoritative parenting is related to high levels of family cohesion. However, parenting style has a powerful

relationship with adult behavior even when family cohesion is removed. This and the other results must be interpreted with caution given the small sample and limited variability.

This study coincides with previous research (Hickman, Bartholomae, & McKenry, 2000) in that parents or children reported no permissive parenting style. This is an interesting finding and should be further explored. Perhaps children rarely perceive their parents as permissive or parents may be reluctant to admit these practices because they may "seem" uncaring. It may be that children of permissive parents do not attend college in large numbers. Again, additional studies are needed to examine this phenomenon.

Further research should include larger more geographically and ethnically diverse samples while continuing to control for the potential mediator and moderator variables. With a larger sample, it is possible that profiles could be developed. Perhaps children with authoritarian parents will have a difficult temperament that is inhibited and anxious along with relationship difficulties that include dependency and lack of trust; whereas, permissive parenting style results in volatile and impulsive character styles in their children. The measures used in this study could yield much more information with a larger sample.

Figure #1. *Adult Self-Report Score (ASR) vs. Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)*



Note: A higher ASR score represents more psychological problems.

Figure #2. *The Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI) vs. Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)*

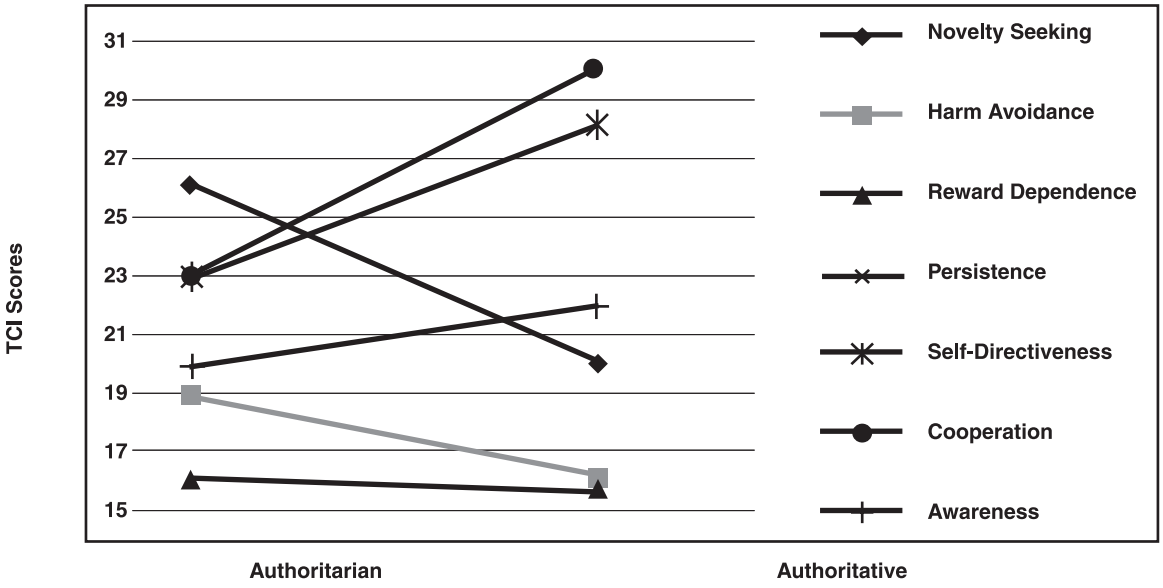


Table #1. *Statistical Descriptive (FOS)*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Clarity	Authoritarian	16	13.5625	3.26535
	Authoritative	21	15.1429	1.93095
	Total	37	14.4595	2.67285
Responsibility	Authoritarian	16	12.1250	2.52653
	Authoritative	21	14.0000	2.38747
	Total	37	13.1892	2.59099
Respect	Authoritarian	16	13.2500	3.53082
	Authoritative	21	15.5714	2.20389
	Total	37	14.8919	3.04175
Openness	Authoritarian	16	13.8750	3.38378
	Authoritative	21	15.6667	2.15252
	Total	37	14.8919	2.85564
Acceptance	Authoritarian	16	14.4375	4.27346
	Authoritative	21	15.2381	2.54764
	Total	37	14.8919	3.37296
Feelings	Authoritarian	16	14.3750	3.36403
	Authoritative	21	16.3810	2.37647
	Total	37	15.5135	2.97790
Mood	Authoritarian	16	15.6250	3.96443
	Authoritative	21	16.9048	2.58660
	Total	37	16.3514	3.26782
Conflict	Authoritarian	16	12.3125	3.55375
	Authoritative	21	14.6667	2.26569
	Total	37	13.6486	3.08415
Empathy	Authoritarian	16	13.6250	3.79254
	Authoritative	21	15.7143	2.53264
	Total	37	14.8108	3.26461
Trust	Authoritarian	16	02.7500	2.75000
	Authoritative	21	02.6838	2.68328
	Total	37	02.6964	2.65634

Table #2. *ANOVA (FOS)*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Clarity	Between Groups	22.680	1	22.68	3.385	0.074
	Within Groups	234.509	35	6.70		
	Total	257.189	36			
Responsibility	Between Groups	31.926	1	31.92	5.327	0.027
	Within Groups	209.750	35	5.99		
	Total	241.676	36			
Respect	Between Groups	48.938	1	48.93	6.028	0.019
	Within Groups	284.143	35	8.11		
	Total	333.081	36			
Openness	Between Groups	29.150	1	29.15	3.859	0.057
	Within Groups	264.417	35	7.55		
	Total	293.568	36			
Acceptance	Between Groups	5.821	1	5.82	0.505	0.482
	Within Groups	403.747	35	11.53		
	Total	409.568	36			
Feelings	Between Groups	36.541	1	36.54	4.524	0.041
	Within Groups	282.702	35	8.07		
	Total	319.243	36			
Mood	Between Groups	14.873	1	14.87	1.409	0.243
	Within Groups	369.560	35	10.55		
	Total	384.432	36			
Conflict	Between Groups	050.328	1	50.32	6.030	0.019
	Within Groups	292.104	35	8.34		
	Total	342.432	36			
Empathy	Between Groups	39.640	1	39.64	4.033	0.052
	Within Groups	344.036	35	9.83		
	Total	383.676	36			
Trust	Between Groups	4.292	1	4.29	0.584	0.450
	Within Groups	257.437	35	7.35		
	Total	261.730	36			

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