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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Upstander Intervention and Parenting Styles

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Abstract
Findings from a survey of children and adolescents ($N = 645$) documents that students witness and experience a range of abuse at home and at school. Participants freely acknowledged pushing or shoving (46%) and slapping or hitting peers (40%). The study contributes to the literature by focusing on upstanding (active versus passive bystander intervention) and parenting styles. Findings reveal an interesting disconnect between those who say they will intervene when confronted by friends' or peers' bullying behaviors and those who actually have intervened. Children and adolescents with authoritarian parents are more likely to say they would intervene to help peers, but when asked if they actually have done so, they are the least likely to follow-through. In contrast, children with authoritative or permissive parents show the opposite pattern: No significant difference in their intent to intervene, but they are more likely to become upstanders, rather than passive bystanders when actually confronted with bullying behavior.

Keywords Parenting styles · Upstander intervention · Active bystander intervention · Bullying

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018), there are three distinct typologies of parenting styles: Authoritarian, Authoritative, and Permissive. These categories are recognized by developmental psychologists as a way to classify the various approaches that parents implement when raising their children. The literature on parenting styles is well established (Kawabata et al. 2011; Simons and Conger 2007; Underwood et al. 2009). The purpose of this study is to extend this literature by studying the relationship between parenting styles and upstander intervention.

Upstander Intervention

Bystander intervention is a form of social support that focuses on empowering people to intervene against antisocial behavior, such as bullying. In recent years, scholars and advocates have embraced the term upstander for a person who stands up, rather than stands by. The importance of social support for adolescents is well documented (Eck et al. 2016; Rudert et al. 2018b). Which people are more likely to become upstanders when confronted with bullying and why? Approaches to answering this question have varied over the years.

Moisuc et al. (2018) focused on the personality characteristics of individuals who "speak up" to confront bullies. The personality characteristics most associated with active bystander intervention were altruism, extraversion, social responsibility, persistence, and self-directedness. Findings also indicate that people who confronted one form of bullying (prejudice) also tended to do so for a variety of other uncivil behaviors. Previous findings support Moisuc's conclusions (Carlsmith et al. 2002; Gabriel 2014; Taggar and Ellis 2007). Adolescents low on trait aggressiveness are less likely to intervene, because they perceive an action to be less morally wrong (Carlsmith et al. 2002). The study also reported that participants who scored high on aggressiveness and low on self-esteem were more likely to intervene for peers. Upstanding behavior is best predicted by strength of character, social responsibility, and being perceived as a peer leader (Gabriel 2014; Taggar and Ellis 2007). Active upstanders are motivated by a sense of morality, valuing community, and the desire to make the world a better place. This seems simple and straightforward, but other factors come into play. One of these is victim blaming. If the incident seems justifiable, passive bystanders often blame the victims (Rudert et al. 2018a, b). A number of studies by Rudert and colleagues argues much of this can be explained through the social dissimilarity rule,

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which suggests that adolescents base their moral judgments on dissimilarities. Study authors described this as the "odd one out," i.e. if members of a cohesive group exclude a bullied dissimilar peer (the "odd-one-out"), participants were likely to blame the victim.

Other factors explaining upstander behavior include perceived popularity or power of bullies (Ashburn-Nardo et al. 2014) and empathy or experience (Chapin and Brayack 2016). Chapin and Brayack studied a group of adolescents, concluding adolescents do not believe their own abuse history impacts their willingness to help others, but those who have experienced abuse themselves were ultimately more likely to intervene.

School-based bystander intervention programs are becoming more common. Early indicators suggest such programs effectively change attitudes, subjective norms, and intent to intervene (Sundstrom et al. 2018). While other studies often measure intent to intervene, the current study contributes to the literature by measuring both intent to intervene and actual intervention.

Parenting Styles

Parenting styles are the defining characteristics of how parents interact with their children on a daily basis. Authoritarian parents are identified by having high expectations for their children, while lacking emotional warmth and support. In contrast, permissive parents are identified by being highly responsive and nurturing towards their children, while having low expectations and displaying a distinct aversion to administrating discipline and structure. Authoritative parents are identified by providing high levels of emotional warmth and support, while also having high standards and structure for their children. Children raised by authoritative parents report the lowest rates of substance use, risk to resort to violence, and engagement in fewer risky sexual behaviors (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2018).

Parenting style typologies enable researchers an empirical way of analyzing and categorizing the impact parents have on the development and growth of their children. Authoritative parents tend to produce children with higher levels of self-esteem and mental health (Chan and Poon 2016; Mogonea and Mogonea 2014; Rodriguez et al. 2016) and higher levels of social competence (Nelson et al. 2011; Ren and Edwards 2015; Scrimgeour et al. 2013), both of which could be drawn from when confronted by bullies at school.

Parenting Styles and Aggression

The authoritarian parenting style is the most likely to produce children and adolescents who are prone to social and physical aggression (Underwood et al. 2009). A meta-analysis that integrated research from 1435 studies and provided data on 1,053,288 children and adolescents found a significant relationship between parenting styles and the externalization of aggression in developing children. The most prevalent factors that determined aggression in adolescents were harsh control and psychological control; both of these characteristics are strongly associated with authoritarian parenting (Pinquart 2014). Authoritarian parenting also leads adolescents to externalize aggression, due to internalizing a negative emotional climate from a young age. This tends to make adolescents have a lack of self-control and an inability to manage their emotions properly. This situation leads them to a predisposition to sadness and angry outbursts (Muhtadie et al. 2013).

Children's disposition to aggression and violent tendencies can make their parents embrace an authoritarian role as a reaction to being frustrated with their children's behavior. This situation may lead to an increased use of severe disciplining and overactive parenting (de Haan et al. 2013). Additionally, children who display higher levels of aggression tend to have parents with lower levels of emotional intelligence (Batool and Bond 2015; Belean 2017). Parents who have higher emotional intelligence tend to be more authoritative; parents with lower emotional intelligence tend to be more authoritarian. These findings suggests that instead of emotional intelligence determining aggression in children, it may determine the parenting style. The parenting style then impacts the child's tendency towards aggression.

Permissive parenting is also strongly linked to children who externalize aggressive behavior (Braza et al. 2013). Notably, children are more likely to demonstrate physical aggression when both parents are permissive. This result occurs, because of the parents' inability to correctly monitor their children's behavior. It leads to children not being able to properly learn and develop the ability to control their violent impulses and regulate their aggression. Such children exhibit high levels of unchecked aggression when angered. Females with permissive parents tend to display higher levels of physical aggression (Braza et al. 2013), while males exhibit higher levels of social aggression (Ehrenreich et al. 2014). However, males tend to be more physically aggressive when raised by authoritarian parents (Underwood et al. 2009). Violent tendencies in children are highly correlated to the development of antisocial behavior, as they grow into adolescents (Munoz et al. 2017).

Like upstander intervention programs, parenting classes have also been documented to evoke change. Parents that implement harsh authoritarian parenting practices can be taught to engage in more authoritative, democratic parenting practices. Li et al. (2013) reported that a majority of the 70 parents participating in a study in Hong Kong successfully adapted to a more authoritative approach to parenting, following an intensive training program. By reducing harshness in a parenting practices through these training programs, parents can reduce one of the most significant factors leading to aggressive and violent tendencies in children and adolescents. The study

highlighted the positive impact that early intervention can have in the lives of these children and their families. There is evidence of similar trends globally. Authoritarian parenting is on the decline in Sweden, being replaced by more democratic, authoritative parenting practices. Trifan et al. (2014) studied three different generational cohorts, and the results indicate a strong decrease in authoritarian parenting practices in the average Swedish family household. The implications of this research are significant, providing empirical evidence that the parenting style that is the most commonly linked with negative developmental outcomes such as having higher tendencies towards aggression is losing popularity amongst Swedish parents as time progresses (Trifan et al. 2014).

Based on the preceding review of the literature, the following research question is posed: What is the relationship between parenting styles and upstander intervention?

Method

Procedures and Participants

Multiple urban and suburban middle school and high school students participated in violence prevention programs provided by a Pennsylvania women's center ($N = 645$). Participants ranged in age from 11 to 18 ($M = 13.6$, $SD = 1.9$). Gender identification included 60% male, 39.8% female, and 1 individual (.2%) identifying as trans. Students also self-identified race or ethnicity, which was consistent with demographics of the region: 76% Euro-American, 16% African-American, 3% Asian-American, 2% Hispanic-American, and 3% mixed or other. Pre-test surveys were administered via pencil and paper surveys. Students could participate in the program without completing the surveys. None did so, but 47 incomplete surveys of the original 692 participants were not included in the analysis. The most frequently skipped items were race (40 students left this blank) and gender (30 students left this blank). Some students wrote in comments like "We're all the same" or "Why does it matter?" These incomplete surveys were kept, unless one or more of the study variables were also skipped. There were no significant differences attributable to race. Gender differences did emerge (females were more likely to report experiencing all forms of abuse; males were more likely to perpetrate all forms.). Because women and girls are realistically more frequently victims of violence, this would be expected.

Materials

Upstander intervention was measured with two items, adapted from the Coaching Boys into Men curriculum (2018). "If a friend or peer of mine abuses someone in front of me, I would try to stop him or her" (Intended upstander intervention). "I have stopped a friend or peer from abusing someone in the past month" (Actual upstanding). Each item had a "yes" or "no" option. The Actual Upstander Intervention item also had a "not applicable (N/A)" option for participants who said they had not personally witnessed any bullying behavior in the last 30 days.

Parenting styles were measured using a standard instrument called Authoritative, Authoritarian, and Permissive Parenting Practices (Full instrument available in Robinson et al. 1995). "Think about your parent or guardian for these questions:" Authoritative (27 items, $\alpha = .81$): "Gives reasons why rules should be obeyed:" Authoritarian (20 items, $\alpha = .76$): "Uses physical punishment to discipline;" Permissive (15 items, $\alpha = .71$): "Threatens punishment, but doesn't actually follow through." Surveys were completed by school-aged adolescents.

Students were also asked to indicate which forms of abuse they had witnessed and personally experienced: "Violent relationships can often be complex, and there are many kinds of abuse and neglect that can occur: verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual. Think about your own experiences with violence over the past year. Circle all that apply. If you would like to talk to a professional, you can ask about our services or call the Crisis Center North hotline anonymously:" Verbal abuse, Emotional abuse, Physical abuse, Neglect. Each of these included four options participants could circle: "I have witnessed at home; I have witnessed at school; Happened to me at home; Happened to me at school." Responses were summed to measure the amount of abuse witnessed and experienced and to determine which forms of abuse were more common. What constitutes "abuse" was not defined in this measure. Categories were described (hit, kicked, excluded, gossip, etc.) in the next measure.

Students were asked to indicate how frequently they engaged in any of the following behaviors over the past 30 days: "Hit or slapped someone, shoved or pushed someone, put someone down to their face, made fun of someone to make others laugh," and "spread false rumors about someone." Responses were measured on a Likert-type scale (1 = never; 7 = almost daily).

Participants also provided basic demographic information: Age, race, gender.

Results

SPSS 25 software was used for analysis. This included Cronbach's Alpha for reliability of the parenting styles measure, as well as frequencies, t-tests, and regression to answer the research question.

Table 1 shows reported experience with violence. Victimization is often under-reported, so participants were asked to indicate what they have witnessed, in addition to

Table 1 Experience with violence: witnessed and victimization

	Witnessed At Home	Witnessed At School	Victim At Home	Victim At School
Verbal Abuse	14%	57%	10%	10%
Emotional Abuse	10%	44%	07%	06%
Physical Abuse	08%	37%	05%	03%
Neglect	05%	29%	04%	04%

what they have personally experienced. Findings suggest verbal and emotional abuse are the most common and that students report more abuse occurring at school than at home. Over half (57%) say they have witnessed verbal abuse at school in the last year, and 10% admit to being victims both at school and at home. Over one third (37%) say they have witnessed physical abuse at school, and three to 5 % admit to being victims at school and at home.

Table 2 shows self-reported perpetration of violence. Participants are most willing to acknowledge perpetrating physical abuse: Nearly half (45.8%) say that have shoved or pushed someone this year and 39.7% say they have hit or slapped someone. This decreased with age (Middle school students push and shove more than high school students). Spreading rumors was the least reported behavior, with only 11.2% saying they have done it over the past year.

Bystander intervention is usually measured as intent to intervene. Most (95%) say they would try stop a friend or peer from abusing someone in the future. Intended bystander intervention was only related to one parenting style. A t-test was used to demonstrate a significant difference between students with authoritarian parents who say they would intervene ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 1.2$) and those who say they would not ($M = 2.8$, $SD = 1.4$), $t\,(575) = -3.1$, $p < .05$. Students with authoritarian parents are more likely to say they would intervene.

There was more variance in actual upstander intervention. Only 13.4% said they had actively intervened when confronted by a friend or peer abusing another, while 39.8% said they did not. The remaining 46.9% said they had not witnessed any bullying or abusive behavior by peers over the past year. A different pattern emerges when looking at students who say they actively intervened. The most likely group to intervene had authoritative parents. A t-test was used to demonstrate a significant difference between students with authoritative parents who say they would intervene ($M = 2.2$, $SD = 1.0$) and those who say they would not ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 0.8$), $t\,(328) = -2.7$, $p < .001$. Students with permissive parents were also more likely to intervene ($M = 1.7$, SD = 1.3) than not ($M = 1.4$, $SD = 0.8$), $t\,(328) = -1.8$, $p < .01$. It's also interesting to note that students who have been victims of abuse (physical, verbal, and social) were more likely to intervene ($M = 0.8$, $SD = 1.3$) than those who have not ($M = 0.3$, $SD = 0.9$), $t\,(340) = -3.4$, $p < .001$; and students who abuse others (physical, verbal, and social) are less likely to intervene ($M = 7.7$, $SD = 4.1$) than those who do not ($M = 9.8$, $SD = 5.4$), $t\,(339) = -3.8$, $p < .001$.

Table 3 shows regression analysis for variables predicting bystander intervention (upstanding). Table 3 only shows actual upstanding, because results for intended upstanding were not significant. Considering the entire group, the authoritative parentings style was the only significant predictor of actual bystander intervention. The three types of abuse are included to show no relationship with upstanding. Controlling for race and gender also yielded no significant differences. When controlling for gender, the relationship did not hold for males. Table 3 shows results for female participants. The adjusted r^2 increases, and the authoritative parenting style remains the only predictor.

Table 2 Experience with violence: perpetration

	M (*SD*)	Percent who have ever done
Hit or slapped someone	1.8 (1.3)	39.7
Shoved or pushed someone	2.0 (1.4)	45.8
Put someone down to their face	1.3 (1.0)	14.3
Made fun of someone to make others laugh	1.8 (1.4)	34.2
Spread false rumors about someone	1.2 (0.6)	11.2

Discussion

While victims of violence often under-report offenses, middle school and high school students acknowledged witnessing and experiencing a range of abuse at home and at school, with verbal abuse being the most common and physical abuse being the least reported. The under-reporting may result from efforts to maintain

Table 3 Summary of linear regression analysis for variables predicting upstander intervention

	Actual Upstander Intervention					
	Entire group (Adj. $r^2 = .20$, $N = 630$)			Female-only (Adj. $r^2 = .31$, $N = 201$)		
Predictor	B	SE β	β	B	SE β	β
Authoritative PS	.12	.05	.11*	.32	.11	.23**
Authoritarian PS	.01	.03	.01	.06	.05	.09
Permissive PS	.04	.04	.04	.13	.07	.11
Abuse/Physical	−.09	.07	−.07	−.19	.12	−.13
Abuse/Emotional	−.01	.07	−.01	−.04	.11	−.04
Abuse/Verbal	.00	.06	.00	.10	.10	.09

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

positive self-esteem, but how children and adolescents conceptualize what constitutes "abuse" must also be considered. Participants in the study freely acknowledged pushing and shoving (46%) and slapping and hitting peers (40%). Even the lowest reported abusive behavior, spreading false rumors, was reported at higher rates by students who acknowledged perpetrating the abuse on others (11%) than by students who acknowledge their own victimization (10%).

The current study contributes to the literature by focusing on upstanding versus passive or intended bystander intervention and parenting styles. Findings reveal an interesting disconnect between those who say they will intervene when confronted by friends or peers' bullying behaviors and those who actually have stepped in. Authoritarian parenting, often characterized as "my way or the highway," has been linked in the past with social and physical aggression in children and adolescents (Underwood et al. 2009). In the current study, children and adolescents with authoritarian parents are more likely to say they will intervene to help peers, but when asked if they actually have done so, they are the least likely group to follow-through. One way to interpret this is the harsh parenting style results in children who say "the right thing," out of fear of possible discipline or retribution, but haven't actually internalized the message. Children of authoritarian parents are the most likely to be familiar with this type of "bullying mentality," as their parents could have demonstrated similar behavior when disciplining them, so they may feel more comfortable in witnessing this type of situation. Although authoritarian parents do not necessarily display this type of behavior, out of all the parenting typologies, they are the most likely to do so. In some cases, authoritarian children might not even perceive certain bullying situations as a truly hostile or abusive situation that demands intervention, but rather see it more as a normal occurrence in everyday life.

In contrast, children with authoritative, even permissive parents show the opposite pattern: No significant difference in intent to intervene, but each is more likely to "step up" when actually confronted with bullying behavior. Children with authoritarian parents may be the most likely to intervene, because they tend to have greater social competence and higher self-esteem, which better equips them with necessary tools to address bullying situations. This finding showed a significant gender difference. When controlling for gender, the relationship between authoritative parenting and active upstanding increases when only female participants are included and becomes nonsignificant when only male participants are included. This is interesting to note, because traditional gender roles would predict female children and adolescents as victims and male children and adolescents as perpetrators and upstanders. Results from this study suggest a more nuanced reality. The data presented are mostly descriptive, so future research would be needed to better understand the dynamic.

Previous findings that parenting classes are effective at changing parenting styles are encouraging (Li et al. 2013). Paired with the current findings that children of authoritative parents are also likely to intervene to help peers, educating parents may help reduce school violence and increase upstander intervention when bullying occurs.

While not a part of this study, it is interesting to note that a significant increase in actual intervention by the end of the school year: Over 90% reported active intervention, and none selected the N/A option (They had not witnessed any abusive behavior by peers in the last 30 days). This suggests that the children and adolescents who participated in the training over the course of the year were more likely to intervene and also changed their perceptions about what is and is not abusive. This contributes to the literature by documenting the effectiveness of school-based upstander intervention programs.

Predicting the outcome of parenting styles and which children and adolescents will become active upstanders is clearly more complex than a simple model. The findings illustrate one more piece to the complex puzzle by documenting that children and adolescents who have experienced bullying themselves are more likely to intervene. In contrast, children who engage in bullying behaviors are less likely to step in to protect peers. These results are first steps in a complex puzzle that may never be solved. Future research could look more closely at the interactions between experience with abuse, perpetration of abuse on peers, and parenting styles. Taking a systems approach to the school and home environments may yield better inform violence prevention programs. Each piece of the puzzle makes tiny contributions. The current study was done in conjunction with school-based violence prevention efforts sponsored by a women's center. Findings suggest further partnerships with community organizations are needed, and that parent-education is as important as child-focused (school-based) programming to build safe communities.

In many ways, institutions such as schools that teach and discipline children on a daily basis are similar to the parenting structures that are found at home. Both parents and schools have a certain sets of expectations for children that determine what is acceptable behavior. Both can be too strict or too permissive and both can vary levels of warmth and emotional involvement. School districts as a whole and individual teachers can also adapt which "parenting style" they choose to implement in an effort to optimize the impact on developing children and adolescents. Authoritarian-type supervision could positively impact children, regardless of the parenting style used at home, yielding more children and adolescents intervening in bullying situations and possibly deescalating more extreme school violence.

A number of limitations should be considered when interpreting these results. Recent studies include a fourth parenting style (Neglectful). The instrument used did not differentiate between permissive and neglectful parenting.

Future research including neglect may provide additional insight into the relationship between parenting styles and upstander intervention. The findings are based on self-reports from children and adolescents. It's established that people of all ages under-report victimization. The data was gathered in the field, but is limited to one region in Pennsylvania. The results may not be generalizable to other children and adolescents. Additional research is needed with larger, more diverse populations. Collecting data in the field provides opportunities, but also limits the number of measures and items. Participants were gathered for education on school violence. Measures were limited to one sheet of paper prior to the session. Tough decisions had to be made, which included limiting the measure of upstander intervention to two items and not defining what constitutes abuse. Participants were able to ask questions, but additional items and written instructions would have been preferable. Many studies of parenting styles rely on responses from parents/caregivers. The current study collected responses only from adolescents. Both techniques represent perceptions of parenting styles. This is both a limitation and an opportunity to explore the topic from the perspective of the children and adolescents. Future work collecting from parents and caregivers would provide a broader perspective.

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Animal Studies This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

Conflict of Interest None to report.

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