

Parenting Styles And Adult Psychological Functioning: The Mediating Role Of Self-Compassion In Resilience Development

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Abstract

While parenting undeniably shapes child development, the long-term echoes of early caregiving on adult resilience and self-compassion remain under-examined. This study investigated whether self-compassion serves as a developmental bridge between retrospective parenting perceptions and adult resilience in a sample of 99 adults. Using a cross-sectional design, we found that authoritative parenting from both mothers and fathers significantly predicted adult resilience ($r = .36$ for both). Self-compassion was found to partially mediate this relationship, accounting for 29.9% of the effect for fathers and 32.9% for mothers. Crucially, maternal and paternal influences were virtually identical, suggesting that the core qualities of warmth and structure matter equally regardless of parent gender. These findings advocate for a holistic view of resilience, as one that recognizes self-compassion as a vital, yet single, thread in a complex tapestry of developmental outcomes.

Keywords: parenting styles, self-compassion, resilience, authoritative parenting, intergenerational transmission

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How do we develop the capacity to bounce back from adversity? For most, the answer begins in the quiet moments of childhood. The ways parents respond to our early struggles, with warmth or criticism, with autonomy support or rigid control, sculpt our internal relationship with ourselves. These experiences influence whether we meet adult failures with kindness or harsh self-judgment. Despite their importance, the developmental origins of self-compassion and resilience remain under-researched. This gap is significant because, unlike fixed traits, both parenting behaviors and self-compassion are malleable targets for clinical intervention.

I. Self-Compassion: Neurobiological Foundations And Attachment Origins

Self-compassion is the behavior of offering oneself with the same kindness and empathy one would offer a friend or loved one. Neff (2003) identified three core components: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. From a developmental perspective, self-compassion possesses a distinct neurobiological signature where functional neuroimaging reveals that self-compassion practices activate the left temporal pole and insula the regions involved in parental nurturance. This supports Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory assertion that early relationships create internal working models for emotion regulation. In this sense, self-compassion acts as an internalized secure base during times of failure.

The Current Study

This study examines how maternal and paternal parenting styles predict adult outcomes and whether self-compassion serves as a mediating mechanism. We hypothesized that (H1) authoritative parenting from both parents would predict resilience; (H2) self-compassion would correlate with resilience; (H3) self-compassion would mediate the link between authoritative parenting and resilience; and (H4) authoritarian and permissive styles would show weaker associations.

II. Method

Participants

We recruited 99 adults (ages 18-65+) via Prolific. The sample was 68% White, 15% Black, 7% Asian, and 6% Hispanic. Participants were highly educated (85% holding at least a bachelor's degree) and came from diverse geographic locations across the U.S. Participants were recruited through Prolific and completed an online survey administered via Google Forms. After providing informed consent, participants completed demographic items followed by the PAQ, SCS-SF, and RS-14. Participation took approximately 15-20 minutes. The study received institutional approval from the university IRB.

Measures

The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991) measured retrospective perceptions of maternal and paternal parenting styles. The Resilience Scale-14 (RS-14; Wagnild, 2009) assessed psychological resilience. The Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form (SCS-SF; Raes et al., 2011) evaluated current levels of self-kindness and mindfulness. All scales demonstrated strong internal consistency in our sample ($\alpha = .82-.93$).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistencies for Study Variables

Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max	α
Resilience (RS-14)	99	80.45	11.17	38	98	.92
Self-Compassion (SCS-SF)	99	39.71	8.09	16	60	.86
Father Authoritarian	99	35.81	7.43	10	50	.84
Father Authoritative	99	32.93	8.96	10	50	.88
Father Permissive	99	27.24	8.52	10	43	.82
Mother Authoritarian	99	35.05	8.74	12	50	.82
Mother Authoritative	99	34.53	8.22	10	50	.87
Mother Permissive	99	28.38	7.96	10	48	.89

Note. N = 99. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha.

Table 2
Zero-Order Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Resilience	—							
2. Self-Compassion	.64***	—						
3. Father Authoritarian	.24*	-.05	—					
4. Father Authoritative	.36***	.18	-.03	—				
5. Father Permissive	.28**	.11	.23*	.73***	—			
6. Mother Authoritarian	.18	-.07	.62***	.17	.39***	—		
7. Mother Authoritative	.36***	.20*	.09	.65***	.56***	-.03	—	
8. Mother Permissive	.30**	.14	.26**	.58***	.66***	.27**	.61***	—

Note. N = 99. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Mediation Analysis: Self-Compassion as Mediator

Predictor	Total (c)	Direct (c')	Indirect (a×b)	Sobel z	% Med	R ²
Father Authoritative	0.359***	0.251**	0.107*	1.73**	29.9%	0.47
Mother Authoritative	0.357***	0.240**	0.117*	1.89**	32.9%	0.47

Note. N = 99. All coefficients are standardized. * $p < .10$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Note. N = 99. All path coefficients are standardized regression weights (β). Total effect = effect of parenting style on resilience. Direct effect = effect of parenting on resilience controlling for self-compassion. Indirect effect = mediated effect through self-compassion (path a × path b). % Mediated = percentage of total effect explained by mediation. R² = variance in resilience explained by full mediation model. * $p < .10$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

III. Results Correlation Analyses

Self-compassion and resilience showed a strong positive correlation ($r = .64, p < .001$), sharing 41% common variance. Authoritative parenting from both fathers ($r = .36$) and mothers ($r = .36$) showed identical moderate correlations with resilience. Surprisingly, permissive parenting also positively predicted resilience (fathers: $r = .28$; mothers: $r = .30$). Conversely, authoritarian parenting showed no significant relationship with self-compassion (fathers: $r = -.05$; mothers: $r = -.07$), suggesting that "control" may be interpreted differently than Western theory assumes.

Mediation Results

Using the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach, we found that self-compassion partially mediated the relationship between authoritative parenting and resilience. For fathers, the indirect effect through self-compassion accounted for 29.9% of the total effect ($z = 1.73, p < .01$). For mothers, self-compassion accounted for 32.9% of the effect ($z = 1.89, p < .01$). Both models explained approximately 47% of the variance in resilience ($R^2 = .47$). This study utilized a cross-sectional design, mediation findings should be interpreted cautiously and do not establish temporal causality.

IV. Discussion The Multi-Faceted Nature Of Resilience

A central finding is that self-compassion explains only about 30% of the link between parenting and resilience. This suggests that authoritative parents cultivate resilience through several concurrent "soulful" pathways: cognitive mechanisms like internal locus of control, social pathways creating secure attachment patterns, and neurobiological resilience shaping the HPA axis.

Equivalence of the Parental Voice

Our data revealed that maternal and paternal influences on resilience were virtually identical ($r = .36$). This challenges the historical "mother-centric" focus of developmental psychology and underscores that core relationship qualities of warmth, structure, and respect do matter equally regardless of the parent's gender.

The Permissive Surprise

The positive correlation between permissive parenting and resilience suggests the warmth in this style may be protective even when structure is lacking. In some contexts, less parental control may be interpreted as trust in a child's autonomy rather than disengagement.

V. Limitations And Conclusion

The cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences, and retrospective reporting bias may influence childhood recollections. Future research should utilize longitudinal designs and diverse samples to test cultural moderation. Ultimately, parenting shapes the very architecture of the adult soul. While authoritative parenting provides a foundation for resilience, self-compassion is just one of many internal resources fostered by this style.

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