THESIS

PARENTAL ALIENATION, AUTHORITARIAN PARENTING, AND THEIR EFFECTS ON ATTITUDES IN ALIENATED CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

PARENTAL ALIENATION, AUTHORITARIAN PARENTING, AND THEIR EFFECTS ON ATTITUDES IN ALIENATED CHILDREN

Research has yet to investigate the attitudes of alienated children other than that of the valences towards their parents. The present study investigated the relationship between parental alienating behaviors (PABs), authoritarian parenting style, and their possible effects on attitudes in children who have been alienated from a parent by another. Participants enrolled in introductory psychology courses (n = 656) were recruited to participate in an online, self-report survey that measured indicators of parental alienation, authoritarian attitudes, prejudicial attitudes, need for closure, splitting, and retrospective ratings of parenting styles and PABs. Results indicated that alienated children did not score significantly higher than children who were not alienated on authoritarian attitudes, and that splitting was not a significant mediator in this relationship. However, results showed a significant relationship between PABs and authoritarian parenting, and a significant correlation between splitting and need for closure. Future research should further investigate attitudes in alienated children.

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PARENTAL ALIENATION, AUTHORITARIAN PARENTING, AND THEIR EFFECTS ON ATTITUDES IN ALIENATED CHILDREN

Numerous studies have examined individual factors relating to prejudicial attitudes such as cultural and racial prejudice, discrimination, and ethnic hatred (e.g., Altemeyer, 1988; Duckitt & Sibley, 2007; Ekehammar et al., 2004; Pratto et al., 1994). Splitting, or describing one group as "all good" and another as "all bad," has been found to play a role in developing and maintaining cultural and racial prejudicial attitudes (e.g, Born, 1998; Chenget al., 1998; McRaeet al., 2007) and is also a cognitive feature of children who have been alienated from a parent. Parental alienation (PA) occurs when a child allies strongly with one parent and rejects a relationship with their other parent for reasons that are not legitimate (Bernet & Lorandos, 2020). To date, attitudinal splitting among alienated children has only been examined for parental attitudes (i.e., whereby the alienating parent is perceived as all good and the targeted parent as all bad); However, this attitudinal splitting may extend to an alienated child's worldview and social and political attitudes.

Given the fact that approximately four million parents in the U.S. (at least 2-3% of all parents) have at least one child who is moderately to severely alienated from them (Harman et al., 2019), parental alienating behaviors that result in the splitting of parental attitudes may be an unexplored social-developmental antecedent of prejudicial attitudes. The purpose of this research is to examine whether controlling and coercive parental alienating behaviors used by an alienating parent to turn their child against their alienated parent create a socialization context that affects personality in such a way that can foster prejudice.

Parental Alienation

Parental alienation can occur in families where the alienating parent, who often holds more power than the alienated parent, engages in abusive and destructive behaviors to sabotage the relationship between the alienated parent and child (Harman, Bernet, & Harman, 2019). The alienating parent (sometimes referred to as the preferred parent) is with whom the child strongly allies with whereas the child rejects a relationship with the alienated parent (sometimes referred to as the rejected or targeted parent) without legitimate justification. It is important to note the difference between estrangement and alienation, as they can appear similar but have an important distinction: estrangement occurs when the negative feelings towards the rejected parent are justified, such as in the case of abuse or neglect. With alienation, the negative feelings are not due to abuse or neglect, are disproportionate in the response versus what behavior is reported in the relationship, and are typically caused by a third party (i.e., the other parental figure; Harman & Biringen, 2016; Smithet al., 2018). Furthermore, when parents persistently reciprocate conflictual behavior (e.g., parental alienating behaviors) towards each other and hold similar levels of power, loyalty conflicts occur and the child tries to maintain relationships with both parents (Bernet et al., 2016). There are several behavioral indicators that PA has occurred (e.g., campaigns of denigration and spreading of animosity; Gardner, 1985), and this thesis will focus on one of them: splitting.

Splitting

Splitting, or lack of ambivalence toward the rejected parent, is one of the eight criteria used to diagnose PA (Gardner, 1985) in which thoughts, feelings, and emotions regarding parents are polarized into two categories: the alienating parent is described as all good whereas the alienated parent is described as all bad (Blagg & Godfrey, 2018). Splitting is a distinguishing feature of

parental alienation because most abused, neglected, or estranged children still perceive the abusive parent with some level of ambivalence (Baker & Schneiderman, 2015; Bernetet al., 2018). Splitting is a maladaptive, cognitive defense mechanism that helps protect against anxiety stemming from parental conflict, and this dissonance is resolved by aligning with the preferred parent and strongly rejecting the other parent (Bernet et al., 2018). When there is continual warfare (i.e., high conflict) between parents, children often find it difficult to maintain affection for both parents at the same time. Children typically resolve the anxiety (e.g., the dissonance caused by previous beliefs about the other parent clashing with fabrications about the other parent created by the alienating parent) by the mechanism of splitting, gravitating to an enmeshed relationship with one parent and strongly rejecting the other parent (Bernet et al., 2018). In fact, one of the recommended therapies for alienated children focuses on reducing splitting by helping to separate the child's feelings from their parents' feelings and minimize the black-white thinking that develops because of this cognitive and emotional splitting process (Stahl, 2001). Splitting as a cognitive defense mechanism is also characteristic of those with borderline (e.g., Brown, 1980; Greenet al., 1985; Gunderson, 1984; Kernberg, 1967) and narcissistic (Siegel, 2006; Watson & Biderman, 1993) personality disorders, wherein relationships or interpersonal events are viewed in "all or nothing" terms in order to avoid feelings of rejection (Blagg & Godfrey, 2018). In contrast, splitting occurs among alienated children due to dynamics of the parental relationships rather than as a symptom of a psychopathology/psychiatric disorder, although such a disorder can develop over time if the parental alienation is not remedied (Harman et al., 2018).

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the psychological splitting and cognitive dichotomization seen in alienated children carries over into other domains of perception (i.e.,

political attitudes and attitudes towards outgroup members), and if this is related to a specific cognitive style: need for closure. To date, the bulk of psychological research on developing attitudes and political socialization has focused on the influence of parenting/intergenerational transfer (e.g., Allerbecket al., 1979; Dalton 1980; Dalton, 1982; Glass et al., 1986; Jennings & Niemi, 1968; Jennings & Niemi, 1982; Jenningset al., 2009; Tedin, 1974; Westholm, 1999), attitudinal structure (e.g., Converse, 2006; Duckitt, 2001; Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Eysenck, 1954/1999; Feldman, 2003; Jostet al., 2009; Kerlinger, 1984), and behavioral genetic influences (e.g., Alfordet al., 2005; Eaves & Hatemi, 2008; Fowler, Baker, & Dawes, 2008; Hatemi, 2006; Hatemi et al., 2009; Hatemi et al., 2011; Hatemi, Medland, & Eaves, 2009; McCourt et al., 1999; Stößel et al., 2006). If this attitudinal split that occurs within alienated children towards their parents generalizes to other attitudinal domains, we will have a greater understanding of the long-term impact of parental alienation on children's personalities, as well as a better understanding of other psychosocial factors that contribute to the formation of social and political attitudes and potential prejudice.

Parenting Styles and Children's Cognitive Schemas

Parental influence on children's attitudes and perceptions has lifelong impact. Early attachments with parental caregivers form the foundation for children's future adult relationships, and these attachment styles impact how the adult child interacts with relationship partners (Birnbaum et al., 2006; Fraley et al., 2013). Research has shown that attachment orientations help explain variations in the construal and experience of romantic relationships (see Feeney, 1999, for a review). For example, people who have secure attachment are more likely than those who are insecure to experience satisfaction and to report high levels of commitment in their marital and dating relationships (e.g., Frei & Shaver, 2002; Tucker & Anders, 1999).

Parenting styles, the constellation of parents' attitudes and behaviors toward children and the emotional climate in which the parents' behaviors are expressed (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). also affect children's attitudes, academic achievement, and career choices (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parenting styles consist of two primary dimensions: demandingness, which is the extent to which parents show control and demand obedience, and responsiveness, which is the extent to which parents show warmth, affection, and acceptance and involvement (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). When combined, these dimensions create four prototypical parenting styles: authoritative (high demandingness and responsiveness), authoritarian (high demandingness and low responsiveness), permissive (sometimes known as "indulgent;" low demandingness and high responsiveness), and neglectful (low demandingness and low responsiveness; Aunola et al., 2000). Studies have shown that authoritative (i.e., warm, but consistent) parenting is related to positive outcomes in children while the other parenting styles (e.g., authoritarian) have shown varying but generally higher levels of negative outcomes such as low self-esteem, substance abuse, and delinquency (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Steinberg et al., 1994).

Parenting styles have been described as patterns typical of certain families which mainly focus on variable oriented approaches (i.e., the relationship between the different types of parenting styles and outcome variables; Baumrind 1989, 1991). Parenting styles have also been studied by identifying homogenous subgroups that share similar patterns of characteristics (i.e., a person-oriented approach; Hinde & Dennis, 1986; Magnusson, 1992) and by parental reports or observational data (Baumrind, 2013). Additionally, *Q*-sorts have been used to classify parent and child behavior (e.g., Baumrind, 1971; Baumrind & Black, 1967; Baumrind et al., 2010; Block, 1965). More recently, researchers have begun to use "domain-specific" models (i.e., multifaceted

and situationally determined) to describe parenting styles (e.g., Grusec & Davidov, 2010; Smetana, 1997; Smetana, 2017). With these models, parents can deploy different practices and strategies in various situations.

Authoritarian Parenting

In contrast to more responsive parenting styles, authoritarian parenting styles typically involve attempts to shape and control attitudes and behavior of the child in accordance with a theological or ideological standard of conduct. In addition, preserving order and traditional family structure is highly valued among authoritarian parents (Baumrind, 1966). Authoritarian parents tend to expect an absolute standard of the child without explaining, listening, or providing emotional support. This approach has been characterized by verbal hostility or punitive discipline strategies (Chao, 1994; Robinson et al., 1995).

Several studies have found that authoritarian parenting is positively associated with internalizing and externalizing problems and higher levels of delinquency and conduct disorders among children (e.g., Aunola et al., 2000; Querido et al., 2002; Hiraga, & Grove, 1994; Mason et al., 2003; Nihof & Engels, 2007; Steinberg, 2001; Steinberg et al., 2006; Steinberg et al., 1994). Aunola and colleagues (2000) suggested that the strict and unresponsive parenting typical of authoritarian parents limits the growth of independence of the child and leaves the child with uncertainty in making their decisions. Consequently, the lack of warmth, affection, and guidance associated with authoritarian parenting can leave children with some degree of difficulty in responding to and coping with problems they encounter compared to those who receive more authoritative parenting.

Parental Alienation and Authoritarian Parenting. One can easily draw parallels between the controlling, demanding, and coercive behaviors that alienating parents engage in to that of

behaviors characteristic of authoritarian parents (e.g., demanding obedience, restricting autonomy of the child, preservation of order, and that the child should accept their word as truth; Baumrind, 1966). For example, alienating parents use many forms of direct and indirect aggression such as expressive aggression, coercive control, gaslighting, and other threats of physical or emotional aggression to control their child and the targeted parent (Harman et al., 2018; Harman et al., 2019). Alienating parents also engage in manipulative strategies like asking the child to spy on the targeted parent or promoting unquestioned loyalty and dependence (Harman & Matthewson, 2020).

Alienating parents have been found to have different parenting styles than parents who are the target of their behaviors (e.g., Baker, 2006; Godbout & Parent, 2012; Harman et al., 2016; Siegel & Langford, 1998; Warshak, 2019). For example, alienating parents may use more harsh, rigid, and unempathetic parenting styles than alienated parents (Kelly & Johnston, 2001; Lund, 1995, Rand, 1997). Alienated children also experience internalizing and externalizing problems (Johnston et al., 2005), like children whose parents employ an authoritarian parenting style. Likewise, alienated children also often experience low self-esteem, substance abuse disorders, insecure attachment, anxiety, depression (Aloia & Strutzenberg, 2019; Baker, 2005; Rand, 1997; Verrochio et al., 2016), and have difficulty trusting themselves or others (Harman et al., 2018). Furthermore, one common reason alienated parents may be initially rejected by the child is a result of rigid or controlling parenting styles of the alienating parent (Godbout & Parent, 2012).

One of the most studied outcomes associated with authoritarian parenting styles is the development of an authoritarian personality in children or adolescents (e.g., Danso, Hunsberger, & Pratt, 1997; Duriez & Soenens, 2009; Duriez et al., 2007; Duriez et al., 2008; Fraley et al., 2012; Peretti & Statum, 1984). To date, it is unclear whether the behaviors of an alienating

parent that result in the alienation of a child create a similar outcome. In other words, is the splitting in alienated children that results from the alienating behaviors of a parent associated with authoritarian attitudes which are further associated with polarized attitudes toward other outgroups in society? The primary purpose of this thesis is to test this question.

Authoritarian Personality

After World War II, psychologists investigated what made people pledge support to fascist governments and figureheads. The notable work to come from this period was Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford's (1950) *The Authoritarian Personality* which outlined the psychological bases for supporting anti-Semitism, ethnonationalism, and extreme social and economic conservatism (Duckitt, 2015). Even in Baumrind's (1971) original typologies of parenting styles, she acknowledged the influence of the "authoritarian personality syndrome" and its relation to authoritarian parenting. Drawing heavily on psychodynamic theory, Adorno and colleagues (1950) hypothesized that the widespread economic hardship in pre-World War II Europe led to more harsh and punitive parenting (i.e., authoritarian parenting styles) which ultimately resulted in resentment and hostility in children towards authority. However, this resentment and hostility could not be expressed by the children because of fear of and dependence on the parents. Repressed anger and hostility were replaced by an uncritical idealization of the parents and conventional authority and was displaced and directed towards other targets seen as sanctioned by conventional authority: deviant out-groups and minorities.

To measure authoritarian personality, Adorno and colleagues (1950) developed the F-scale (fascism) personality test. The unconscious impulses and inner conflicts were proposed to be represented in the nine traits associated with the authoritarian personality:

- conventionalism (rigid adherence to conventional middle-class values),
- authoritarian submission (a submissive, uncritical attitude towards authorities),

- authoritarian aggression (tendency to condemn, reject, and punish people who violate conventional values),
- anti-intraception (opposition to the subjective, imaginative, and tender-minded),
- superstition and stereotypy (preoccupation with the dominance– submission, strong–weak, leader–follower dimension; identification with power, strength, toughness),
- destructiveness and cynicism (generalized hostility, vilification of the human),
- projectivity (disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world; the projection outward of unconscious emotional impulses),
- sex (an exaggerated concern with sexual 'goings-on'; Duckitt, 2015).

Although the F-scale was used to measure authoritarian personality in research for over three decades, the scale was not without criticisms. There was inconclusive evidence regarding the psychodynamic propositions of the theory, the validation efforts for the scale failed to control for sociodemographic variables, and the scale was prone to acquiescence bias because all the items were positively worded (Duckitt, 2015; see Altemeyer, 1981 for an extensive review of the methodological issues with the F-scale). Therefore, there was room for improvement in measuring authoritarianism.

Alternative Theories of the Authoritarian Personality

Altemeyer (1998) proposed an alternative explanation for authoritarian personality, which he dubbed Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA). Rather than positing that authoritarianism is only learned because of strict, harsh, and punitive parenting, Altemeyer (1981) argued that socialization through social learning from family and peer influences (e.g., exposure and reinforcement of information and behavior within those social groups) as well as situational factors (e.g., education) were antecedents of RWA. Although parents may be the most important source of attitudes relating to RWA, it was thought to emerge mostly during adolescence (Altemeyer, 1988). Altemeyer (1981) refined the original nine components of an authoritarian personality down to three covarying facets: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. Stemming from this idea, Altemeyer (1981) established a scale to measure these three dimensions and attitudinal expressions of RWA. It is important to note that "right-

wing" in this case does not refer to a particular political ideology, but instead to the original conception of the left-right ideological dimension in which the right symbolized "liking for or acceptance of social and religious hierarchies" and the left with the "equalization of conditions through the challenge of God and prince" (LaPonce, 1981, as cited in Jost and Amodio, 2012). In this same vein, right-wing authoritarians tend to submit to conventional, established authorities, the social norms these authorities promote or endorse, and show aggression towards deviant outgroups that are sanctioned by authority to perpetuate this established hierarchy.

Altemeyer (1996) described high RWAs as being less likely to make correct inferences (i.e., accurately remember material they just read and scoring highly on critical reasoning tests), more likely to demonstrate compartmentalized thinking and hold self-contradictory ideas, and more likely to assume the world is inherently dangerous. High RWAs are more likely to be scared and self-righteous, which can instigate and disinhibit aggression (Altemeyer, 1998). There is a substantial body of research showing the predictive power of authoritarianism as it relates to prejudice and ethnocentrism (Altemeyer, 1996), support for war (Cohrs & Moschner, 2002; McFarland, 2005), and restriction of human rights (e.g., Altemeyer 1996; Cohrs et al., 2005; McFarland & Mathews, 2005). However, the main idea of interest in Altemeyer's (1981) conception of authoritarianism was authoritarian submission (i.e., deference to conventional/traditional authority).

Tajfel's (1974) social identity theory can help explain why the experience of a child being alienated from a parent is a similar process by which racism is propagated. Just as people who identify strongly with an ingroup stigmatize those outside of the group, alienated children's negative beliefs cause them to discriminate against, stereotype, and denigrate the targeted parent. It is clear there are parallels between authoritarian parenting and parental alienating behaviors in

their aggressive, rigid, and coercive natures, but how does this relate to authoritarian attitudes? Might elevated levels of authoritarianism in alienated children be due to the attitudinal splitting they experience regarding their parents?

Parental Alienation and Authoritarian Attitudes. Right wing authoritarianism may reflect individual differences in cognitive styles present in alienated children that extend to their worldview and political attitudes. Authoritarianism represents the intense hatred and rejection of outgroups as sanctioned by authority (e.g., the alienating parent's actions towards the targeted parent and the effects on the child) and perpetuating in-group dominance (e.g., the child further aligning with the preferred parent and denigrating the rejected parent). If alienated children do tend to score higher in RWA, it might also be related to higher levels of prejudice and attitudes associated with political conservatism. For instance, RWA has correlated strongly with political party affiliation, pro-capitalist attitudes, punishment of deviants, racial prejudice, homophobia, and victim blaming (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996, 1998). Because parental alienation is estimated to affect a substantial part of the population (Harman et al., 2016; Harman et al., 2019), this may reveal a significant factor in developing prejudicial attitudes in young adults.

Beyond Personality: Motivational Goals or Values

> *"Individuals are not merely passive vessels of whatever beliefs and opinions they have been exposed to; rather, they are attracted to belief systems that resonate with their own psychological needs and interests, including epistemic, existential, and relational needs to attain certainty, security, and social belongingness" (Jost, 2017, p. 167).*

Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003) posited that motivated social cognition can be used to explain the relationship between people's beliefs and the motivations for holding said beliefs. There are several bases of motivational concerns for political attitudes and beliefs, and

belief systems are adopted in part to satisfy individual psychological needs. For instance, political conservatism has a particular set of epistemic, existential, and ideological motives that serve to manage fear and uncertainty. Even with *The Authoritarian Personality,* Adorno et al. (1950) and Frenkel-Brunswick (1948) argued that certain cognitive styles were related to authoritarianism such as cognitive rigidity and intolerance of ambiguity.

Epistemic motives involve a search for security and meaning in an often ambiguous and complex world, and these motives are represented by dogmatism/intolerance of ambiguity, uncertainty avoidance, and need for order, structure, and closure (Jost et al., 2003). Much research has focused on need for closure as it relates to political conservatism (e.g., Chirumbolo, 2002; Jost et al. 2003; Chirumbolo et al., 2004; Leone & Chirumbolo 2008; Van Hiel et al., 2004). Need for closure is a more recent construct established by Webster and Kruglanski (1994) which has been defined as the "desire for a firm answer to a question, any firm answer as compared to confusion and/or ambiguity" (Kruglanski, 2004, p. 6). Individuals who score higher on the Need for Cognitive Closure scale tend to gravitate towards belief systems (i.e., conservatism) that offer simplicity and clarity (Jost et al., 2009). These epistemic motives are most closely related to the cognitive styles as argued by Adorno and colleagues (1950) and Rokeach (1960).

Ideological motives also involve a search for security but help reduce uncertainty and reduce feelings of threat or fear by embracing a particular ideological belief system (Adorno et al., 1950; Rokeach, 1960; Altemeyer, 1998). These motives can be represented by self-interest, system justification, and social dominance orientation (e.g., perpetuating group-based dominance; Jost et al., 2003). Of course, these motives can relate to other belief systems aside from conservatism (e.g., liberalism or libertarianism), but people can be motivated by this

uncertainty to uphold the preferred social system which perpetuates the status quo and inequality (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Lastly, existential motives involve the search for certainty regarding one's own existence and coping with crises inherent to the human experience. Jost and colleagues (2003) suggested that these motives are best represented by desires to maintain or enhance self-esteem, minimize fear of loss, and terror management. Terror management theory (Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberget al., 1997) posits that culture, worldviews, and ideological belief systems are constructed and serve as buffers to reduce the anxiety brought on by the thought of death as all humans must cope with. Though, several researchers have failed to find the same relationships that Greenberg and colleagues (1994) originally hypothesized or replicate their findings (Klein et al., 2019; Leary & Schreindorfer, 1997). A large-scale replication effort involving 21 labs by Klein and colleagues (2019) found no significant overall effect for increased worldview defense when priming mortality salience compared to a control condition. Some research has suggested that when confronted with thoughts of their own mortality, authoritarians have more negative evaluations of a potential interaction with someone whose attitudes were dissimilar to their own, and high scoring authoritarians are more rejecting than low scoring authoritarians when exposed to mortality salience conditions (Greenberg et al., 1990). While Burke and colleagues' (2013) meta-analysis found strong effects for mortality salience on explicit political attitudes ($r = .50$), there have been no replication attempts specifically for the effects of mortality salience on political attitudes. However, the epistemic, existential, and ideological motives discussed here are all interrelated and contribute to the tendency to hold conservative belief systems which are closely related to authoritarian attitudes.

Motivational Goals Associated with Authoritarian Attitudes and Parental Alienation

The focus on motivational bases of attitudes is not to say that personality factors are also not important—A motivated social cognition framework could be more useful than personality characteristics in identifying connections between authoritarianism and parental alienation. It is possible to measure authoritarianism in children who have been alienated from a parent, but it does not get at the root of why they may hold these attitudes. For instance, research suggests that close-mindedness is a strong predictor of generalized authoritarianism (i.e., right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation; Berggren et al., 2019; Sinclair et al., 2020). What cognitive styles might be found among those who have been alienated and score high in authoritarianism? Need for closure might be the most salient motivational factor to investigate in relation to authoritarianism and parental alienation, as it measures preference for defined order and structure and a desire for firm or stable knowledge (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Similarly, Lauriola, Foschi, and Marchegiani (2015) found that right-wing radicalism and close-mindedness contributed to ambiguity intolerance and black-and-white thinking, which are also cognitive styles of many alienated children (Harman et al., 2018). I predict that need for closure will be closely related to the psychological splitting that is demonstrated in alienated children.

Just as splitting is a defining criterion of diagnosing parental alienation, intolerance of ambiguity might be a significant predictor of authoritarian attitudes in alienated children. Chirumbolo (2002) suggested that those with a high need for closure may process less information than those for a low need for closure that causes them to see the world around them in a more simplistic manner. Furthermore, need for closure relates to the conventionalism and rigidity and desire for preservation of existing or traditional structures of authority in authoritarian and conservative attitudes. Kruglanski (1996) postulated that high need for closure

may induce an abhorrence toward change in general, which can lead to holding more conservative attitudes or beliefs. I believe that the punitive and coercive parenting present in parental alienation is influential in developing authoritarian attitudes and related cognitive styles (e.g., highly dogmatic, intolerant of ambiguity, and high need for order, structure, and closure). While this study cannot assess whether this parenting is crucial in development, it can assess whether this parenting is associated with development.

The Present Study

To my knowledge, no studies to date have investigated the political attitudes or related cognitive styles among those who have been alienated from a parent by another parent. Understanding not only individual differences, but the motivational factors that may influence someone to score highly in RWA might help researchers understand the cognitive styles fostered by alienation, the effects it may have on children's attitudes, and consequently a significant portion of prejudice that may exist. I tested the following hypotheses in this study:

1. Participants who report a parent who has engaged in more unreciprocated PABs than their other parent (i.e., unilateral PABs rather than reciprocated PABs as in loyalty conflicts) are more likely to have manifestations of parental alienation than those who do not.
2. Splitting of parental attitudes will be moderately associated with the Baker Alienation Questionnaire.
3. Participants who report having authoritarian parents will score higher on RWA than participants who do not report having authoritarian parents.

4. Participants who report a parent engaging in more unreciprocated PABS will report the same parent as having a more authoritarian parenting style than participants with parents who do not engage in PABs or engage in them to a similar extent as the other parent.
5. Participants with higher RWA will have higher need for closure than those with lower RWA.
6. There will be positive association between authoritarianism, need for closure, and prejudicial attitudes.
7. Participants who had a parent engaging in unreciprocated PABs and who were authoritarian in parenting style will be more likely to have more authoritarian attitudes than participants with authoritarian parenting styles only.
8. Parental attitude splitting will moderate the relationship between exposure to unreciprocated PABS and authoritarian parenting and RWA.
9. Participants who report higher levels of splitting of parental attitudes will report a higher need for closure than those without split attitudes.
10. Unreciprocated PABs and authoritarian parenting will be correlated, and both will correlate with parental attitude splitting. Splitting will moderate need for closure, which in turn is correlated with RWA and prejudice.

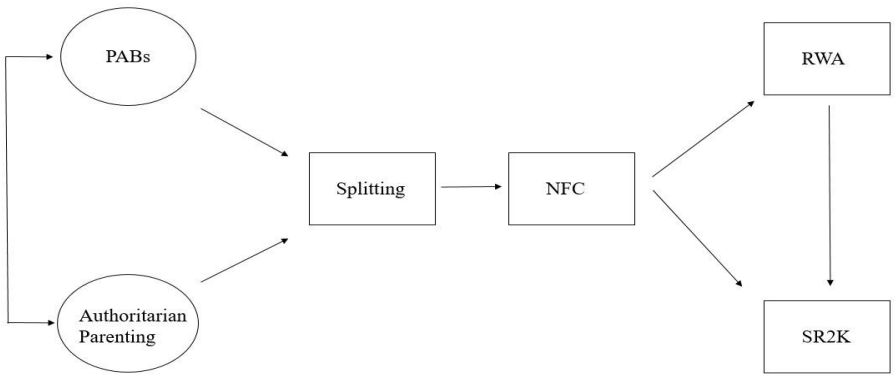

Figure 1

Hypothesized input path

METHOD

Participants

A sample of 656 undergraduate students (79% female, 20% male), where the majority were between the ages of 18-21 (n = 548, 94%), participated in the present study. Four cases were removed due to the respondents being under the age of 18. The sample was majority white (n = 541, 84%) and non-Hispanic (n = 529, 81%). Additionally, 21% of participants reported their biological parents as currently divorced (n = 135) and 2% reported theirs as separated (n = 15). The students were enrolled in first and second-year psychology courses in the Fall 2020 semester and recruited through the Psychology Department's research pool. Full demographic information can be seen in Table 7.

I created an online survey using Qualtrics software and linked the survey to the research pool. Participants were presented with a brief description of the study which explained that the purpose was to investigate parental experiences and social attitudes. Next, participants were presented with a cover letter explaining the risks and benefits of participation and for those who consented they proceeded to complete the survey. Participants first completed a demographics questionnaire and then moved to the self-report scales described below. Finally, after completing the survey, participants read a debriefing script describing the study and were thanked for their participation. Participants did not receive extra credit, but completion of the study did count towards their research participation requirement.

Materials

The control variables in the models were of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, parents' marital status, self-reported political orientation and affiliation, political identity centrality, and the Personality Assessment Questionnaire (Rohner & Ali, 2016b). Social and

economic conservatism, splitting, self-reported perceptions of parenting styles, parental alienating behaviors, indicators of parental alienation, authoritarianism, prejudicial attitudes, and need for closure represented the variables of interest in the present study.

Splitting

The short form of the adult Parental Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) is a 24-item, self-report questionnaire designed to measure splitting and assess adults' retrospective remembrances of parental acceptance or rejection towards each parent in their childhood (Rohner & Ali, 2016a). The PARQ has four scales: warmth and affection, hostility and aggression, indifference and neglect, and undifferentiated rejection. This measure explains splitting by quantifying the strong acceptance toward the alienating parent accompanied by the strong rejection of the targeted parent. Each item is scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from (4) "almost always true" to (1) "almost never true." Scores on the short form range from a low of 24 (maximum perceived acceptance) to a high of 96 (maximum perceived rejection; Rohner, 2005). Khaleque and Rohner (2002) found in a meta-analysis of 51 worldwide studies that the alpha coefficient for the adult PARQ was .95, and the validity was assessed to be acceptable across numerous samples in United States, Australia, and Italy (Gomez & Rohner, 2011; Senese, Bacchini, Miranda, Aurino, Somma, Amato, & Rohner, 2016). To assess the difference between realistic estrangement and parental alienation, the PARQ-Gap score can be used, which is simply the difference between the PARQ score for each parent. Bernet, Gregory, Rohner, and Reay (2020) found that using a PARQ-Gap score of 90 (on the long form of the PARQ) as a cut-off point was 99% accurate in distinguishing alienated children from non-alienated children. For the short form, a PARQ-Gap score of 29 or higher typically indicates severely alienated children from non-alienated children (D. Rohner, personal communication, June 18, 2020).

Parenting styles

Alkharusi, Aldhafri, Kazem, Alzubiadi, & Al-Bahrani (2011) developed a short version of Buri's (1991) 30-item Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ). The Parental Authority Questionnaire-Short (PAQ-S) measured adult's childhood perceptions of their parents' parenting styles along the authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive dimensions. There are two forms: one for the father and one for the mother with both rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree.) Having a shorter measure of the PAQ is beneficial to this to help reduce respondent fatigue. The authors found the PAQ-S fit both Baumrind's (1971) typologies of parenting styles and demonstrated adequate validity and internal consistency by significantly correlating with the PAQ and having a Cronbach's alpha ranging from .65 to .75. This scale used a variable oriented to approach to describing parenting styles (i.e., the patterns typical of each parenting style). However, Alkaharusi and colleagues' (2011) measure was initially assessed using a sample of students from Oman. More recent studies that have used the PAQ-S have gathered samples from American adults (but did not report fit or intercorrelations; Odenwelleret al., 2014) and Australian and Polish adults demonstrating questionable fit (Elphinstone et al., 2015). However, in addition to the brevity of the PAQ-S, it might be beneficial to test this measure in another sample of American adults.

Parental alienating behaviors

The Baker Strategy Questionnaire (BSQ) is comprised of 20 items regarding specific behaviors that parents engage in to involve their children in parental conflict (i.e., parental alienation; Baker & Chambers, 2011). Each item is answered on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (always.) Total scores are calculated as sum scores, ranging from 0 to 80. Baker and Chambers (2011) reported a high internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$); Baker and Eichler (2016) noted

that the scale was normally distributed and had high internal consistency. In addition to the PAQ-S, the BSQ affords a clearer picture of parental alienating behaviors and delineate respondents whose parents were engaged in loyalty conflicts, where both parents engage in negative parenting behaviors and involve the child, from those who had one parent engaging in largely unilateral PABs.

Parental Alienation of the Child

The Baker Child Alienation Questionnaire (BAQ; Baker & Eichler, 2016) consists of seven items asking the respondent to report whether or how often they exhibited each of the eight behavioral characteristics of parental alienation toward each parent, as described by Gardner (1998). Responses were coded by evaluating each pair of items (the item that referred to the mother and the identical item that referred to the father) as "alienation consistent" if the responses for the mother and father were at opposite extremes of the scale. This resulted in 14 variables, each coded as 1 = alienation consistent or 0 = not alienation consistent.

Authoritarianism

The Very Short Authoritarianism (VSA) scale (Bizmic & Duckitt, 2018) is a 6-item measure used to assess the three components of right-wing authoritarianism as identified by Altemeyer (1996), scored with a nine-point Likert scale ranging from "very strongly agree" to "very strongly disagree". The VSA has strong internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha exceeding .70 in all samples; additionally, the VSA scale correlated strongly with the established measure of RWA (Bizmic & Duckitt, 2018).

Prejudicial Attitudes

The Symbolic Racism 2000 (SR2K) scale (Henry & Sears, 2002) is an 8-item measure containing non-Likert and Likert items designed to measure contemporary racial issues, and the

idea that a new, modern, and symbolic form of racism has overtaken blatant, "old-fashioned" racism. Henry and Sears (2002) indicated that the scale has good internal consistency, construct validity, and discriminant validity. Additionally, the SR2K scale had generalizability in college student and general population samples, which may extend to ethnic minority groups as well as whites. This SR2K scale was used to measure explicit (although covert) racial attitudes as opposed to using implicit measures such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

Need for Closure

The Need for Closure Scale (NFCS) was designed to measure individuals' motivation regarding information processing and judgement (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Typically, this is a 41-item, self-report scale which uses a six-point rating scale (1 = strongly agree to 6 = strongly disagree). Because need for closure is one of several measures in this study, a brief measure was preferred. More recently, Roets and Van Hiel (2011) created an abridged, 15-item version of the NFCS; the authors found similar psychometric properties with strong reliability and high internal consistency when compared with the full NFCS, so this abridged measure was used in the current study.

Analyses

To analyze the data and investigate my hypotheses, I used several methods. The crucial step was to operationalize how participants were "alienated." Normally, parental alienation is diagnosed when families are referred by the court to couple and family counselors (Weigel & Donovan, 2006), but there have been several assessment tools developed over the last few years that rely on survey responses. For example, respondents who have a PARQ-Gap score of at least 29 are more likely to be alienated from a parent than those without a gap (e.g., divorced or neglected children; Bernet et al., 2020), so the gap score was used in the current study to identify

those adults who were likely alienated as a child. It is important to note that splitting (lack of ambivalence) is only one manifestation of parental alienation. Accordingly, the BAQ was also used to assess all the eight manifestations of parental alienation (one of which is lack of ambivalence) and identify those adults who were alienated as children.

I used the BSQ to differentiate alienating parents from parents engaged in loyalty conflicts and parents with low or no conflict. These categories were then used to compare the outcomes of interest (i.e., self-reported parenting styles, parental alienating behaviors, authoritarianism, prejudice, and need for closure) across groups (i.e., alienated or not alienated and authoritarian parents or non-authoritarian parents). All preregistered hypotheses and the statistical models used to test them are presented in Table 8.

RESULTS

I present all the variables for the analyses, along with how specifically each were scored and/or calculated, in Table 1. Additionally, the full dataset, R Notebook, and R HTML output are available on the OSF (https://osf.io/4b27f/?view_only=3058f19c28ed4b30869e4d2738cfe0fc).

Table 1

Calculation of study variables

Variables used in analysis and variable name	Type of variable	Calculation
Baker Alienation Questionnaire (BAQ)	Continuous	Summary score ranging from 0-14. Qualitatively coded each pair of items (the item that referred to the mother and the identical item that referred to the father) as "alienation consistent" if the responses for the mother and father were at opposite extremes of the scale. This resulted in 14 variables, each coded as 1 = alienation consistent or 0 = not alienation consistent (Baker, Burkhard, & Albertson-Kelly, 2012).
Authoritarian Parenting (from the Authoritarian subscale on the Parental Authority Questionnaire - Short scale)	Continuous	Summary score
Need for Closure (from the Need for Closure Scale)	Continuous	Summary score
Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA; from the Very Short Authoritarianism scale)	Continuous	Summary score
Symbolic Racism 2000 (SR2K) Scale, used as a measure of prejudice	Continuous	Summary score
PARQ-Gap (represented degree of splitting of parental attitudes)	Continuous	Absolute value of the difference of PARQ Mother and Father scores ([PARQ-Father - PARQ-Mother])
Conflict (Alienating-Loyalty Conflict-Low/No Conflict Parents; from the Baker Strategy Questionnaire)	Categorical: 0 = Low/No Conflict 1 = Loyalty Conflict 2 = Alienating Parent	Grouped by score on Baker Strategy Questionnaire: 0-1 = Low/No Conflict 2-10 = Loyalty Conflict 10+ = Alienating Parent (Baker & Chambers, 2011)
Authoritarian/Not Authoritarian Parent	Dichotomous: 0 = Not Authoritarian Parent 1 = Authoritarian Parent	Created cutoff score for Parental Authority Questionnaire-Authoritarian subscale. If participant had a score that was at least one SD above the mean for either parent, coded as a 1 (having an authoritarian parent.)

Unreciprocated PABs + Authoritarian Parenting	Categorical: 0 = Non-alienated children with non-authoritarian parents 1 = Non-alienated children with at least one authoritarian parent 2 = Alienated children with at least one authoritarian parent	If Conflict = 0 or 1, & Authoritarian Parent = 0, then coded as a 0. If Conflict = 0 or 1, & Authoritarian Parent = 1, then coded as 1. If Conflict = 2, & Authoritarian Parent = 1, then coded as 2.

I conducted exploratory data analyses to obtain descriptive statistics and graphs of the variables to check for statistical assumptions (e.g., linearity). No transformations were needed other than reverse coding and sum scores. My analyses utilized independent samples t-tests, correlations, and univariate and multivariate linear regression, regression with mediation, and path analysis. All analyses were conducted using R (RStudio Team, 2020). Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the main study variables. All variables presented normal values of skewness and kurtosis.

Table 2

Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. VSA	3.63	1.29							
2. NFCS	52.81	15.65	.08* [.00, .16]						
3. BAQ	0.63	1.42	-.03 [-.11, .05]	.09* [.01, .17]					
4. BSQ	13.21	17.59	.03 [-.05, .11]	.20** [.12, .27]	.29** [.21, .36]				
5. Authoritarian Father	17.37	8.49	.06 [-.02, .14]	.38** [.32, .45]	.09* [.01, .17]	.25** [.18, .32]			
6. Authoritarian Mother	17.80	8.49	.10* [.02, .18]	.43** [.36, .49]	.13** [.05, .20]	.34** [.27, .41]	.55** [.50, .61]		
7. SR2K	11.50	5.02	.39** [.32, .46]	.39** [.32, .45]	.04 [-.03, .12]	.10** [.03, .18]	.37** [.30, .44]	.39** [.32, .46]	
8. PARQ Gap	9.53	13.98	-.07 [-.15, .01]	.12** [.04, .19]	.59** [.54, .64]	.35** [.28, .41]	.24** [.16, .31]	.18** [.10, .26]	.09* [.02, .17]

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014). * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.

In distributions, 35.7% of participants (n = 225) reported severe exposure to PABs while 29.2% reported no exposure (n = 184) and 36.5% (n = 221) reported low to moderate levels of exposure to PABs. This distribution is similar to that of what Baker and Chambers (2011) reported in their study using the BSQ. For the BAQ, using the cutoffs as described by Baker, Burkhard and Albertson-Kelly (2012; 2 SD above and below the mean), I found that 4.8% of participants (n = 29) could be classified as alienated, whereas around 95% (n = 601) were classified as not alienated. Finally, I used a PARQ gap cutoff score of greater than 28 to delineate severely alienated participants from not alienated or mild-moderately alienated participants. By this measure, 9.2% of participants (n = 58) met the criteria for severe parental alienation while 90.8% (n = 572) reported no alienation or mild-moderate parental alienation. Around 9% of parents are estimated to be alienated from one or more of their children (Harman et al., 2016), which makes these distributions fall near that estimate. Interestingly, a majority of the sample reported some exposure to PABs, while more than a third reported severe levels of exposure. Table 9 contains the means and standard deviations of the main study variables by grouped by BSQ scores.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis tested was whether PABs were related to manifestations of parental alienation. To do this, I regressed BAQ scores on a categorical variable created from scores on the BSQ (0 = Low/No Conflict, 1 = Loyalty Conflict, 2 = Alienating-Alienated Parental Conflict). Results revealed that participants with parents who engaged in a greater number of parental alienating behaviors scored significantly higher on the BAQ (b = 0.75) than those who reported loyalty conflicts (b = 0.24) or no/minimal parental conflict (b = 0.28; $p < .01$). Additionally, participants with loyalty conflicts did not score significantly higher than participants with minimal parental conflict ($p > .05$).

Table 3

Regression results using BAQ as the criterion

Predictor	*b*	*b* 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	Fit
(Intercept)	0.28**	[0.08, 0.48]			
Loyalty Conflict	0.24	[-0.03, 0.51]	.00	[-.01, .01]	
Parental Alienation	0.75**	[0.48, 1.02]	.04	[.01, .08]	
					R^2 = .048** 95% CI[.02,.08]

Note. A significant *b*-weight indicates the semi-partial correlation is also significant. *b* represents unstandardized regression weights. sr^2 represents the semi-partial correlation squared. *LL* and *UL* indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively. * indicates p < .05. ** indicates p < .01.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 was that splitting of parental attitudes would be significantly correlated with scores of the BAQ, though this correlation would be modest. As predicted, PARQ-Gap and BAQ scores were found to be strongly correlated, $r(630) = .59$, $p < .01$. This finding indicates that splitting is correlated with the overall measure of manifestations of parental alienation, as it represents one aspect of parental alienation.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis tested was that participants with at least one authoritarian parent will score higher on authoritarianism. I conducted an independent samples *t*-test, and I grouped participants into two groups: having at least one authoritarian parent or no authoritarian parent. Results revealed that participants with at least one authoritarian parent scored higher ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.5$) than those without an authoritarian parent ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.19$) but this difference was not statistically significant; $t(250) = -1.53$, $p > .05$. Therefore, I did not find support for the third hypothesis.

Table 4

Independent samples t-test

Parent	*Mean*	*SD*	*T(250)*	*p*
Authoritarian	3.78	1.5		
Not authoritarian	3.58	1.19	1.5276	0.1279

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 tested the relationship between PABs and ratings of authoritarian parenting. I predicted that participants who reported having an alienating parent would rate that parent as having a more authoritarian parenting style than participants whose parents do not engage in PABs or engage in them to a similar extent as the other parent (i.e., children who were in a loyalty conflict). To test this prediction, I conducted a multivariate linear regression using the same categorical variable created from the BSQ used in H1 as the independent variable and ratings of authoritarian parenting for both parents as the dependent variables. I found that ratings of authoritarian parenting significantly increased at each level of parent conflict: participants who reported loyalty conflicts scored significantly higher (b = 8.95, p < .01) than those who reported low/no parental conflict (b = 26.92), and participants who reported having an alienating parent scored significantly higher (b = 14.30, p < .01) than participants who reported loyalty conflicts.

Table 5

Regression results using Authoritarian Parenting as the criterion

Predictor	b	b 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	Fit
(Intercept)	26.92**	[24.92, 28.92]			
Loyalty Conflict	8.95**	[6.24, 11.66]	.06	[.02, .09]	
Parental Alienation	14.30**	[11.60, 17.00]	.15	[.10, .20]	
					R^2 = .148** 95% CI[.10,.20]

Note. A significant b-weight indicates the semi-partial correlation is also significant. b represents unstandardized regression weights. sr^2 represents the semi-partial correlation squared. *LL* and *UL* indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively. * indicates p < .05. ** indicates p < .01.

Hypothesis 5

The fifth hypothesis was that participants who score higher in authoritarianism will have a higher need for closure than those who score lower in authoritarianism, and this correlation would be significant. This prediction was based on previous research showing a positive

correlation between NFC and RWA (e.g., Chirumbolo, 2002; Lauriola et al., 2015; Kruglanski, 1996). Results showed that there was small but statistically significant correlation between RWA and NFC, $r(608) = .08$, $p < .05$. These results supported my prediction. Table 2 contains this correlation along with correlations of all the main study variables.

Hypothesis 6

The sixth set of hypotheses were related to the relationships between RWA, NFC, and prejudice. I predicted that there would be a significant relationship between authoritarian attitudes and prejudice as suggested by previous research (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996). Results supported this prediction: scores on VSA were significantly and positively correlated with scores on the SR2K scale; $r(608) = .39$, $p < .01$. I also tested the relationship between NFC and prejudicial attitudes to replicate previous findings (e.g., Dhontet al., 2011; Roets & Van Hiel, 2006; Van Hiel et al., 2004). I found that NFC significantly and positively correlated with SR2K scores; $r(630) = .39$, $p < .01$. This finding replicates the relationships found in previous research with symbolic racism scores being significantly and positively correlated with authoritarianism and need for closure.

Hypothesis 7

Hypothesis 7 was that participants who had a parent engaging in unreciprocated PABs and who were authoritarian in parenting style would have more authoritarian attitudes than participants with authoritarian parenting styles only. To test this hypothesis, I conducted a univariate linear regression. The independent variable was a self-created, categorical variable which represented three groups: non-alienated children with non-authoritarian parents, non-alienated children with at least one authoritarian parent, and alienated children with at least one authoritarian parent. The dependent variable in the regression was scores on the VSA scale.

Results revealed that although participants with authoritarian parents (alienated or not) scored lower on the VSA scale than participants without authoritarian parents, there were not statistically significant differences in scores between the three groups. Therefore, I did not find support for the seventh hypothesis.

Table 6

Regression results using VSA as the criterion

Predictor	*b*	*b* 95% CI [LL, UL]	sr^2	sr^2 95% CI [LL, UL]	Fit
(Intercept)	3.61**	[3.50, 3.73]			
Authoritarian Parent	0.18	[-0.20, 0.56]	.00	[-.00, .01]	
Alienating & Authoritarian Parent	0.03	[-0.25, 0.32]	.00	[-.00, .00]	
					R^2 = .001 95% CI[.00,.01]

Note. A significant *b*-weight indicates the semi-partial correlation is also significant. *b* represents unstandardized regression weights. sr^2 represents the semi-partial correlation squared. *LL* and *UL* indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively.
* indicates p < .05. ** indicates p < .01.

Hypothesis 8

Hypothesis 8 predicted that splitting of parental attitudes would mediate the relationship between exposure to PABS and authoritarian parenting and RWA. First, I conducted a regression analysis for the total effect; I regressed the categorical variable created for hypothesis 7 on the VSA measure. This effect was not statistically significant at each level ($b = 0.23$; $b = 0.12$, $p > .05$). Second, I found that the effect of PABs and authoritarian parenting on splitting was significant for participants who were alienated with at least one authoritarian parent ($b = 13.58$, $p < .001$). Third, I tested the effect of splitting (the mediator) on authoritarianism. Results revealed that splitting had no significant effect on authoritarianism ($b = -0.005$, $p > .05$). Overall, this analysis showed that splitting was not a significant mediator in the relationship between PABs and authoritarian parenting and authoritarianism.

Hypothesis 9

My final hypothesis before construction of a path model was that participants who report higher levels of splitting of parental attitudes would report a higher need for closure than those without split attitudes. Results supported this prediction as PARQ-Gap scores were significantly and positively correlated with NFC, $r(630) = .12$, $p < .01$. Given this weak correlation, future research should seek to replicate this relationship.

Path Model

Building from the findings in previous research and the present study, I constructed a path model. My hypothesis for this model was that parental alienating behaviors and authoritarian parenting would correlate with attitudinal splitting which would then be significantly related to need for closure and authoritarian attitudes, which would finally correlate with prejudicial attitudes. The results of the path analysis with the standardized regression coefficients are presented below in Figure 1. Results indicated a non-significant difference between the user-defined model and baseline model with chi-square = 8.08 ($df = 5$, $p > .05$), RMSEA = 0.04, CFI = 0.99, and a TLI = 0.97. As expected, authoritarian parenting (β=0.22, $p < .001$), RWA (β=0.46, $p < .001$), and NFC (β=-0.08, $p < .05$) significantly correlated with symbolic racism, and authoritarian parenting significantly correlated with RWA ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < .001$). Additionally, PABs (as measured by the BSQ) were significantly related to authoritarian parenting (β=0.37, $p < .001$). However, splitting and PABs were not significantly correlated with symbolic racism (β= 0.03, $p > .05$; β= -0.07, $p > .05$). The R^2 indicated that 27.8% of the variance in symbolic racism could be explained by this model.

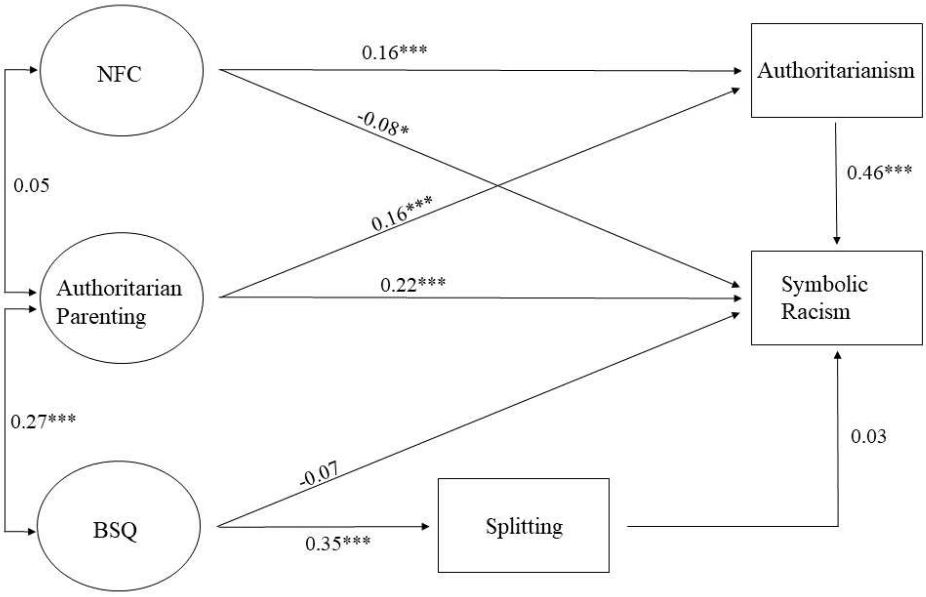

Figure 2
Path analysis using symbolic racism as dependent variable

Results of the path analysis for symbolic racism. Standardized coefficients are presented. BSQ, Baker Strategy Questionnaire; NFC, Need For Closure; * significant at P < .05, ** significant at P < .01, *** significant at P < .001

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the relationship between parenting styles, parental alienation, the splitting that occurs as a result of parental alienation, and the attitudes and personality in alienated children, and attempted to build a causal model to better understand these relationships. To date, no studies have examined the effects that alienation may have on personality or attitudes in children who are alienated other than that of valences towards their parents.

Results from the present study reinforce previous findings that authoritarian parenting is significantly related to authoritarian attitudes and prejudicial attitudes, that need for closure is significantly related to authoritarianism and prejudice, and that parental alienating behaviors are significantly related to parental alienation and the splitting of parental attitudes. I also hypothesized that splitting (e.g., describing one person or group as all good and another person or group as all bad) would be significantly correlated with authoritarian attitudes, but I did not find support for this hypothesis. Splitting was not shown to be significant moderator of authoritarian attitudes and authoritarian parenting and PABs, although splitting moderately and positively correlated with need for closure. Furthermore, effect sizes in parental alienation research tend to be small (e.g., Baker & Verrocchio, 2015; Balmer, 2015; López et al., 2014; Sîrbu et al., 2014), though there are some studies that have reported larger effect sizes (e.g., medium to large effect sizes; Boch-Galhau, 2018; Roma et al., 2021). Similarly, the present study reported smaller effect sizes which could be considered practically important.

A novel finding from this study was the relationship between PABs and authoritarian parenting. It was hypothesized that the characteristics of authoritarian parenting style (e.g., controlling, punitive, and coercive behaviors) would coincide with the behaviors commonly perpetrated by alienating parents, and results supported this prediction in correlation, regression,

and path analyses. I found that participants who reported a parent engaging in PABs rated that parent as more authoritarian in parenting style.

Implications

Parental alienating behaviors have been argued by some scholars to be a form of family violence (Boch-Gallhau; 2018; Djikstra, 2019; Harman et al., 2018; Kruk, 2018), and alienated children have been shown to experience several short- and long-term consequences such as mental health issues, substance abuse, and relationship instability (Aloia & Strutzenberg, 2019; Baker, 2005; Rand, 1997; Harman et al., 2018; Johnston et al., 2005). It is clear the effects that PA can have on overall well-being of children, but the results from the present study suggested another deep and potentially long-lasting impact that the co-occurrence of authoritarian parenting and PABs can have on attitudes. Although PABs were not significantly correlated with authoritarian attitudes or prejudicial attitudes, PABs and authoritarian parenting were strongly correlated. Given that we know the relationships between authoritarian parenting style and other attitudes (i.e., RWA and dogmatism), parental alienation could be an antecedent of those attitudes. That is, if we know that authoritarian parenting is related to authoritarian attitudes, and PABs are significantly correlated with authoritarian parenting, alienated children might be more likely to hold authoritarian attitudes (or other related attitudes). This study offered initial evidence that this relationship may exist. This finding may also have therapeutic implications. For instance, if family therapists understand that parents in a family they are working with tend to engage in more punitive parenting behaviors, the therapist might be able to identify potential alienating behaviors or alienation (whether that is mild or severe.) Finally, the present study provided a bridge between two previously unconnected areas of psychological research: attitudes and parental alienation. Attitudes and belief systems can also be studied in children who have

been alienated from a parent and alienating parents, and these can be further studied in relation to their motivations and behaviors.

Limitations

The results from the present study were promising, but the study was not without methodological limitations. This study was conducted in a single setting at a single point in time (i.e., cross-sectional) with primarily college-aged participants, and although the sample collected reflected the prevalence of parental alienation in the general population (around 10%), the sample was comprised mainly of young, white women. This homogeneity is not uncommon in convenience samples gathered from university settings (Bornstein et al., 2013; Gall et al., 1996; Peterson & Merunka, 2014) but does make it more difficult to generalize the findings from the present study to the general population. Longitudinal study would show a more clear picture of alienation and how it may have changed or not over time as well as the stability of other attitudes being measured. Future studies should aim for longitudinal studies (if possible) and to gather more heterogenous and representative samples. While I do not believe power was an issue in this study, it is always beneficial to gather larger samples when conducting parental alienation research. Participants may sometimes be resistant to or ignore questions about parental alienation in surveys, which may make the samples seem smaller as well.

Additionally, some questions regarding respondents' biological parents (e.g., on the BAQ) were not applicable in some cases (e.g., never met one of their parents or a parent was deceased), and these options were not listed under questions regarding parents' marital status, for example. This may have caused some respondents who otherwise could not accurately answer those particular questions to respond, though this likely only represented a very small portion of the overall sample. In the future, researchers should be sure to account for the variety of family

arrangements and construct their surveys of parental attitudes to accommodate respondents (i.e., not asking participants who may have a deceased parent questions from the BAQ). All data collected was self-report, and the questions regarding parenting behaviors (e.g., the BSQ and PAQ-S) were retrospective in nature. Although the measures themselves were reliable and valid, there was no way to ascertain whether the self-reports of these behaviors (including the participant's own retrospective recollections) were truly valid or accurate. Furthermore, the BSQ captured only respondents' overall exposure to PABs during childhood rather than PABs perpetrated by each parent individually. Although some items suggested exposure to unilateral PABs (e.g., "made communication with the other parent difficult") participants' scores on the BSQ did not reflect if their experience was entirely that of a loyalty conflict or parental alienation. However, scores on the BSQ significantly correlated with the BAQ and PARQ-Gap scores which indicated that it was related to the behavioral and cognitive outcomes associated with unilateral PABs. Researchers should ensure that they capture behaviors engaged in by both parents to clearly delineate loyalty conflicts compared to parental alienation.

Another limitation of the study was the creation of categorical variables to describe participants who were alienated versus not alienated and the presence of an authoritarian parent for use in regression analyses. Because there was no one single measure to capture alienation itself, I used a combination of measures (i.e., BSQ, BAQ, and PARQ gap scores) to do so. To describe authoritarian parents, I used a cut-off score based on standard deviations. To my knowledge, there is no "scoring scale" for parenting types other than to represent the different dimensions. For categorizing exposure to PABs on the BSQ, I used the cutoffs as described by Baker and Chambers (2011). Nonetheless, the use of categorical variables may have led to a loss of information (i.e., the loss of statistical power to detect an effect or relation; Altman &

Royston, 2006) that would have otherwise existed by using continuous measures. Dichotomization can increase the risk of false positives, and individuals close to the median or cutoff are characterized as very different rather than similar. In the case of the present study, this loss of information may suggest that some of the weaker and/or non-significant relationships (e.g., authoritarian parenting and authoritarianism) may have actually been stronger than they were represented had they been measured continuously. Thus, this loss of information could have led to some spurious conclusions (e.g., false positives and type II errors), though this is hard to ascertain based on one study. For future studies, receiver operating characteristics (ROC) curves can be used to assess the performance of a diagnostic test in sensitivity and specificity by finding the "ideal" cut-off point. Future research in parental alienation should seek to develop valid cut-offs and categorizations of exposure to parental alienation and PABs using ROC curves.

A potential confound in this study was gender, particularly as it relates to authoritarianism. Previous research on this relationship is mixed as some studies have found no gender differences in authoritarianism (e.g., Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1988, 1996; Feather, 1993; Nagoshi et al., 2007; Peterson & Lane, 2001), men as more authoritarian than women (Lippa, 1995), or women as more authoritarian than men (Whitley Jr., 1999). Even without overt political or religious content (that RWA scales do contain), studies still show mixed results of the effect of gender on authoritarianism, like that women are equally authoritarian as men (e.g., Chuang & Su, 2009; Henry, 2011; Stenner, 2005), that men are more authoritarian than women (e.g., Napier & Jost, 2008; Stenner, 2005), or that women are more authoritarian than men (e.g., Flouri, 2009). Gender was collected as a variable, though it could have been used as a control in

regression analyses. Future studies in this area should note effects of gender on authoritarianism and parental alienation.

Finally, the specificity of attitudes presented in this study is another limitation. In my hypotheses, I attempted to find a relationship between more broad, intergroup attitudes (i.e., authoritarianism and racial prejudice) and attitudes towards parents and their related behavioral manifestations (i.e., splitting and parental alienation.) As Stangor and colleagues (2014) noted, attitudes can predict behaviors well but sometimes only under certain conditions (e.g., when the attitude and the behavior occur in similar social situations.) Furthermore, attitudes predict behavior better when the attitude is measured at a similar level of specificity as the behavior of interest (e.g., Davidson & Jaccard, 1979) This difference in specificity of measurement and of similar situations may partially explain why there were some non-significant effects in relationships that I hypothesized would be significant (i.e., splitting and authoritarianism). Authoritarianism, a broad set of attitudes that includes racial/ethnic prejudice, related well to the SR2K scale, a specific measure of racial prejudice. Whereas splitting, a specific attitude regarding affective ratings of both parents, would not be at a similar level of specificity of the SR2K scale. There were a few ways this specificity issue could have been addressed. One way would have been to create a measure or variable that represented some of the cognitive aspects under investigation (i.e., the black and white thinking in splitting and maintaining prejudice) that could then be studied in relation to authoritarianism, for example. Another way to address this issue would be to use the existing measures but change the wording or add a prompt before the items that specified that attitude object with similar specificity (e.g., questions about splitting extended to generalized outgroups or items regarding prejudice moved to a more individual/personal level of measurement). In the future, parental alienation research that

incorporates measurement of attitudes other than those of valences towards parents should also seek to measure those attitudes (and any behaviors) at similar levels of specificity.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from the present study offer several potential routes for future inquiry. First, researchers could replicate the present study with different samples to see if the findings still hold. All the materials and code for this project are available on OSF, which should facilitate high-quality replication for researchers. Replication could show if the relationships between variables were truly significant or spurious, or if there were factors specific to the sample gathered that may have affected these relationships.

Second, although need for closure was not found to be significantly related to PABs or splitting in the path model, NFC was moderately and significantly associated with splitting in the correlational analysis. Need for closure can be also induced situationally (cf. Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Webster & Kruglanski, 1998) via various constraints on information processing such as time pressure, noise, fatigue, and other sources of stress. Splitting is understood as a form of maladaptive, psychological defense to alleviate the mental stress of being embroiled in parental conflict, and it would follow that higher need for closure could potentially be induced in a stressful situation like family conflict. Future research should seek to confirm the relationship between need for closure and splitting as well as investigate other related cognitive styles and personality traits (e.g., intolerance of ambiguity and impulsivity) and splitting.

Future research should also investigate other personality factors in children who have been alienated from a parent. Although some parental alienation studies (e.g., Sirbu & Biuca, 2018; Truhan et al., 2021) have used the Big Five Inventory (BFI; Goldberg, 1993) to measure personality traits in parents, to my knowledge no studies have used the BFI to measure

personality in alienated children. The Big Five dimensions (I.e., extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experience) are meaningful in predicting behavior (e.g., Ashton et al., 1995; Costa Jr. & McCrae, 1995; Hirsh et al., 2010; Paunonen & Ashton, 2001; Soto et al., 2011; Terracciano et al., 2005). Furthermore, the subscales of the NFCS (I.e., decisiveness, preference for order, and discomfort with ambiguity) have been shown to partially correlate with aspects of the BFI (Neuberg et al., 1997). Need for closure only represents a small part of the overall personality picture, and the BFI could be used to capture that.

Finally, approaching parental alienation and attitude research from a motivated social cognition framework might prove to be more useful than a strictly psychodynamic approach. In attitude research, 1,483 peer-reviewed articles that studied implicit social cognition (i.e., social judgements and behavior that occur outside conscious awareness or control) have been published since 2003 (Greenwald & Lai, 2020). However, measurement of implicit social cognition is still typically done in conjunction with other, explicit (direct) measures of social cognition. For parental alienation research, although Gardner's (1985) original conception of parental alienation syndrome (which would later come to be known as parental alienation) claimed that parents could consciously or unconsciously alienate a child from a parent, the recent research on parental alienation instead focuses on the dynamics of the situation that leads to alienation and what occurs in the alienated child. Integrating personality and individual differences, epistemic and existential needs, and rationalization (e.g., dissonance reduction) could be a helpful approach in understanding the beliefs and behaviors of children who are alienated from a parent. Future research could investigate what psychological needs might be satisfied (if any), and if there are any relationships with other values or beliefs that were not investigated in the present study.

Conclusions

In summary, the present study offers a deeper understanding of the parenting behaviors of alienating parents (especially as viewed by their children) and subsequently the effects that authoritarian parenting and parental alienating behaviors can have on attitudes later in life. Although parental alienation did not have a significant direct effect on authoritarian attitudes, I found a strong link between PABs and authoritarian parenting styles which was found to be significantly related to authoritarian attitudes and prejudice. If this finding is replicated in future studies, it might be able to explain a portion of authoritarian attitudes and potential prejudice that exists. Future research should seek to confirm the relationship and investigate the connection of parental alienation to other attitudes, cognitive styles, and/or personality traits in children who have been alienated from a parent.

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APPENDIX

Table 7

Sample Demographics

Characteristic		N	%
Gender Identity	Woman	513	79
	Man	129	20
	Non-Binary or Non-Conforming	4	1
	Other	4	1
	Transgender	1	0.2
	Total	651	
Age	18-21	548	94
	22-25	23	4
	26-29	5	1
	30 or older	7	1
	Total	583	
Race/Ethnicity	White	541	84
	Multiracial/multiethnic	44	7
	Asian	26	4
	Black or African American	16	3
	Other	12	2
	American Indian or Alaska Native	6	1
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.2
	Total	646	
Hispanic	None of these	529	81
	Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino	122	19
	Total	651	
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual (straight)	502	77
	Bisexual	99	15
	Homosexual (gay)	26	4
	Other	20	3
	Prefer to not answer	6	1
	Total	653	
SES	Less than $10,000	392	60
	$10,000 to $24,999	67	10
	$25,000 to $49,999	30	5
	$50,000 to $75,000	5	1
	$75,000 to $99,999	4	1
	$100,000 or greater	16	2
	Not sure/Don't know	115	20
	Prefer to not answer	24	4
	Total	653	
Education	Less than high school degree	1	0.2

	High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)	260	40
	Some college but no degree	361	55
	Associate degree in college (2-year)	18	3
	Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)	12	2
	Graduate degree	1	0.2
	Total	653	
Marital Status	Married	4	1
	Never Married	648	99
	Total	652	
Parents' Marital Status	Married or remarried	423	65
	Divorced	134	21
	Never Married	56	1
	Widowed	17	3
	Separated	15	2
	Unmarried and both parents living together	8	1
	Total	653	

Table 8

Preregistered Hypotheses

No.	Hypothesis	Analysis	Independent variable(s)	Dependent variable(s)
1	Participants who report a parent who has engaged in more unreciprocated PABs than their other parent are more likely to have manifestations of parental alienation than those who do not.	Univariate Linear Regression	Conflict (Alienating-Alienated Parents, Loyalty conflict Parents, Low conflict parents)	Baker Alienation Questionnaire (BAQ)
2	Splitting of parental attitudes will be moderately associated with the Baker Alienation Questionnaire.	Correlation (Pearson's R)	BAQ and Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) Gap score	
3	Participants who report having authoritarian parents will score higher on RWA than participants who do not report having authoritarian parents.	Independent samples t-test	Authoritarian Parent/No Authoritarian Parent	Right-wing Authoritarianism (RWA)
4	There is an association between PABs and authoritarian parenting such that participants who report a parent engaging in more unreciprocated PABS will report the same parent having a more authoritarian parenting style than participants with parents who do not engage in PABs or engage in them to a similar extent as the other parent.	Multivariate Linear Regression	Conflict	Parental Authority Questionnaire - Authoritarian Parenting (both parents)
5	Participants with higher RWA will have higher need for closure than those with lower RWA.	Correlation (Pearson's R)	Need for Closure Scale (NFCS) and RWA	
6	There will be positive association between authoritarianism, need for closure, and prejudicial attitudes.	Correlation (Pearson's R)	RWA and Symbolic Racism 2000 (SR2K) Scale; RWA and NFCS; NFCS and SR2K	
7	Participants who had a parent engaging in unreciprocated PABs and who were authoritarian in parenting style would be more likely to have more authoritarian attitudes than participants with authoritarian parenting styles only.	Univariate Linear Regression	Unreciprocated PABs + Authoritarian Parenting	RWA

8	Parental attitude splitting will mediate the relationship between exposure to unreciprocated PABS and authoritarian parenting and RWA.	Univariate Linear Regression with Mediation	Unreciprocated PABs + Authoritarian Parenting, PARQ-Gap as mediator	RWA
9	Participants who report higher levels of splitting of parental attitudes will report a higher need for closure than those without split attitudes.	Correlation (Pearson's R)	PARQ-Gap and NFCS	NFCS
10	Unreciprocated PABs and authoritarian parenting will be correlated, and both will contribute to parental attitude splitting. Splitting will influence need for closure, which in turn is correlated with RWA and prejudice. That is, the co-occurrence of parental alienation and authoritarian parenting will uniquely contribute to attitudinal splitting and cognitive rigidity leading to authoritarian and prejudicial attitudes.	Path Analysis (lavaan in R)	BAQ and PAQ-Authoritarian subscales PARQ-Gap NFCS RWA	SR2K

Table 9

Means and Standard Deviations by Exposure to PABs

	No Exposure		Low-moderate Exposure		**Severe Exposure**	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
VSA	3.76	1.28	3.51	1.23	3.66	1.34
NFCS	45.68	22.85	54.89	10.15	56.60	9.99
BAQ	0.28	1.11	0.52	1.19	1.03	1.73
Authoritarian Father	13.47	8.81	17.90	7.51	20.03	7.97
Authoritarian Mother	13.45	8.94	17.97	7.39	21.19	7.50
SR2K	10.01	5.76	11.86	4.65	12.38	4.44
PARQ Gap	4.82	12.62	8.31	11.98	14.578	15.25