

## **DO CONSERVATIVE PARENTS NURTURE CONSERVATIVE CHILDREN?**

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To test the notion (derived from early studies with the *F*-scale and the TFI scale) that conservative parents nurture conservative offspring (and that liberal parents nurture liberal offspring) the modified Conservatism Scale was administered to a sample of New Zealand schoolchildren and their parents. Conservatism/liberalism in parents is associated with the presence of similar attitudes in their children. The greatest attitudinal similarities were between fathers and their sons and mothers and their daughters. It is suggested that children identify with and introject the attitudes of the same-sex parent.

*Keywords:* conservative parenting style, nurture, influence on children.

A central thesis of the authoritarian personality researchers (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) concerned the power of family background as a determinant of personality development. Specifically, they predicted that autocratic family structures would be associated with the development of authoritarian personality patterns and that equalitarian family structures would be associated with the development of democratic personality patterns in children.

The Traditional Family Ideology scale and the *F*-scale have recently been criticized on the grounds that they measure acquiescence response set more than "authoritarianism" (Peabody, 1966). Thus, the previously-established positive correlations concerning family background and personality development are now in doubt.

Recently, the Conservatism Scale (Wilson & Patterson, 1970) has been developed in order to overcome criticisms leveled at the *F*-scale. The economy and simplicity of the *C*-scale make it suitable for a reexploration of the assumed relationship between autocratic family structures and the development of authoritarian attitudes in children. Indeed, a factor analysis by Boshier (1972) reveals the *C*-scale to be measuring factors not unlike the major characteristics of autocratic families as hypothesized by *F*-scale proponents (conventionalism, authoritarian submission, exaggerated sex role, extreme emphasis on discipline, and a moralistic rejection of impulse life).

So far as we are concerned, the way in which parents attempt to control child behavior has been hypothesized as an antecedent and consequent of authoritarianism. A circular pattern of cause and effect may be postulated as operating with respect to childrearing practices and the development of conservative/liberal attitudes in children.

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We predicted that conservative parents would nurture conservative offspring and that conservative mothers would be more inclined (than liberal mothers) to nurture conservative daughters, while conservative fathers would be more inclined (than liberal fathers) to nurture conservative sons.

## METHOD

The first sample comprised 34 boys and 42 girl school-leavers who were at a residential course in Wellington as applicants for Volunteer Service Abroad. This sample (hereafter referred to as the "children") accepted an invitation to take part in a research project, the first step in which consisted of their completing the *C*-scale.

The children supplied their parents' home addresses and all the parents, except for those who were overseas, were sent a letter, with a request that they complete an enclosed *C*-scale. The letter was sent immediately, before the children could return home and possibly contaminate returns by discussing the research with their parents. The parents (like their children) were cooperative, with 87% responding within 10 days and a further 9% after a reminder by telephone. The nonresponse rate of 4% was far below that which other researchers had received in postal surveys (cf. Travers, 1969, p. 199). This is the second report derived from these data. The first, concerning the nature of the "generation gap", particularly the attitudinal areas where the gap is large and where it is small, is available elsewhere (Boshier & Taylor, 1972).

## RESULTS

To test the notion that conservative parents nurture conservative children, Pearson product moment correlation coefficients between the boys' and fathers' *C*-scores, boys' and mothers' *C*-scores, girls' and fathers' *C*-scores, and girls' and mothers' *C*-scores, were calculated. These and other coefficients between boys' and parents' *C*-scores (i.e., the mean of the mother's and father's *C*-scores), and girls' and "parents'" *C*-scores are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN THE CONSERVATISM SCORES OF CHILDREN  
AND THEIR PARENTS

	<i>n</i>	<i>Fathers</i>	<i>Mothers</i>	" <i>Parents</i> "
Boys	28	0.31*	0.17	0.27
Girls	31	0.17	0.33*	0.30
"Children"	39			0.27**

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .02$ ; both one-tailed

Seventeen parent/child dyads were excluded from the above analysis because one or more members of the family were absent (deceased, separated, or divorced). This left available for analysis 31 girls' C-scales and 31 parents' (i.e., 31 mothers' and 31 fathers') and 28 boys' C-scales and 28 parents' (i.e., 28 mothers' and 28 fathers').

In Table 1 it can be seen that the original formulation concerning the cyclic nature of autocratic family functioning is essentially correct although significant inter-sex and infamily differences occur. For example, conservative mothers tend to nurture conservative daughters ( $r = 0.33, p < .05$ ), and conservative fathers tend to nurture conservative sons ( $r = 0.30, .05 < p < .10$ ). These findings also suggest that both mothers and fathers have less control over the attitudinal development of opposite-sexed offspring than the same-sexed parent.

Data provided by Douvan and Adelson (1966) (corroborating the above findings), concerned with the choice of in-family and out-family adult models, demonstrate that boys, when asked who they admire most and would like to resemble, overwhelmingly choose their fathers, whilst girls choose their mothers. Attitudinal similarities between fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters, are therefore probably a function of identification and the introjection of same-sex adult attitudes. Overall, the relationship between the presence of conservative/liberal social attitudes in "parents" is associated with the presence of similar attitudes in their "children" ( $r = 0.27, df = 57, p < .02$ ).

Infamily social attitudes such as those identified in the present study are undoubtedly mediated by factors such as the magnitude and direction of attitudinal differences between parents, dominance-submission patterns of the husband and wife, and the differential amounts of contact between father and child as compared with mother and child. Factors such as these would need to be accounted for in any future research on this question.

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