

4-26-2017

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Molly A. Bee

Bellarmino University, mbee01@bellarmino.edu

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Recommended Citation

Bee, Molly A., "The Relationship between Parenting Styles and Self-Esteem for Successive Generations" (2017). *Undergraduate Theses*. 19.

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The Relationship between Changing Parenting Styles and
Self-Esteem for Successive Generations

Molly Bee

Bellarmino University

Advisor: Dr. Christy Wolfe, Ph.D.

Readers: Dr. Pamela Cartor, Ph.D. and Dr. Ann Jirkovsky, Ph.D.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parenting styles and self-esteem across three generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. The researchers hypothesized that parenting styles from Baby Boomers to Generations X and Y have shifted from authoritarian to permissive, so a decrease in authoritarian parenting behaviors and an increase in permissive parenting styles were expected across the three generations. Further, we expected a decrease in self-esteem across the three generations, and speculate that this hypothesized change in parenting styles might relate to the decreases in the self-esteem of each generation. A total of 111 subjects, both males, and females participated and data were collected using an online survey that combined the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1989) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The results of this study revealed that Baby Boomer's parents were more authoritarian than Generation Y's parents, and Generation Y's parents were more permissive than BB parents. In addition, Generation Y had lower self-esteem than the Baby Boomers. Generation X revealed no discernible differences with parenting style or self-esteem. Therefore, in support of the hypotheses, there was evidence that parenting styles have gotten more permissive, and that self-esteem has gotten lower across the three generations. These findings lend support to the argument that increasing parental permissiveness may relate to decreasing self-esteem.

The Relationship between Changing Parenting Styles and Self-Esteem for Successive Generations

With the way that tradition and social norms have shifted, one could logically assume that there has also been a shift in parenting styles over the past few generations from the authoritarian parents who raised the Baby Boomers (Light, 1988), to the seemingly more permissive parents who raised Generation Y (Taylor, 2014). If parenting styles have changed across generations, it stands to reason that the way people within these generations function as adults also would change. The current project focused on one aspect of personality that may be influenced by this change in parenting styles, namely self-esteem. Specifically, this study examined whether parenting styles have changed over the course of three generations with a focus on the permissive parenting style and also studied whether self-esteem has decreased over the course of three generations. Further, the findings of this study suggest the background and initial support for an argument linking an increase in permissive parenting to a decrease in self-esteem.

Parenting Styles

Diane Baumrind writes “the practices favored by American parents to influence the actions and character of their offspring have varied from time to time with the predominate view of the child as a refractory savage, a small adult, or an angelic bundle from heaven” (Baumrind, 1966, p. 888). In this paper, Baumrind put forth three prototypes of parenting styles that represent these varying views. These prototypes characterize three different patterns of parenting that capture the three views outlined above; these patterns are permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian parenting styles.

Permissive Parenting. The first of these parenting types is permissive parenting. The main characteristics of this parenting style are acceptance and affirmation of the child often in a manner of unconditional positive regard rather than the desire for the child to follow guidelines and obey authority. This style is not focused on discipline, and instead, encourages a child's autonomy without the guidance of the parent. In this technique, the parent is not an active participant in a child's life, but rather "a resource for him to use as he wishes" (Baumrind, 1966, p. 889). The parent does not exert control over the child and allows the child to determine his own actions without guidance, consequence, or punishment. In order to get the child to conform to the desires of the parents, permissive parents will often use manipulation to achieve the desired behavior. There are no outright demands made in permissive parenting style and the child takes an active role in the regulation of self, be it from feeding schedules to toilet training to interaction with others. According to one advocate of permissive parenting, this parenting style permits the child to determine his own desires and actions without concern about impulse control or concern about consequences of actions (Neill, 1977).

Indeed, this type of parenting style does seem to have causal implications for children's behavior. In one study, researchers found that when a permissive adult was present in the room, aggression among the children increased (Siegel & Kohn, 1959). For this study, the researchers assigned a group of boys enrolled at the same preschool to pairs of one older boy and one younger boy. Within these pairs, the researchers measured the aggression of the older boy. A coin toss assigned each pair to either the condition of Adult-Absence or Adult-Presence. Each pair participated in two play sessions in order to compare the aggression once the child learned how the adult would react. In each session, each pair went in a playroom and read a story with the confederate, who then either left the boys alone in the room for fourteen minutes with

instructions not to leave, or stayed in the corner of the room only speaking when addressed while the boys played. The results were scored every 20 seconds on a scale of zero to three, with zero signifying no aggression and three signifying intense aggression characterized by a highly destructive, hostile, or forceful behavior. The researchers observed that the children who participated in the Adult-Presence condition exhibited more aggressive behaviors than those assigned to the Adult-Absence condition.

There are many perspectives and opinions as to the influence of the parents' behaviors on the concurrent behaviors of the developing child. For example, a possible explanation for the phenomenon described in the study above is that when a parent does not react to a child's behavior it does not indicate the parent's neutrality as may be the intention of the parent, but rather that the parent approves of the behavior in question (Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957). Another possibility is that the child does not anticipate any sort of punishment for the behavior exhibited thus causing the child to act without fear of consequence. Because the permissive parenting style allows for so much autonomy, the children do not have anyone guiding them into appropriate behavior. This encourages the child to behave as he sees fit at any given time. In an additional study by Schaefer and Bayley (1963), the results revealed that the idea of autonomy correlates with timidity and inhibition with boys from 0- to 3-years-old and with disinterested, uncooperative behavior in adolescent boys aged 9-to-14, reflecting a feeling of parental detachment and noninvolvement.

Authoritative Parenting. The second of Baumrind's prototypes is authoritative parenting. This type of parenting consists of give-and-take on the part of the parent. The parent discusses the rationale behind rules and regulations with the child, and takes the child's objections and misgivings into consideration. This parenting style both affirms and corrects the

child through a balance between childhood autonomy and discipline. This parenting style does not dismiss the adult perspective, and identifies and addresses the child's desires and opinions. Reason, discipline, and shaping are used in order for the parent to get the child to comply with the parent's objectives. The parent maintains authority, but does not dismiss the child's autonomy as a person.

Baumrind (1967) investigated the competence of children as related to parenting practices and styles. For the purposes of this study, Baumrind selected 32 preschool students after she assessed them on five dimensions: self-control, approach-avoidance tendency, subjective mood, peer affiliation, and self-reliance. From these dimensions, Baumrind selected the children who received the highest and lowest rankings on two or more dimensions. These children were tested again in situations where they experienced certain success, probable success, probable failure, and certain failure in turn. Baumrind recorded the children's responses and then selected her subjects from the children who rated reliably with patterns of high and low scores in each dimension and situation.

In addition to the children's measurements on the five dimensions used to establish membership, their parents underwent measurement on four different dimensions. One of these dimensions was parental control, which consisted of "consistency in enforcing directives, ability to resist pressure from the child, and willingness to exert influence upon the child" (Baumrind, 1967, p. 128). Another dimension measured was that of parental maturity demands which referred to either the pressures put on the child as related to intellect, emotion, and sociability, or the license given to the children to make decisions for themselves. Parent-child communication was measured as well and defined as how a parent communicates with the child be it through reason, solicitation of opinions, manipulation, or power. Parental nurturance was the final

dimension studied in the parents and referred to the way that a parent expressed love, expressed compassion, and ensured the child's well-being.

From these measures, the study identified whether children fell into Pattern I, characterized by self-control, independence, and exploration, Pattern II, characterized by distrustful, withdrawn, and malcontent children, or Pattern III characterized by children without self-control or dependence and who distrusted new experiences. Mothers of Pattern I children were found to be consistent in discipline, respectful of the child's independence, loving, and secure in handling their children. These women were supportive of their children, and communicated more clearly than the parents of children who fell within Patterns II and III. The characteristics exhibited by mothers whose children fell within Pattern I were consistent with those that characterize authoritative parenting as outlined in Baumrind's prototypes (Baumrind, 1967). These children "were not adversely affected by their parents' socialization and maturity demands and, indeed, seemed to thrive under the pressure" (Baumrind, 1967, p. 130). The researchers thought that because the parents utilized reason and conversation when interacting with their children, the children agreed to go along with the parents' requests without passivity or rebellion.

Authoritarian Parenting. The third prototype that Baumrind identified is authoritarian parenting. Authoritarian parenting centers on absolute standards as defined by the parent. The parent expects the child to align with certain standards and rules and values obedience. There is no a give-and-take relationship between authoritarian parents and their children. Instead, the parent is the authority and the child must obey the parent's word without question or argument. According to Baumrind, the authoritarian parent "believes in keeping the child in his place, in restricting his autonomy, and in assigning household responsibilities in order to inculcate respect

for work” (Baumrind, 1966, p. 890). Order and tradition are important to authoritarian parents and in this parenting style, the parent has the final word in behavior. For a period of time, experts believed that this style of parenting which relies on high demands and a lack of independence would be associated with hostility and rebellion among children. However, since 1950 there have been several studies which revealed results supporting the idea that parents who are more demanding have children who are less hostile and rebellious than those parents who demand less from their children (e.g. Bandura & Walters, 1959; Glueck & Glueck, 1950; McCord, McCord, & Howard, 1961).

Yet, according to a study on the relationship between parenting styles and obsessive compulsive disorder, people who came from homes with authoritarian parents were significantly positively correlated with more severe obsessive compulsive symptoms (Timpano, Keough, Mahaffey, Schmidt, & Abramowitz, 2010). Alternatively, authoritative parenting was significantly negatively correlated with obsessive compulsive symptoms, thus providing evidence to suggest that people with authoritative parents are less inclined to develop obsessive compulsive symptoms than those with authoritarian parents (Timpano et al., 2010). In addition to these findings, over 1,000 people in Japan evaluated their parents using the Parental Authority Questionnaire, and were then asked about their current mental health (Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi, & Kitamura, 2014). The results of this study indicated that participants with authoritarian parents reported worse mental health than those with authoritative parents (Uji et al., 2014). The results of these studies provide evidence to support the theory that authoritarian parenting may have detrimental effects on adult mental health. Beyond mental health in general, there are several studies supporting the idea that both authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting can have detrimental effects specifically on self-esteem.

Self- Esteem

Morris Rosenberg (1965) defines self-esteem as one's attitude towards the self. In other words, self- esteem refers to how someone views himself, be it in a positive or negative regard. High self-esteem is "a heterogeneous category, encompassing people who frankly accept their good qualities along with narcissistic, defensive, and conceited individuals" (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003, p. 1). These individuals report themselves to be likeable, good looking, and able to form meaningful and lasting relationships. Past research indicates that high self-esteem is one of the most influential factors on self-reported well-being (Campbell, 1981).

Contrarily, Rosenberg (1965) identifies individuals with low self-esteem as more inclined to self- consciousness, self-imposed isolation from others, and more likely to be depressed than those individuals with higher self-esteem, a characteristic that was corroborated by Furnham and Cheng (2000). In this study, individuals were measured on child rearing techniques as recalled by the participants, the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, and self-esteem. The results revealed that of these correlates, the most significant correlation was between self-esteem and self-reported happiness, thus supporting the idea that self-esteem is an important predictor in happiness. Researchers such as Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978), support the idea that low self-esteem is significantly negatively correlated with depression in their investigation of learned helplessness. According to this investigation, people who believe that their helplessness is due to personal shortcomings and inability to perform, thus indicating low self-esteem, are more inclined to be depressed.

There has been a great deal of research on the subject of self-esteem, particularly as it relates to the parenting styles outlined above. Buri (1988), in his validity testing of the Parental

Authority Questionnaire posed three hypotheses: “that authoritativeness should positively predict self-esteem, authoritarianism should be inversely related to self-esteem, and permissiveness should not be significantly related to self-esteem” (p. 8). After testing these hypotheses using the PAQ and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965), Buri found significant evidence to support his hypotheses. However, this is at odds with another study done by Rudy and Grusec (2006) on the difference in parenting styles between descendants of collectivistic cultures, and those who descend from individualistic cultures. In this study, the data did not support the hypothesis that “authoritarianism would be more strongly associated with lower levels of self-esteem in the individualist but not in the collectivist group” (p. 71). Instead, the data did not yield evidence that authoritarianism had an influence on self-esteem in either group, thus forcing the researchers to fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Some researchers believe that the intent to bolster self-esteem through the unconditional positive regard often associated with permissive parenting may also have the effect of lower self-esteem in the children of permissive parents. One theorist writes “spoiled offspring may become angry and resentful when they realize that the world does not worship them quite as much as their parents do” (Shaw, 2003, p.106). Shaw is not isolated in his belief, and another theorist suggests that parents bolster their children’s self-esteem by praising them for every little accomplishment rather than acknowledging the child’s shortcomings and encouraging improvement. She writes, “The self-esteem program also prevents children from learning that there may always be people who are better at something than you are, and that’s okay” (Ehrensaft, 1997, p. 124).

Parenting style is not the only factor that influences self-esteem. One study investigated the self-esteem of people of different age groups and birth cohorts (Twenge & Campbell, 2001).

This study revealed that as the world has changed and social and family norms have changed, so has the self-esteem of various cohorts throughout the decades. For example, this study investigated divorce rates among other things from the years 1965 to 1995. It revealed that as divorce rates went up, self-esteem among children went up as well. The same can be said for unemployment rates and other economic factors. According to the researchers on this study “these larger societal trends may have led to changes in children’s self-esteem” (p. 324).

Generations

No two academics agree on the precise years that the Baby Boom generation spans, but all researchers are in agreement that it began after World War II and lasted until the early 1960s. As of 2015, there were an estimated 76 million Baby Boomers living in the United States (Adcox, 2015). The period of the Baby Boom lasted around twenty years, so the Boomers experienced their formative years during multiple significant historic events. For the Early Boomers, the Cold War was one of the most notable of these historic periods and manifested itself in drills involving hiding under tables and living in fear of a Russian attack (Wiedmer, 2015). The Late Boomers were formed during the era of the Vietnam War, the Kennedy assassination, the Civil Rights movement, and a revolutionary era of music and pop culture (Wiedmer, 2015).

The Baby Boom generation consists of hard working individuals who are goal oriented and professionally competitive. According to some researchers (e.g., Kane, 2015; Loretto, 2015), Baby Boomers often equate self-worth with professional success, and will work hard to obtain positions of success and authority “that they do not want to relinquish, as they see their identities are tied to their work” (Wiedmer, 2015, p. 53). Baby Boomers’ parents were the Traditionalist generation. The Traditionalist generation consists of those born from 1900 to 1945 and is

characterized by a respect for authority, order, and tradition (Wiedmer, 2015). Baby Boomers experienced a range of parenting styles from the Traditionalists, from coddling directly following World War II, to strict discipline during the juvenile delinquency scare of the 1950s (Light, 1988).

Despite the traditional values of hard work and the way their parents interacted with them, Baby Boomers were a liberal generation during the height of the Baby Boom. One author writes “they may love their parents, but when it comes time to talk about politics, marriage, drugs, or sex, the Baby Boomers respectfully disagree” (Light, 1988, p. 28). The Boomers grew up during the era of free love, the Civil Rights Movement, the British Invasion, and the early years of the Vietnam War as well as the social rebellions that came along with that. These experiences formed the Baby Boomers in a way that differed from their parents’ youth. So, when the Boomers went on to raise Generation X, they brought these ideals and experiences with them.

Generation X’s birth dates range from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s. Their birthrate was much smaller than their Boomer predecessors with 84 million members living in the United States as of 2014 (Miller, 2014). The Generation Xers lived during the time of the global energy crisis, the beginnings of AIDS awareness, personal computer development, and MTV.

Generation X consists of individuals seeking to find a balance between work and family life. They are independent thinkers who prefer to enjoy work rather than simply excel in it like their parents (Wiedmer, 2015). Generation X preferred to be more cautious and plan more than their parents did. According to a report on Generation X published in 2012, Generation X members are educated, balanced, happy, active, and oriented around family (Swanbrow, 2012).

Generation X was one of the first generations to be raised by two working parents. They were the first generation to come home to empty houses, or to experience daycare. They were also a generation who experienced broken families and absent and workaholic parents (Wiedmer, 2015). They were raised by the Traditionalists and by the early Baby Boomers who put a great deal of importance into work and success, often at the expense of the family. The Boomers raised their children less strictly than they were raised, partially because they were not home as much as their parents were, but also in response to their strict upbringing. One psychiatrist comments on this phenomenon, writing “now the fragile child who needed constant care and attention- the child who would be, in the language of the 1950s, ‘traumatized’ by the wrong or thoughtless deed- was joined by the child as knowing actor. In this view the child deserved an equal standing in the social world; adult rules and boundaries were unnecessary infringements on the child’s liberty” (Ehrensaft, 1997, p. xiii). As a result of absentee parenting, “Gen X are engaging in financial planning, avoiding broken homes, and ensuring that children grow up with a parent available” (Wiedmer, 2015, p. 53). They worked to correct the issue of absentee parenting by creating a balance between work and family that was implemented during the rearing of Generation Y.

Generation Y, or the Millennial Generation, spans from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. This is the largest cohort since the Boomer generation, consisting of 71 million members (Wiedmer, 2015). This generation grew up during the era of Desert Storm, the World Trade Center attacks, the Columbine High School shooting, Hurricane Katrina, and the digital age of technology. This generation is more connected and social than previous generations, and were raised by late Boomers and Generation X. Like their Generation X parents, they seek balance and meaningful personal lives (Gibson, 2015). Generation Y are expert multitaskers and utilize

new methods and technology with ease. In addition to seeking challenges and creative problem solving techniques, Generation Y want to be happy in their work and lives, rather than simply successful (Gibson, 2015).

Generation X put their belief in balance and the importance of family life into their child rearing practices. As a result, the Generation X parents were very involved in the lives of Generation Y. They received feedback and supervision from their parents in a way that Generation X never had from their Baby Boomer parents. The parents of Generation Y indoctrinated a need for community into Generation Y by their parents. Some researchers claim that Millennials are more inclined to cooperate and resolve situations amicably than they are to cause conflict. According to one author, “in response to a survey question, parents of millennials said they are only about half as likely to report they often had disagreements with their children as they are to say that as children themselves, they often fought with their own parents” (Taylor, 2014, p. 46). Millennial parents reported much less conflict between parent and child than Generation X reported regarding their relationship with their Baby Boomer parent (Taylor, 2014).

Study Purpose and Hypotheses

The research on parenting styles is not very comprehensive as related to how parenting styles have changed over years and generations. There is also not much research on how self-esteem has changed over generations. For this reason, the present study investigated how perceived parenting styles differed from the Baby Boomer Generation, to Generation X, to Generation Y, using a cross-sectional methodological design. The study also investigated the self-esteem of each successive generation, and the relationship between self-esteem and perceived parenting style for each generation. It was hypothesized that parenting styles have

moved from more authoritarian with the Baby Boomers to more permissive with Generation Y. In addition, it was hypothesized that self-esteem would decrease across the three generations. Support of these two hypotheses would provide the initial evidence to speculate about the relationship, potentially causal, between the increasing permissive parenting style and decreasing self-esteem. This aspect of the relationship between parenting style and self-esteem would require a longitudinal methodology and thus has not been extensively researched.

Method

Subjects

This study consisted of 111 subjects including 77 females, 32 males, and two subjects who elected not to provide gender. Of the 111 subjects, there were 57 Generation Y members, 23 Generation X members, and 31 Baby Boomers. Data were collected online using a 73 item survey through Google Forms. The researchers found the subjects using social media and email to share the survey with associates and friends.

Procedure and Materials

The survey consisted of three demographic questions and seventy survey items answered on a one-to-five Likert Scale with one signifying “strongly disagree” and five signifying “strongly agree.” The survey combined the Parental Authority Questionnaire developed by John Buri (1989), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965). The results of the survey were stored in a password protected Google Forms document accessible only to the researchers.

The demographic questions were listed in a multiple-choice format. The first demographic question was the range of years in which a person was born. The researchers included this question to determine the generation to which the subject in question belonged. For

the purposes of this study, the researchers defined Baby Boomers as those born from 1946 to 1964. Generation X consisted of those born from 1965-1977, and Generation Y consisted of those born from 1978 to 1998. Although most scholars claim that Generation Y continues through the early 2000s, the researchers chose to end the range at 1998 to eliminate the possibility of minors responding without parental consent. Subjects were asked to select which of the ranges above applied to their birth years. The next demographic question concerned gender, and the subjects chose from male, female, and other. The final demographic question dealt with the primary caregiver for the subject. The subject chose between mother, father, mother and father equally, and another guardian. This question was necessary because parenting styles could differ from one parent to another and have a different relationship to self-esteem. Of the participants, 62 people claimed to be raised by their mothers and fathers equally, 44 claimed their mothers as the primary caregiver, and 4 participants claimed their fathers as the primary caregiver. Other than these demographic questions, there was no identifying information given by the participants.

Parental Authority Questionnaire

The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1989) is used to measure the parenting styles that Diana Baumrind outlined in 1966, specifically, authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Buri constructed this survey using Baumrind's descriptions, and it originally consisted of 48 questions with responses on a Likert Scale. Psychological researchers, social workers, sociologists, and educators evaluated the survey for content-related validity and ultimately accepted 36 of the 48 questions as an accurate way to map Baumrind's parenting styles (Buri, 1989). From these 36 items, Buri selected 30 so that the survey would ultimately have 10 items targeting each parenting style. The survey is set up from the first person

perspective and has two parts: one that deals with the father's parenting style, and one that deals with the mothers. The same 30 items are used for both parents, the only thing that changes is the word "father" to "mother." For this study, the researchers wanted to investigate the subject's perceptions of both parents, so there were 60 parenting style items on the survey with 30 items corresponding to the father's parenting style and 30 items corresponding to the mother's parenting style.

Students in an introductory psychology class participated in assessing the PAQ's test-retest reliability by completing the survey early in the semester, and then completing it again at the end of the semester (Buri, 1989). The results yielded respectable reliability coefficients ranging from $r = .77$ for father's permissive parenting style to $r = .92$ for the father's authoritarian parenting style. Students also tested internal consistency reliability and yielded alpha values ranging from .74 for father's permissiveness, to .85 for mother's authoritarianism and father's authoritativeness.

The developers of the survey also tested criterion validity. If the survey had good criterion validity, then authoritativeness and nurturance should be positively correlated, and authoritarianism should be negatively correlated with nurturance, and permissiveness should not be significantly correlated with nurturance. In order to test this, the PAQ was paired with a Parental Nurturance Scale and administered to 127 college students. The results revealed a significant positive correlation of authoritativeness and nurturance, a significant negative correlation between authoritarian and nurturance, and no significant correlation between permissiveness and nurturance. Based on these results, the study yielded good criterion-related validity (Buri, 1989).

For the purposes of the current study, the researchers changed the wording on some questions that dealt with all of the children in the family. This study was interested in the perceived parenting style of the subject in questions, but not of all of the children in the family. Since it is possible that parenting styles could vary from child to child, the wording needed to be changed to make it clear that the survey was referring only to the subject in question. For example, item two on the scale reads “Even if his children didn’t agree with him, my father felt that it was for our own good if we were forced to conform to what he thought was right” (Buri, 1989). The researchers changed this item so that it reads, “Even if I didn’t agree with him, my father felt that it was for my own good if I was forced to conform to what he thought was right.”

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Morris Rosenberg developed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale in 1965. He developed this scale as a way to establish self-esteem with easy administration methods. Interviewing each subject, or measuring self-esteem using apparatuses is extremely time consuming. Instead, the scale provides a way for subjects to quickly and easily mark answers that can then be tabulated. In addition to time and ease of administration, Rosenberg wanted a scale that would place scores on a single continuum for self-esteem from high to low. Rosenberg writes, “The Guttman scale insures a unidimensional continuum by establishing a pattern which must be satisfied before the scale can be accepted. The adequacy of each item is not determined primarily by its relationship to a total score but by its patterned relationship with all other items on the scale” (Rosenberg, 1965, p.16). This scale had a reproducibility of 92 percent and a scalability of 72 percent, both of which are significant. The scale was originally set up as a Guttman Scale where the subjects selected statements that applied to them out of the ten item scale. For the purposes of this study, the researchers decided to change the Guttman Scale to a Likert Scale in order to maintain

consistency with scoring across both surveys. As with the PAQ, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a self-report scale.

Results

Parenting Styles

The researchers hypothesized that the permissive parenting style for both parents would increase in prevalence across the three generations. To address this research hypothesis, a 3 (generation: BB, GenX, GenY) x 2 (parent: mother, father) x 3 (parenting style: permissive, authoritarian, authoritative) mixed factorial ANOVA was calculated on perceptions of the presence of certain parenting style characteristics. The ANOVA also included the other two parenting styles, authoritarian and authoritative, as the data were available and valuable. The between-participants factor was generation. The within-participants factors were parent and parenting style. Participants rated the extent to which the behavior of their mothers and their fathers matched the characteristics of the permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting styles; thus, each participant contributed six data-points, in addition to their generation classification. The results of this analysis indicated main effects for parenting style, $F(2,104) = 96.01, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .65$, and parent, $F(1, 105) = 10.04, p = .002, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .09$. These main effects were superseded by significant interactions between parenting style and generation, $F(4, 210) = 3.26, p = .013, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .06$, and between parenting style and parent, $F(2,104) = 4.27, p = .017, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .08$. To aid in the interpretation of these interaction effects, the researchers conducted follow-up analyses.

To explore the interaction between parenting style and parent, the researchers performed follow-up protected paired *t*-tests ($\alpha / c = \alpha / 3 = \alpha \leq .02$) comparing participants' ratings of their mothers and fathers on each of the parenting style types. The results revealed a significant

difference for the ratings of mothers and fathers for the authoritative parenting style, $t(107) = -3.00, p = .003$; mothers' ratings were higher than fathers at $M = 3.46, SD = .86$ where fathers rated $M = 3.19, SD = .90$ on characteristics associated with the authoritative parenting style. The results revealed no differences between mother and father ratings of permissive or authoritarian characteristics.

To explore the interaction between parenting style and generation, follow-up one-way ANOVAS compared the three generations on parenting style perceptions separately for each parenting style. Again a Bonferroni adjustment was used to protect the Type I error rate, ($\alpha / c = \alpha / 3 = \alpha \leq .02$), and revealed a significant difference between the generations for permissiveness, $F(2,108) = 6.22, p = .003$. A Tukey's HSD post-hoc analysis revealed the significant difference between BB and GenY ($MD = -.49, p = .002$); BB perceptions were not significantly different from those of GenX, and GenX perceptions were not significantly different from GenY. A significant difference was found between the generations for the authoritarian parenting style, $F(2,108) = 4.47, p = .014$. A Tukey's HSD post-hoc analysis again indicated the significant difference between BB and GenY ($MD = .45, p = .018$), but not between BB and GenX nor between GenX and GenY. Finally, a significant difference was found between the generations on their ratings of the authoritative parenting style, $F(2,108) = 4.25, p = .017$, and once again a Tukey's HSD indicated the difference between the BB generation and GenY ($MD = -.47, p = .013$). The differences between GenX and the other two generations were not statistically significant. Importantly, as noted above, mothers rated as having higher authoritative scores than fathers across all three generations. See Figure 1.

Self-Esteem

Researchers also hypothesized that self-esteem would decrease across the three generations. To test this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with self-esteem scores as the dependent variable and generation as the independent variable. There was a significant difference between the three generations, $F(2,108) = 10.32, p < .001$. A Tukey's HSD post-hoc analysis revealed the significant difference between the BB generation and GenY, ($MD = .64, p < .001$); GenX was not significantly different from either the BB generation or GenY. See Figure

2. Self-Esteem and Parenting Styles

The hypothesis behind this study was that the permissive parenting style would increase across the generations and that self-esteem would decrease across the three generations. Both of these hypotheses were supported. It also was of interest to the current study to speculate about the potential, causal associations between these two variables. The following analyses explored the cross-sectional associations between permissive parenting and self-esteem. There is a negative association between permissive parenting styles and self-esteem scores for all generations combined, $r(107) = -.34, p < .001$; mothers $r(108) = -.41, p < .001$.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in parenting styles and the differences in self-esteem across three generations, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. The results of the study supported both hypotheses. Specifically, the incidence of the permissive parenting style increased from the Baby Boomer generation to Generation Y. Also as hypothesized, self-esteem showed a decrease from the Baby Boomer generation to Generation Y. Given the findings of the current study, particularly the increase in permissive parenting and decrease in self-esteem across the generations, it may be interesting to explore the potential causal relationship between these two constructs. Since the study was not a true

experiment as the researchers were unable to assign a condition of a certain parenting style to a participant or control for confounding variables, we can only speculate regarding a causal relationship between self-esteem and parenting style. Arguably the increase in permissive parenting may be causally related to the decrease in self-esteem reported here.

The findings of this study are consistent with the theorizations of Shaw (2003), Kindlon (2001), and Ehrensaft (1997). It is with the aid of their ideas that we can speculate as to the causal relationship between the two factors in this study. One plausible causal explanation for this relationship between the permissive parenting style and self-esteem is that when a permissive parent provides a child with unconditional positive regard at home, the child develops a certain image of herself and seeks validation externally. However, when this child enters the real world she will quickly learn that the world does not treat everyone with the same unconditional positive regard. When this child looks for external validation, she will find very few people who are willing to validate her as consistently as her permissive parents were. As a result, this child's self-esteem will be affected since she is not treated as unique or exceptional, as she has been her whole life. She does not receive the constant praise and possibly begins to think that her parents were lying or exaggerating her value and importance. Such a harsh realization and experience of the world may negatively impact the child's self-esteem, a sentiment shared by Shaw (2003).

Kindlon (2001), agrees with Shaw and adds an element of self-centeredness to his argument. Children of permissive parents are the center of the parents' world. As a result, there is a certain amount of egocentricity that develops within this child. It is important for children to be the center of the parents' world at a young age as that helps with bonding and attachment. However, if the behavior of the parent continues, the child will become excessively self-

centered. When the child does not receive unconditional positive regard outside of the home, this self-centeredness could become more negative and may lead the child to wonder what causes people to behave rudely, or indifferently toward him. If the child decides that these behaviors are aimed at something about him that people find distasteful, then that would lead to more negative self-regard and feelings of inadequacy.

An additional possible causal explanation is that parents of Generation Y children overvalue their children's accomplishments. Ehrensaft (1997) writes about the family of a girl she counseled. The parents were thrilled about a certificate their daughter received in one of her gymnastics classes, but the child seemed less than enthused. When asked why, the child responded that she did not understand why she received a certificate of achievement for something that everyone else in her class could do just as well as she could. This child was no longer sure what accomplishments of hers were worthy of praise, and which were blown out of proportion. As a result, this child assumed that all of her accomplishments were equal, and thus lost the sense of pride and rise in self-esteem that is typically associated with an impressive accomplishment. She had no standard to strive for anymore, and therefore was not pushed to improve and achieve goals. The parents were celebrating her mediocrity, and as a result she had no idea what was really an accomplishment or something of which to be proud (Ehrensaft, 1997). Pride in one's accomplishments is an important factor in high self-esteem, and this girl could be just one of many Generation Y children who are victims of the "everyone deserves a trophy" mentality.

In addition, there are several plausible rival alternative hypotheses that could account for the lower self-esteem of the Generation Y participants as related to the Baby Boomer participants. One such alternative is that as someone gets older, their self-esteem increases

regardless of parenting, a hypothesis that is supported by previous research. A group of researchers conducted a study examining self-esteem from many different angles, one of which was ageing (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, & Potter, 2002). These researchers administered a survey online to over 300,000 people from different countries, cultures, age groups, socioeconomic statuses. The results of this study revealed fluctuations in self-esteem with a marked decrease in self-esteem through adolescent and college aged participants, and a steady increase in self-esteem among participants until the age of 60. As people age, they typically increase in maturity and emotional stability (Robins et al., 2002). In addition, adults become more established in themselves as they age and typical adult development leads to an ability to regulate self-esteem more effectively (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). It is possible that the present study yielded similar results with Generation Y mostly comprised of college age adults and the Baby Boomers in their fifties and sixties, and that the causal relationship instead lies between age and self-esteem rather than parenting styles and self-esteem.

Another plausible alternative hypothesis is that self-esteem has decreased for Generation Y as a result of external influences not present during the Baby Boomer generation's formative years. One such influence is social media. Social media provides another means of external validation, and when someone does not get a seemingly suitable amount of likes, or compares herself negatively to another person, then Generation Y could see a decrease in self-esteem. A study in 2014 investigated the role of social comparison via Facebook and its relationship to self-esteem (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014). The researchers hypothesized that people who spend more time on Facebook have lower self-esteem and that this was related to negative social comparison of oneself to others. They tested this hypothesis using both correlational and experimental studies and found significant evidence supporting their hypothesis. It is possible

that similar phenomena were at work during the present study, and that Generation Y members have lower self-esteem than the Baby Boomers because of the influences of social media, rather than the influences of parenting.

Limitations

This study had a few limitations that may have affected the results. One of the main limitations was the inability of the researchers to account for all extraneous variables. As previously stated, the researchers could not assign a parenting condition to each subject and measure the self-esteem solely in relation to each parenting style as would be required for a true-experimental design. If that were possible or ethical, then it would have been much easier to define a causal relationship between the two factors. However, there may have been many confounding variables contributing to the lower self-esteem of Generation Y such as interpersonal relationships, societal events and changes, psychological disorders such as Major Depressive Disorder, or trauma experience, to name a few. This survey did not account for any of the aforementioned factors, and as a result, the study's results are open to influence from these and other extraneous variables; thus, caution is warranted when interpreting the results.

In addition, the survey technique used self-report for each subject, and self-report surveys have additional limitations associated. It is possible that the subjects were not entirely honest with regard to how they perceived their parents' styles of parenting or their own self-esteem. They could have been trying to protect their parents or their own images of their parents and themselves. Even though the results were anonymous, people may still have hesitated to speak ill of their parents, or too highly of themselves. Given the fact that the survey was administered online without a researcher present, it is possible that some subjects answered inaccurately as a

result of misunderstanding certain items on the survey. There was nobody available to answer questions while the participants took the survey, and so subjects were left to their own interpretations and understandings of questions. Since the survey was online, it is also possible that the subjects were not entirely focused when completing the survey which could have affected how they responded to each item.

Another important limitation is that due to the recruitment techniques utilized, the subjects in this study were largely people who knew the researchers. The study was limited to the people that the researchers were connected with on social media and email. Thus, this relatively homogenous group consisted of a majority of white, middle to upper-middle class, Midwestern participants with a few exceptions. As a result of this limitation, the study cannot easily be generalized to the entire population, since the results pertain to one predominately unvaried population. Once again, we can only speculate about the results as they would pertain to a wide variety of people.

Future Research

Follow up research could look at each generation individually and the potential causal relationship between parenting style and self-esteem. The present study provided one more general piece of information regarding how self-esteem and parenting style may relate, and how each of those factors differs across generations. Narrowing the topic to one generation may provide an even more in depth look at that generation and the factors surrounding the fluctuation of self-esteem within the generation. From that point, a pattern may emerge regarding a decrease in self-esteem and it would be easier to find significant causal evidence behind low self-esteem within the generation. Exploration of the plausible alternative hypotheses, such as the influence of social events occurring in the formative years, could help determine other factors that may

contribute to a low or high self-esteem within each generation. This would also provide more specific data regarding the cause of low self-esteem

In order to increase the generalizability of the study, future research should draw participants from a more diverse population. Since this study primarily dealt with middle class white participants, gathering data from other cultures, races, and socioeconomic areas could be beneficial to obtain more complete data on the subject. This data could be collected through more effective distribution of the survey, rather than limiting it to whoever was readily available to the researcher. More complete data could provide more concrete evidence that self-esteem and parenting style are both linked and changing. From this concrete evidence, solutions to the potential problem of lower self-esteem could be postulated and implemented across cultures and social groups.

Finding a solution to the apparent problem of lower self-esteem is another topic that should warrant future consideration. As stated earlier, low self-esteem is characterized by a negative self-regard that can be damaging to the individual and to interpersonal relationships (Rosenberg, 1965). Therefore, a healthy self-esteem is required in order that one might remain positive and connected to others, but not isolate oneself through narcissistic tendencies or ideas. According to the results of the present study, self-esteem has decreased across the past three generations. Whether it has decreased to a level that might negatively impact the individual is not apparent in these findings, however, if self-esteem continues to decrease, it could become harmfully low. Future research needs to investigate ways to reverse the negative trend of self-esteem so that future generations do not begin to or continue to experience the negative effects of low self-esteem. If there is a causal relationship between permissive parenting and low self-esteem, then self-esteem can be increased to a healthy level or maintained at a healthy level

across the generations by facilitating a decrease in permissive parenting through education and awareness as to the effects of permissive parenting.

Conclusion

Despite limitations, the findings of this study point to a potential problem among the current generation. Permissive parenting style may be one component pointing to the decrease in self-esteem, but further research is required to form a causal explanation. Regardless the decreasing self-esteem found in this study requires further investigation. Perhaps, with further investigation into the principles of this study, we can determine a pattern and find a solution to the apparent problem of decreasing self-esteem, thus protecting future generations from the deleterious effects of excessively low self-esteem.

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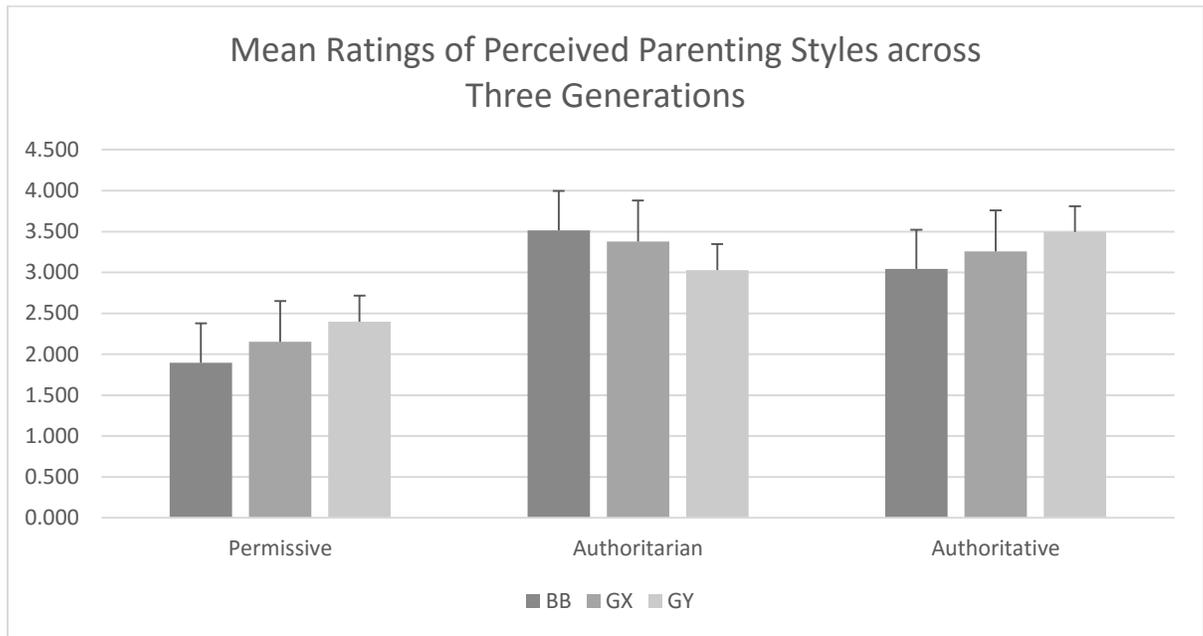


Figure 1. Mean ratings of perceived parenting styles across the three generation groups.

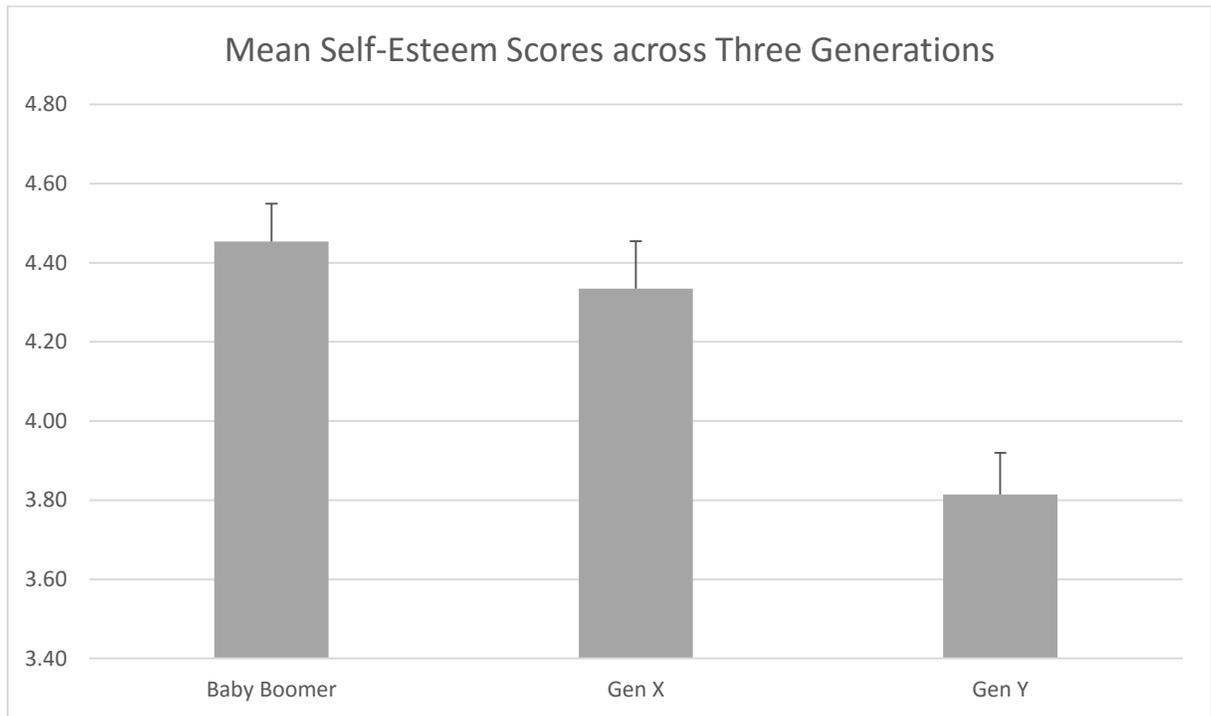


Figure 2. Mean self-esteem scores across the three generations.