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Parenting Styles and Family Communication as Correlates of Juvenile Delinquency

Montone White

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PARENTING STYLES AND FAMILY COMMUNICATION
AS CORRELATES OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

by

Montone White

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
Family and Human Development
ABSTRACT

Parenting Styles and Family Communication
As Correlates of Juvenile Delinquency

by

Montone White, Master of Science
Utah State University, 1997

Major Professor: Thomas R. Lee
Department: Family and Human Development

The goal of this study was to examine parenting styles and family communication as correlates of juvenile delinquency. A review of the literature was completed in the areas of parenting styles, family communication, and juvenile delinquency. The literature that was reviewed for this study was examined mainly from juvenile perceptions. This study was approached from a general systems theory perspective.

A sample of juveniles (N = 78) from Weber County, Utah, involved in the juvenile justice system completed a survey assessing their perception of parenting styles and family communication. The survey was a 25-item questionnaire measuring kindness, unkindness, communication, authoritarian parenting, authoritative parenting, and permissive parenting.
A correlation was computed to show the relationship between the variables. It showed that there were moderate positive correlations between kindness, communication, and authoritative parenting styles. Also there was a moderate negative correlation between unkindness, communication, and authoritative parenting styles.

While the sample limits generalizations of results, these preliminary findings provide interesting results for professionals who work with juveniles involved in the juvenile justice system.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For the experience and growth of a lifetime, I would like to say thank you to a few people whose kindness and gentle pushes were greatly appreciated.

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Thank you, Beth, for enduring through those early drafts, and Shelley for helping me finalize this product.

To my beautiful friend and wife, Julie, thank you for enduring most of all. Four years, two children, and lots of life changes, I owe you my world. Thank you and I love you.

Last, glory to God, for without him to lean on I would have quit hundreds of times.

Montone White
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CHAPTER I
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Parenting styles and family communication have been used in research to predict a young person’s development, which includes things such as academic achievement, self-concept, and peer associations (Baumrind, 1971, 1991a; Parish & McCluskey, 1994; Smetana, 1995). Findings suggest that the more positive the parenting or communication, the greater the youth’s chances are for developing positive life skills.

The study of juvenile delinquency has primarily focused on the personality aspects of the child and/or the makeup of the family (Anolik, 1983). There have been limited attempts to predict juvenile delinquency through maltreatment (e.g., child abuse, economic hardship, parenting style, marital satisfaction, and family communication; Anolik, 1983; Bolger, Patterson, Thompson, & Kupersmidt, 1995; Masselam, Marcus, & Stunkard, 1990; Schwartz, Rendon, & Hsiesh, 1994; Wilson, 1983). There is a need for more research in this area.

When positive parenting styles and good family communication (e.g., active listening skills, nonverbal communication) are combined, it usually results in juveniles who experience acceptance, autonomy, and positive adolescent adjustment and academic success (Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Masselam et al., 1990). By contrast, when negative parenting styles and poor family communication are combined,
youth may suffer low peer acceptance, negative adolescent adjustment, and poor academic careers (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Wilson, 1983). This negative pattern can result in juveniles becoming involved in problem behavior. This pattern may be responsible, in part, for the increase in caseloads in juvenile court probation in the state of Utah, an increase of 34.3% during the last 5 years (Haddon, 1996).

According to Baumrind (1993), socialization patterns are critical to an understanding of normal and deviant development. Since parents are the primary socialization agent throughout a child’s life, investigations of these patterns are warranted. Although poor developmental outcomes are not caused solely by less-positive home environment, parents can frequently attenuate the unattractiveness of conditions, social or genetic, that have not been created (Baumrind, 1993). This means that if parents accept the belief that the primary responsibility for adolescent outcomes are beyond their control, it will undermine their belief in their own abilities to effect positive changes in their adolescent. Thus, since parents loom so large in the socialization of adolescent behavior, parenting style and family communication should be examined from the adolescent perspective.

This study sought to examine the relationship between parenting style, family communication, and juvenile delinquency. To assess this relationship, a sample from the
juvenile court population in Ogden, Utah, was surveyed to gather information about their perceptions of parenting styles and family communication.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Parenting styles and family communication may have an impact on juvenile delinquency. The purpose of this review of literature is to explore the research in support of that relationship. The literature pertaining to parenting styles will show how it relates to adolescent development. The literature in the area of family communication will show how communication patterns relate to adolescent development. The literature on juvenile delinquency helps to link these areas together. A critique of literature will explore whether linking of the topics is possible. Finally, a theoretical perspective in which all three topics could be developed and the hypothesis of the study are provided.

Parenting Styles

Research in the area of parenting styles generally demonstrates that the type of parenting style has a strong impact upon children's and adolescent's development (Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1991a, 1991b; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Parish & McCluskey, 1994). Adolescents with high self-esteem generally state that their parents promote warm and loving environments at home. The term "warm" typically involves only positive feelings as expressed from a single individual in a family toward another individual, regardless of how the
second individual feels toward the first. Also, parental warmth is generally expressed in terms of the child’s perception of the parent-child relationship (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Paulson, Hill, & Holmbeck, 1991).

The work of Baumrind (1971) established the typology of parenting styles. According to Baumrind (1967, 1971, 1991a, 1991b), children of authoritative parents (e.g., those with high levels of both demandingness and responsiveness) have higher achievement than children of either authoritarian (e.g., high levels of demandingness but low levels of responsiveness) or permissive parents (e.g., low levels of demandingness), suggesting that high levels of both control and effect were more conducive to positive achievement outcome than were other parenting characteristics. Baumrind’s research set the standard for defining parenting styles. She (1991a, 1991b) later added the category of rejecting-neglecting (e.g., when parents are disengaged and neither demanding nor responsive) to her parenting scheme. Baumrind’s research was supported by the findings of Smetana (1995). Smetana’s research supported the same four parenting areas.

Authoritative parenting has been shown to be associated with children achieving better academic grades, improved self-esteem, better peer association and, more importantly to this study, less deviant behavior (Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1991a, 1991b; Bolger et al., 1995; Forehand & Nousiainen,
Juveniles whose parents are authoritative seem to perceive their families to be more balanced and more positive (Baumrind, 1971, 1991a, 1991b; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Masselam et al., 1990). They may be better prepared to demonstrate the tasks necessary for emancipation from the home. They may be more poised, active, and confident in themselves (Parish & McCluskey, 1994). Communication in these types of families is open and stresses a bidirectional flow of ideas (Feldman & Wentzel, 1995; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Masselam et al., 1990).

Authoritarian parents are demanding toward their children (Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1991a, 1991b; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Smetana, 1995) but not very responsive to their children's needs. These children achieve high academic success and generally positive peer associations, but they generally lack the self-confidence and the internal drive to be successful without external pressure. According to Shedler and Block (1990), fathers who are authoritarian and domineering, who squelch spontaneity and creativity, tend to have children who use drugs. Communication in these families seems to be more rigid with no room for flexibility.

Permissive parents are the opposite of authoritarian parents in that they are responsive but not demanding (Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1991a, 1991b; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Smetana, 1995). They are very attentive to their children
but often do not demand anything in return. Thus, their children may not develop a sense of ownership for their actions. These children tend to perform poorly when the pressure is solely on them. Also, the communication in these families tends to be chaotic. Further research by Paulson (1994) suggests that parents in the authoritarian and permissive categories may have a negative impact on their children regarding grades and educational outcomes for adolescents.

Finally, according to Baumrind (1991a, 1991b) and Smetana (1995), there are the rejecting-neglecting parents who are neither demanding nor responsive. The communication in these families is typically unsupportive and consists of judgement-based statements. Children are not accountable to anyone or for anything. Rejecting-neglecting parents tend to have children who are more susceptible to becoming involved in delinquent acts through the influence of delinquent associates (Anolik, 1983). Thus, if children in this category are involving themselves in acts or they are associated with delinquents, then they may end up in the juvenile justice system (Anolik, 1983). However, empirical evidence is lacking in this last category to support that juveniles with rejecting-neglecting parents are more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system. This is because the rejecting-neglecting parenting style occurs relatively infrequently among middle class samples (Smetana, 1995).
Family Communication

Family communication, as defined by Whitchurch (1993), views families as created and maintained more through communication than through structure (i.e., the way a family communicates defines them as a family more than if they are a traditional head of household male or nontraditional). Whitchurch (1993) stated three reasons why this came to be: (a) only 7% of U.S. families are traditionally nuclear (i.e., meaning the breadwinner father and the homemaker mother in their first marriage with two or more school-aged children); (b) individuals differ about what constitutes a real family, and those differences create controversy when others’ perspectives of what a family is differ from our own perspective; and (c) when traditional families are associated with “healthy” communication, it leaves a substantial proportion of the population from “nontraditional” families wondering if their family structure has doomed them to “unhealthy” communication.

Communication is central to family life today because the expectations for personal relationships have changed during this century (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1992). Many of the traditional functions of the family have been delegated to other social agencies (e.g., care of the elderly and education of children), though nurturance in the family remains constant. This nurturance function takes place
primarily through the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1992).

Communication between children and their parents can present some special problems for families. Communication accompanied by support and nurturance in the family can also become quite strained when children reach adolescence. According to Masselam et al. (1990), communication is linked to the effective climate of interpersonal interactions, and it is as families enter the adolescent life stage (i.e., when at least one child in the home is an adolescent) that one is likely to hear about poor communication. During this adolescent life stage, children tend to minimize the importance of their participation in events with their families, such as family outings or gatherings, in order to gain and achieve independence from parents.

There has been some research endeavoring to link the relationship between communication in families and delinquent behaviors. According to research conducted by Novy, Gaa, Frankiewicz, Liberman, and Amerikaner (1992), families with juvenile delinquents tend to be characterized as uninvolved with each other or lacking in intermember involvement. It seems that families that are uninvolved with each other could also be characterized as having little or no positive communication and being very unstructured and chaotic. There also have been several studies that have explored the positive outcome of the relationship between
adolescents and family communication in different areas such as school performance (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Masselam et al., 1990), college students' perceptions of family communication (Parish & McCluskey, 1994), and through the mother's and father's perception (Feldman & Wentzel, 1995; Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Smetana, 1995), all of which focused on the positive outcomes for adolescents when family communication is good.

The research conducted by Astone and McLanahan (1991) and Masselam et al. (1990) in the area of parent-child communication indicated that high levels of communication help children to achieve high academic success and that they will be much less likely to drop out of school or attend alternative schools. This means that as parents stay connected to their children's lives through positive communication, the children have a greater chance for success through their elementary and secondary school years.

A study of college-aged students by Parish and McCluskey (1994) on self-concept and evaluations of parents' communication and marriages indicated that if children perceived their parents' marriage as a good one with lots of positive communication, then the students had a positive self-concept. The students reported most often that firm discipline and open communication were the most important things in the home needed to help produce adolescents with positive self-concepts. This is interesting because one
would expect open communication to impact youth positively, but unless firm discipline is interpreted to mean consistent discipline, then the reader is left to come up with his or her own meaning of firm discipline. The authors did not offer an explanation. Thus, relating the meaning of students' reports of positive self-concept to parenting styles, one would expect that students with positive self-concepts to report a home environment with much open communication and that parenting styles in those homes, according to Baumrind (1967, 1971, 1991a, 1991b) and Smetana (1995), would be authoritative, with parents being both responsive and demanding.

Communication in families has been primarily examined through the mother's perception (Smetana, 1995). However, there are a small number of researchers who have looked at the father's perceptions also (Feldman & Wentzel, 1995; Forehand & Nousianinen, 1993; Gallimore & Kurdek, 1992). Research in this area was conducted on both boys and girls but was most significant for boys, indicating that if fathers display warmth, kindness, and acceptance with boys, then there is a decrease in aggressiveness in boys at school and home (Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993). Further, fathers who reported having good marriages had a significant positive impact on their son's social interaction with peers (Feldman & Wentzel, 1995).
The Gallimore and Kurdek (1992) research reported that parental depression is positively related to child/adolescents' depression and that most of the data collected came from mothers. However, they further stated that if families can be characterized as providing the setting for the development of depression (i.e., families in which one or more members can be clinically classified as depressed), then adolescents' depressive symptoms should also occur in families where both parents are displaying depressive symptoms. These adolescents would tend to characterize their parents' discipline style as authoritarian.

The Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1979) presents a way of classifying healthy and dysfunctional families on aspects of cohesion, adaptability, and communication. The model, according to Masselam et al. (1990), suggests that cohesion is the emotional bonding that family members feel toward each other. Adaptability is defined as the ability of the family to change its power structure, role relationships, and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress. The more extreme the levels of cohesion and adaptability, the more dysfunctional the family structure. For example, a family classified as disengaged and chaotic could be characterized as a family without strong lines of communication between family members, thus
creating a lack of support with much blaming and having no clear family goals. Communication is the key that allows families to move toward and maintain balanced levels of family cohesion and adaptability (Masselam et al., 1990). Without positive communication, adolescents are more susceptible to become involved in delinquent acts through the influence of delinquent associates (Anolik, 1983). Adolescents who experience supportive, open, free-flowing, nonproblematic communication between family members want to maintain their status within the family (e.g., they do not want to jeopardize their standing in the family by getting into trouble with delinquent associates; Anolik, 1983; Masselam et al., 1990).

Parenting Styles, Family Communication, and Juvenile Delinquency

The relationship of parenting styles, family communication, and juvenile delinquency has some empirical support, although it is limited. According to Anolik (1983), juvenile delinquents are exposed to socialization factors that are characterized by weak parent-child attachment. This means that early in a child’s life, he or she is exposed to factors both inside and outside the family that lead to delinquent patterns of adjustment or problem behaviors (Jessor & Jessor, 1977, 1984).
Problem behaviors as defined by Jessor and Jessor (1977, 1984), Donovan and Jessor (1985), and Jessor, Donovan, and Costa (1991) are behaviors that are socially defined as problems, a source of concern, or as undesirable by the norms of conventional society. The outcomes of these behaviors usually elicit some kind of social control response. Examples of problem behaviors include alcohol use, cigarette smoking, use of illicit drugs, delinquent behaviors, and precocious sexual intercourse.

Research conducted by Brack, Brack, and Orr (1994) supports the idea of problem behaviors leading to negative adolescent outcomes (e.g., jail, detention, contact with the juvenile justice system). They stated that adolescents' attachments to others (e.g., peers and parents), commitment to the values of social institutions such as church and school, involvement in conventional activities, and belief in conventional values and norms are negatively related to substance abuse and early sexual intercourse. This means that there may be a wide variety of issues or factors related to whether an adolescent will engage in problem behaviors.

Some other factors that can lead to the development of negative adolescent outcomes include economic hardships and child abuse (Baumrind, 1994; Schwartz et al., 1994). These factors by themselves do not necessarily mean that a child will become a juvenile delinquent. However, when negative
factors such as economic hardship and child abuse are combined with a negative parenting style such as that exhibited by a rejecting-neglecting parent, then children are more susceptible to becoming involved with other delinquent juveniles through association (Smetana, 1995). According to a study by Bolger et al. (1995), economic hardship has the highest association with low self-esteem, negative peer associations, behavior problems, school dropout, and delinquency.

A study conducted by Steitz and Owen (1992) on school activities and work and their effects on adolescent self-esteem found that lack of participation in school activities was a characteristic of most dropouts. They found that extensive time spent on part-time employment (over 20 hours per week) is associated with an array of deleterious outcomes (e.g., drug use, less involvement in school activities, lower academic achievement, and delinquent behavior).

Anolik (1983) and Schwartz et al. (1994) have also suggested that there is a common thread in delinquent-producing and child-abusing families. That thread is poor communication. Poor communication encourages an environment that allows or forces juveniles to satisfy their needs outside of the family (Anolik 1983). Thus, without clear positive patterns of established communication in the family, juveniles will depend more on their peers than
family members. However, boys who perceived their parents as having a good marriage, with high levels of positive communication, were significantly less likely to have strong peer ties, dated less, and were reported to not have participated in sexual intercourse (Feldman & Wentzel, 1995).

In a study by Boone (1991), levels of aggression in African American boys were compared to those of Caucasian boys. A result of particular interest was that of the boys' perception of their mothers' love. Boone's results indicate that from the boy's perspective, the higher the mother's emotional attitude toward her son in showing love, the less likely the boys were to develop aggressive behaviors. One way this may be interpreted is that if boys have a high perception of their mother's love toward them, then their aggressive behavior is not as developed and they have a greater chance of avoiding delinquent behavior. This interpretation is consistent throughout her results, but as she states,

The absence of data concerning the effect of the respondents' attitudes and behaviors on the mothers' emotional attitudes and disciplinary practices precludes a more comprehensive analysis of the results. (p. 223)

Boone further reported no ethnic differences in her findings between aggressive and nonaggressive boys.
Critique of the Literature

The literature on parenting styles is very thorough, and it tries to focus on what is positive within each style, except for the rejecting-neglecting parent, which suggests a negative parenting style with academic achievement (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Bolger et al., 1995; Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Masselam et al., 1990; Smetana, 1995), and parenting styles with positive peer outcomes (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Parish & McCluskey, 1994; Wilson, 1983). This shows that the stronger the correlation, the more likely an adolescent will be successful in college (Astone & McLanahan, 1991) or be involved with/become juvenile delinquents (Wilson, 1983).

According to Jones (1992), many approaches aimed at preventing adolescent problem behavior are based upon general assumptions with little or no empirical support. Except for the studies directly targeted at juvenile delinquency, most of the literature does not shed any light on preventative parenting. However, there is limited literature about parenting adolescents who are starting to get involved in delinquency. Authors like Gordon (1975) and Wahlroos (1995) have written books providing the lay person with step-by-step instructions on how to better parent adolescents who are starting to display problem behaviors.
In the juvenile delinquency literature, few articles were located that showed how parenting styles and family communication have an impact on juvenile delinquency. One such article was written by Wilson (1983), who tried to link parenting style and delinquency together. He attempted to document past studies that linked parental warmth and cohesiveness with consistent discipline. Wilson reported that studies by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck at the Harvard Law School and William and Joan McCord, both published in the 1950s, documented how parental warmth and cohesiveness impact juvenile delinquency. Wilson stated clearly in his article that "delinquent boys were about twice as likely as nondelinquent ones to come from homes with parental disciplinary practices that had been rated as erratic or lax" (p. 48). This means that consistent discipline from the parents is not present.  

There is limited research on the relationship between parenting style, communication, and juvenile delinquency. There are not nearly enough studies in either the criminal justice field or in the parent communication field to provide empirical support for the development of successful prevention/intervention strategies for those who work with parents of delinquent youth. Jones (1992) indicated one reason for this lack of success is that prevention/intervention programs and strategies lack clear, strong, theoretical underpinnings. However, there is some research
on protective factors and rule structuring, which may be the most helpful in curbing or stopping problem behavior/juvenile delinquency. According to Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, and Turbin (1995), the way to decrease the likelihood of engaging in problem behavior would be to reinforce strong religious commitments, have predictable parental sanctions, involve adolescents in activities that tend to be incompatible with or alternatives to problem behavior (e.g., family outings or involvement with church groups) and more support toward positive commitments with conventional institutions like schools. Parents who explain their rules and child-rearing decisions are more likely to have compliance and instrumentally competent children (Holmbeck & Hill, 1991).

Since the goal of this literature review was to find data that showed the impact of parenting styles, family communication, and juvenile delinquency, it is noteworthy that the three variables have not been better linked in the literature. Linking the three variables could help those who work with juvenile delinquents and their families.

**Theoretical Framework**

Research on the impact of parenting styles, family communication, and adolescent behavior has primarily been conducted from theoretical frameworks such as biosocial and psychosocial perspectives (Anolik, 1983; Baumrind, 1967,
1971, 1980, 1994; Youniss, 1980), identity theory (Grotevant, 1992; Jones, 1992; Stryker, 1980, 1981), attachment theory (Bretherton, 1993; Forehand & Nousianen, 1993), ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989; Lewin, 1931), and from a conceptual framework like the circumplex model (Masselam et al., 1990). Research from the general systems theory perspective is lacking. It seems that parenting styles and family communication's impact on juvenile delinquency could be productively addressed from this perspective. Understanding the importance of the whole family system in resolving or preventing juvenile delinquency seems critical to successful approaches for the prevention of problem behaviors or juvenile delinquency.

The biosocial and psychosocial perspectives alone would not be sufficient to thoroughly give insight to parenting styles, family communication, and juvenile delinquency. These perspectives would only show children/adolescent development through insight, training, habits, and values they adapt in their cultures (Baumrind, 1980). That is, when a child is born, there is a range of possibilities for that child. His or her potential is impacted by the interaction of the various values and training he or she receives from parents and peers. According to Youniss (1980), as children become adolescents, their peers help socialize them and are a major force in their development. The main characteristic
during this period of adolescent development is that as adolescents strive for independence from their families, they tend to drift or push away from family members and toward their peer group (Bigner, 1979).

According to Stryker (1980, 1981), identity theory suggests that individuals actively infuse roles with identities, commitment, and salience, which for adolescents is a time for exploration. Exploration is a time when adolescents search for who they are or what they are going to become in the future. This exploration time equates to work for adolescents. Grotevant (1992) stated that exploration, also defined as problem behavior for the adolescent, is aimed at gathering information about one’s self or one’s environment. Jones (1992) concurred that problem behavior may be a way to define one’s independence from parental control and serve to confirm or support one’s personal identity.

Exploring the bond that children have with their parents, especially with their mothers, can help determine the outcome of the child’s adolescent years. Bretherton (1993) documented well the work of Ainsworth and others in this area. According to her, attachment research has provided a framework for understanding the importance of parental sensitivity in the process of family relationship patterns. Thus, the association between parenting and the
parent/child attachment will contribute to adolescent adjustment (Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993).

The ecological theory of human development proposed by Lewin (1931) and later expounded upon by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989) is important to this concept of parenting styles, family communication, and juvenile delinquency. According to Bronfenbrenner (1989),

> every human finds both its meaning and expression in particular settings, which the family is a part. As a result, there is always an interplay between the psychological characteristics of the person and the specific environment; one cannot be defined without the other. (p. 225)

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989) further suggested that a meaningful analysis of participants’ behavior (e.g., adolescent behavior) is easiest when the researchers themselves have participated in similar settings or roles and if they are members of the subculture from which the participants come. This theory would be relevant when trying to explain adolescent behavior, if the researcher had similar experiences or background, but those who do not may feel inadequate. However, there are similarities in this theory and the general systems theory.

The theoretical origins of the general systems theory perspective are in the work of Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968). He argued that the physical and social sciences share a common concern with analyzing data in systemic terms. The key is that humans share the characteristic of
purposiveness, by which they act upon stimuli rather than responding to stimuli in a unilinear manner. This means that human behavior is circular or that it is based upon recursive feedback loops. Thus, if something happens in one part of a system, there will be waves that will be felt throughout the system.

According to Cooper and Upton (1990), the systems approach to human behavior is founded on the notion that the origins and purposes of human behavior are essentially interactional. This means that humans are neither free to behave as they choose nor do they act wholly as determined by environmental forces. From this perspective, we are the products of continuous interaction between internal and external influences. Further, our sense of social belonging makes the group the central focus of human activity.

When attempting to explain the family from the system perspective, the first thing that needs to be understood is that the juvenile and his or her family need to be looked at as a whole instead of in its component parts (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). In order to get to the meaning within a family, a researcher or practitioner cannot just singly evaluate the parental perspective or the child's academic progress or mother's and father's parenting style, but rather there must be an attempt to examine several variables impacting the child's make-up. Thus, in families, the system is more than just parent(s) and just the child(ren). This
wholeness is important because the parts do not move in isolation. What tends to happen is that as one part of the system is engaged and changing, it impacts the other parts. Families that are functioning normally tend to correct themselves without any problems. This is called self-reflexivity or the ability to make themselves and their own behavior the object of examination and self-correction (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993).

Using a systems approach does not preclude the fact that some problems may stem from an individual child or from another individual source, but it leads to looking at how the problem is processed within the system (Cooper & Upton, 1990). Through this approach, topics can be addressed from a socialization perspective. One begins to understand intrafamily processes such as family communication, family conflict, parental influence of adolescent peer selection, lack of warmth, and adaptation to change, when looked at wholly. This perspective can help researchers ask better questions about the factors predicting delinquency. It can also help practitioners address prevention of and intervention in delinquency more effectively.

Hypothesis

To examine the relationships between family communication, parenting styles, and severity of juvenile delinquent behavior and involvement in the juvenile
corrections system, one hypothesis was examined in this study.

1. There will be no relationship between parenting styles, communication, and juvenile delinquency.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Subjects

There were approximately 130 youth in the juvenile court system under the age of 19 from the Weber County area of Utah invited to complete a paper-and-pencil survey. The 78 juveniles who actually participated in the survey were comprised of a combination of approximately 32 nonprobationers (i.e., youth who are being seen by an intake officer and may or may not have to be sentenced by a juvenile court judge) and 46 probationers (i.e., youth who have been placed on formal court probation by a juvenile court judge for a period of no less than 3 months).

All participating youth had previous criminal offenses referred to the Second District Juvenile Court. Due to their age and involvement in the juvenile court process, both the juvenile and his or her parent(s) signed a consent form. The rules governing the confidentiality of the youth involved in the court process allow for only court personnel to have access to a juvenile's record unless there is permission from the court-assigned Juvenile Court Judge. To ensure confidentiality, the juveniles were identified by a number on the questionnaire. That number was recorded on a separate log along with their name and was accessible only by the author. The procedures for collecting data and ensuring
confidentiality, as well as the instrument to be administered, were also approved by the human subjects committee at Utah State University.

Description of the Sample

A description of the sample \((N = 78)\) showed the age ranged from 10 to 15 years old for nonprobationers with the mean age being 14.48 years and 15-19 years old for probationers with the mean age being 16.09 years (see Table 1). The ethnic background was composed of 68% White, 29% Hispanic, and 1% for both Black and other. There were 32 (41%) nonprobationers and 46 (59%) probationers who completed the measures. The male-female comparison were 72% male (43% nonprobationers, 57% probationers) and 28% female (36% nonprobationers, 64% probationers).

Procedure

The Second District Juvenile Court Ogden office receives about 300 new referrals in a 1-month period. This includes referrals on both nonprobationers and probationers. There were 70 referrals for nonprobationers during the first 2 weeks of March 1997 to Ogden juvenile court. All 70 were sent a letter (see Appendix A) inviting them to participate in the study. Only 32 nonprobationers actually came and participated in the study. The 46
Table 1

Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Nonprobationers</th>
<th>Probationers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of participant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>10-15 years</td>
<td>15-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>14.48</td>
<td>16.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of offenses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>1-41</td>
<td>3-68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>21.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
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<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
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<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

probationers who participated were from a list of 65 probationers who were invited to participate in the study. The 65 probationers were randomly selected from a list of all youth placed on probation during February 1997. The juveniles were invited to participate in the study via a mailed letter (see Appendix A). Once there, they voluntarily read and signed the informed consent, along with their parent(s) (see Appendix B), per the regulations of Utah State University and the Juvenile Court. Then each individual youth completed a paper-and-pencil survey (see
Appendix C). The student researcher was near to answer any questions. On two separate Saturdays in April 1997, the juveniles came to a community police office located in the Ogden City Mall to complete the survey. Upon completion of the survey, they voluntarily listened to a short presentation by the student researcher, a police officer, and a youth corrections representative on parenting, community policing, and local services aimed at helping troubled youth. There were three meeting times on the Saturdays between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. for the purpose of the survey and presentations. The survey time and presentation totalled approximately 45 minutes.

Instrument

After brief instructions and the signing of the consent form by the parents and the juvenile, the juvenile completed a 25-item Likert scale survey. The survey is a section of the Family Profile (Lee & Goddard, 1989), which has been revised and validated (Lee, Burr, Beutler, Yorgason, & Harker, 1996), and the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991).

The Youth Survey was comprised of four areas. The first three areas of the survey were comprised of 15 questions from scales measuring kindness, unkindness, and communication in families (Lee, Burr, Beutler, Yorgason, & Olsen, 1997). Reliabilities for these measures are
kindness = .88, unkindness = .89, and communication ability = .85 (Cronbach’s alpha), respectively (Lee et al., 1997).

The fourth area consisted of 10 questions from the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991). The questionnaire measures the permissiveness, authoritarianism, and authoritativeness of parents and can be used with both sexes and with adolescents. The reliabilities for these measures are permissiveness = .75, authoritarianism = .85, authoritativeness = .82 (Cronbach’s alpha), respectively (Buri, 1991).

The items used in the questionnaire were grouped by the four categories as such: questions 1, 5, 9, 13, and 17 were about kindness; questions 2, 6, 10, 14, and 18 were about unkindness; questions 3, 7, 11, 15, and 19 were about communication; and questions 4, 8, 12, 16, and 20-25 were about parenting style (see Appendix C).

An explanation of the four variables is: kindness meaning good or nice; unkindness meaning mean-spirited, not just the absence of kindness; communication meaning how members of families understand and express themselves with each other (Lee et al., 1996; Lee et al., 1997); and parenting styles relating to whether parents are authoritarian, authoritative, or permissive (Buri, 1991).
Data Analysis

Frequencies and descriptives were computed to generate means and standard deviations on all variables included in this survey (i.e., age, gender, ethnic background, number of offenses, kindness, unkindness, and communication). The statistical procedure best suited for analyses of this data was a correlation. This was done to test the relationship between the variables.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The Concurrent Criterion-Related
Validity of the Youth Survey

The internal reliabilities for the subscales in the Youth Survey were computed using the sample for this study. They were kindness = .82, unkindness = .69, communication ability = .72, permissiveness = .57, authoritarianism = .55, and authoritativeness = .66 (Cronbach’s alpha), respectively. The Cronbach alpha values are somewhat lower than in the published results of Lee et al. (1997) and Buri (1991).

Correlation

The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between parenting styles, family communication, and juvenile delinquency. Correlations were calculated between the measures of parenting style, family communication, juvenile offender status, and also number of offenses for each youth in the sample. The results are shown in Table 2.

Measures of kindness and unkindness have a negative moderate correlation of -.40. This indicates that the measures are measuring the same information correctly. Kindness also has a moderate correlation of .35 with communication and a moderate correlation of .46 with
Table 2

Correlations Among the Study Variables Juvenile Offender Status, Kindness, Unkindness, Communication, Permissiveness, Authoritative, Authoritarian, Offenses, Age, and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>JOS*</th>
<th>Kindness</th>
<th>Unkindness</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Permissiveness</th>
<th>Authoritative</th>
<th>Authoritarian</th>
<th>Offenses</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>.12</td>
<td>- .04</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.59***</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>- .40***</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.46***</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unkindness</td>
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<td>- .56***</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>- .04</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permissiveness</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.15</td>
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<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Offenses</td>
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<td>.34**</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Note. N = 78

* = Juvenile Offender Status
* = p < .05
** = p < .01
*** = p < .001
authoritative parenting style. This indicates that juveniles scoring their parents high on the kindness measure should score their parents high on communication and score them as authoritative on the parenting measure. Unkindness has a negative moderate correlation of -.31 with communication and authoritative parenting style. This shows that as juveniles perceive their parents as unkind, they score them lower on the communication and parenting measures. Authoritative parenting style and authoritarian parenting style have a weak positive correlation of .38 in this sample, which is supported in the literature (Baumrind, 1971; Buri, 1991). The number of offenses has a moderate positive correlation of .34 with level of probation status, which suggests that there is some validity to the notion that as the number of offenses increases, the level of probation status increases. Age has a weak positive correlation with level of probation status, unkindness, and offenses. In this sample, although age has a positive correlation with the variables level of probation status, unkindness, and offenses, age is not the strongest predictor of what level youths will be on in the system or how unkind they are perceiving their parents, nor how many offenses they might have on their record. Finally, gender has a negative weak correlation with communication. This suggest that being male or female in this sample may affect how a young person communicates with his or her parents. Further, results of noteworthiness were that there
were no statistically significant correlations between permissiveness, authoritative, authoritarian, or communication and juvenile offender status or the number of offenses.

Summary of the Findings

The overall results of the correlation matrix support the partial rejection of the null hypothesis. There is a relationship between parenting styles, communication, and juvenile delinquency. There are several statistically significant correlations using these variables with this population at this time. The number of correlations in these results shows a relationship among the variables. Thus, one could expect that a similar population of youth would have similar results, using the same survey. The correlation matrix showed that juveniles who perceive their parents to be kind scored their parents high on the communication scale and the authoritative scale, and low on the unkindness scale.

The fact that there were no statistically significant correlations between permissive, authoritarian, authoritative, or communication and juvenile offender status or the number of offenses suggests that overall there is no difference between the two groups, meaning that as a juvenile enters the juvenile justice system, he or she could be thinking and behaving similarly.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study shows that the relationship of parenting styles and family communication on juvenile delinquency has some validity for researchers and practitioners who work with juvenile delinquent populations. Although there is no clear link between the fields, there are significant works available to develop a theoretical background for working with delinquent adolescents. Studies completed by Donovan and Jessor (1985) on problem behavior in adolescence, Brack et al. (1994) on dimensions underlying problem behavior, Wilson (1983) on raising delinquent youth, and Anolik (1983) on family influence upon delinquency are just a few of the studies that would help new professionals prepare themselves for working with juvenile delinquents.

Discussion

The correlations that were calculated show the weak to moderate relations among kindness, unkindness, communication, and authoritative parenting. This helps support that the measures are measuring the information correctly. The correlations of most values were the variables of kindness, communication, and authoritative parenting. Their correlation was moderate and positive. This relationship is supported in the literature by Baumrind
(1993), Buri (1991), Smetana and Asquith (1994), and Lee et al. (1997). There was a weak positive correlation between number of offenses and the permissive parenting measure. This may suggest that as the number of offenses increases for juveniles, they perceive their parents as more permissive in their parenting styles; or it may indicate that permissive parenting practices are related to youth being involved in more delinquent activities.

The sample was the one limitation that limits the use and implications of the results of this study. The sample was limiting in the following ways:

1. The two groups did not differ much. There was limited variability in the variables. This may be because the youth in this sample were homogeneous. That is, once they become involved in the juvenile justice system, their behavior and/or their thinking patterns are similar.

2. The sample was small ($N = 78$). The goal was to have 50 cases in each category. Due to the responsiveness of this particular population and their parents, only 32 nonprobationers and 46 probationers participated in this sample.

3. The sample was truncated in that it was exclusive to youth involved in the juvenile justice system from Weber County, Utah, only.

4. The ethnic background of the participants was primarily White (53 cases out of 78).
5. This sample did not gather information for socioeconomic status (SES), grade point average (GPA) of participants, or marital status of the parents.

Recommendations

Although generalizations to other populations would not be feasible, this research could be expanded if the sample consisted of youth involved in the juvenile justice system as well as an age-approximate group of youth that are not involved in the juvenile justice system. Because in this sample the two groups did not differ much in their answers on the questionnaire and the variability was similar, a group difference could prove to be statistically significant, and perhaps this line of research could then lend itself to really helping those interested in intervention/prevention of juvenile delinquency implement significant ways to impact that population. Also, if a major collaborative effort were to occur among the four universities in Utah, several school districts, and the juvenile court system, maybe the relationship among parenting style, family communication, and juvenile delinquency could be clearly assessed. This collaborative effort would help to obtain more ethnic minorities and females in a sample. It would also help to define parenting styles in Utah and how adolescents perceive their parents.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in Survey

To: Parents of ______________________

From: Montone White, Graduate Student USU
       Family and Human Development Department
       Emphasis on Adolescent Behavior

Your son/daughter has been selected to participate in an important survey that will help address adolescent behavior. I would like you and your son/daughter to come to the Ogden Juvenile Receiving Center, 2315 Washington Blvd. on Saturday, April ____, 1997, to take the survey. While there you will also receive information on Community Police, Youth correction Diversion programs, and Parent Education programs in this area.

Your total time and participation will take about 30-45 minutes. Please come and be involved with this important survey about adolescent behavior. You are scheduled for the time of ________.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 629-0661.

Thank you,

MONTONE WHITE
Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

Teenage Perception of Family Communication
Consent Form

We are requesting permission for your child to complete a survey that relates to important adolescent outcomes.

The survey that your child will complete will ask his/her feelings about his/her family. The hope is that this will provide information to the Juvenile Court for the development of new programs to strengthen families and better serve the public.

________________________

Agreement:

By our signatures below, we agree to allow our son/daughter to participate in the study by completing the survey. We realize we can stop the survey at any time without any consequences to our son/daughter’s case.

If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact Montone White at (801)629-0661.

________________________

Youth Signature  Parent(s) Signature

Date:____________________ Date:____________________

Dr. Thomas Lee, FHD
Appendix C

Survey

YOUTH SURVEY
FEELINGS ABOUT YOUR FAMILY

Please put the number next to the statement that best describes your feelings about your family. For example, if the statement said, "We fight/argue a lot in our family," you would mark 1 if your family never quarrels, 4 if it sometimes happens, or 7 if it seems like it always happens.

<p>| | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Almost</td>
<td>Once in a While</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>Almost</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. We do nice things for each other.
2. Some family members are rude to others.
3. Some members of our family are poor at communicating with others.
4. While I was growing up my parents felt that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do.
5. We give each other compliments.
6. Some family members are verbally abusive with one another.
7. Some members of our family have difficulty expressing themselves.
8. Whenever my parents told me to do something as I was growing up, they expected me to do it immediately without asking any questions.
9. Family members sacrifice for each other.
10. Some family members are very cruel to one another.
11. Some members of our family have difficulty understanding others.
12. As I was growing up, once family policy had been established, my parents discussed the reasoning behind the policy with the children in the family.

13. Family members give of their time for one another.

14. Some family members are very critical of others.

15. Some family members can't put their thoughts into words very well.

16. My parents have always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever I have felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable.

17. We are compassionate.

18. Some family members ridicule others.

19. We have the skill to communicate effectively.

20. My parents have always felt that what children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want.

21. As the children in my family were growing up, my parents consistently gave us direction and guidance in rational and objective ways.

22. My parents feel that most problems in society would be solved if parents would not restrict their children's activities, decisions, and desires as they are growing up.

23. As I was growing up, my parents let me know what behavior they expected of me, and if I didn't meet those expectations, they punished me.

24. My parents always felt that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don't do what they are supposed to as they are growing up.

25. As I was growing up I knew what my parents expected of me in the family and they insisted that I conform to those expectations simply out of respect for them.