

Affording the Luxury of Negotiation: Primary Caregivers' Rules for Adolescents

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Introduction

Public discussions about child rearing strategies are ever present. A recent collection of op-eds and letters to the editor in the *New York Times* on parenting spanning the last four years attests to this (Mermelstein, 2018). At the core of the debate is the returning issue of how much independence parents should grant their children. Baumrind (1971) famously categorized parenting into three styles: the authoritarian style with high demands and strict rule enforcement, the permissive style with low demands and bidirectional communication, and finally the recommended approach, the authoritative style, with high demands, but room for negotiation and bidirectional communication. Meanwhile sociologists draw attention to how social and economic circumstances shape child rearing strategies, affording some parents the luxury of negotiating bedtime, while leaving other parents to rely on obedience in order to get through a challenging every day or as a result of social classed values (Kohn, 1963; Lareau, 2011; Weininger & Lareau, 2009). A key issue in relation to children's independence is the structure of family rules governing their behavior and activities, including the presence or absence of any such rules as well as the choices parents make to enforce, monitor, or negotiate their implementation. In families with adolescents, the "family rules" climate may become increasingly salient as teens begin to immerse themselves and interact in the wider world beyond parental observation. In this study, we analyze patterns of rule setting among primary caregivers of adolescents, and ask whether these patterns are associated with families' economic circumstances. We contribute to the literature by examining patterns in an extensive set of rules in a recent national population-representative cohort.

Data

We use data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics Child Development Supplement 2014 (PSID CDS 2014). PSID is a panel household survey first fielded in 1968 and surveying original householders and their descendants annually until 1997 and biennially thereafter. In 2014, the Child Development Supplement was fielded to collect information on child well-being including

primary caregivers' rules. All children in families actively participating in PSID who were between age 0 and 17 were eligible for inclusion. The longitudinal design of PSID, the focus on collecting high quality data on families' economic circumstances, and detailed information on family rules makes PSID-CDS an excellent data source for our study. Our analysis focus on 1,012 primary caregivers of adolescents age 12-17. If more than one adolescent resided in the primary caregiver's household, we sampled one adolescent at random. Conditional on no missing information, our sample consists of 967 primary caregivers.

Primary caregivers were asked if they have rules about (1) how late the adolescent can stay up, (2) when the adolescent does his/her homework, (3) how the adolescent spends time after school, (4) who the adolescent can spend time with and where they can go, (5) how much time the adolescent can watch television per day, (6) which types of television the adolescent can watch, (7) about the amount of time the adolescent may use a computer or other electronic device (such as a tablet or smartphone) to watch TV shows, videos, or movies, (8) The types of TV shows, videos, or movies the adolescent may watch on a computer or other electronic device, (9) using social media, texting, or emailing to interact with friends and others, (10) the amount of time the adolescent may use a computer or other electronic device to play games, and (11) the types of games the adolescent may play on electronic devices. Primary caregivers could answer that they have (a) clear and enforced rules, (b) general and monitored rules, (c) rules, but that the adolescent makes his/her own choices, and (d) no rules.

We capture family economic position using income quintiles from the average of family income in 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014 reported in the PSID Core interview. While family income can be quite volatile, this average reflects the family's long term economic position.

Method

We use latent class analysis to identify groups of primary caregivers who provide similar answers on the rule items. Latent class analysis relates observable categorical variables to latent variables by finding the latent variables that best explain the relationships between the observed variables. We further analyze whether family income is related to the latent classes using bivariate statistics and multinomial logistic regression allowing us to control for demographic characteristics.

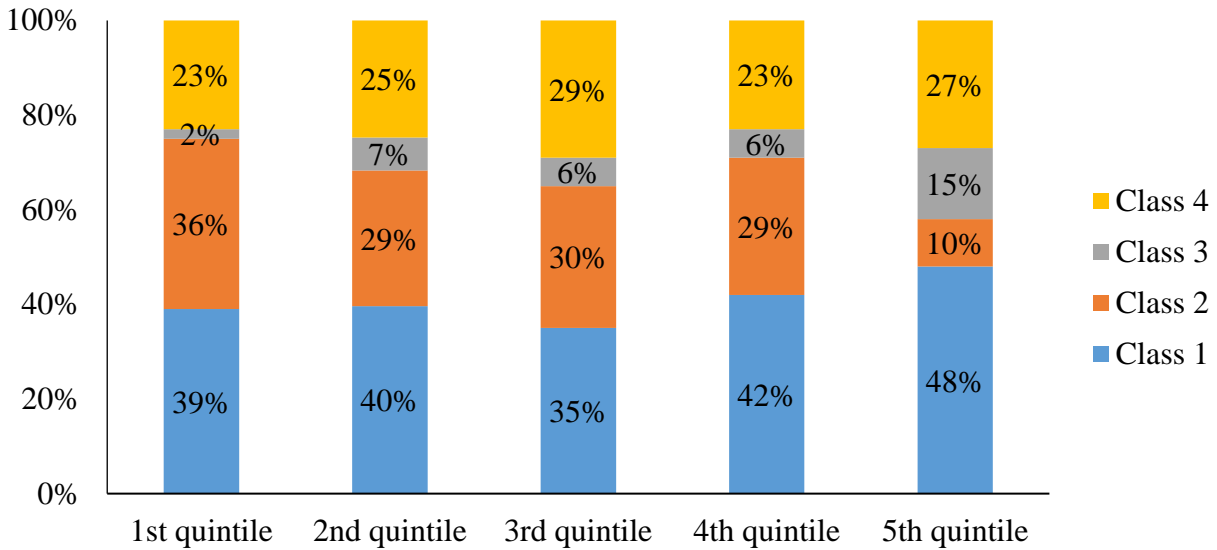
Results

Using latent class analysis, we find four latent classes of response patterns. Table 1 shows the proportion of each class. The first and most prevalent class tends to report that they have general and monitored rules. The second class most often reports that they have clear and enforced rules. The third and least prevalent class reports that they have rules, but that the adolescent makes his or her own choices. Finally, the fourth class reports that they have no rules regarding adolescents' use of television, computers and other electronic devices, but mixed rules in other areas. We find that these latent classes of rules are associated with differences in family income. Figure 1 shows the prevalence of the latent classes within each family income quintile. While the second, third, and fourth income quintile show similar prevalence of classes, the prevalence are strikingly different for the first and the fifth family income quintile. The third class of rule setting, having rules but letting the adolescent makes his/her own choices, is more prevalent among the fifth quintile of the income distribution and much less prevalent among the lowest quintile of the income distribution. Further, primary caregivers in the fifth income quintile are the least likely to have clear and enforced rules. In our multinomial logistic regression model, we find that controlling for sociodemographic characteristics blurs the differences in rule setting among primary caregivers in the first four income quintiles. However, primary caregivers in the fifth income quintile are statistically significantly less likely to have clear and enforced rules compared to primary caregivers in all other income quintiles. These preliminary results indicate, that primary caregivers in affluent families can afford the luxury of having a more lenient approach to raising their adolescents whether this is in the form of having general and monitored rules or simply no rules at all.

Table 1 Latent Classes of Rule Setting

	Margin	Std. Err.	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Class 1: General and monitored rules	0.38	0.02	0.34	0.41
Class 2: Clear and enforced rules	0.30	0.02	0.26	0.33
Class 3: Rules, but adolescent makes own choices	0.08	0.01	0.06	0.10
Class 4: No tech. rules, mixed in other areas	0.25	0.02	0.22	0.28

Figure 1 Prevalence of Latent Classes within Family Income Quintiles



Note: Class 1: General and monitored rules; Class 2: Clear and enforced rules; Class 3: Rules, but adolescent makes own choices; Class 4: No tech. rules, mixed in other areas. N=967. Percentages are weighted.

Next Steps before PAA

Before PAA, we intend to expand the analysis in three ways. First, we will explore whether our preliminary findings are robust to different functional forms of family income. Second, we will analyze whether other aspects of families’ socioeconomic positions such as primary caregiver’s educational attainment and occupation are associated with rule setting. Finally, we will analyze whether the socioeconomic position of the primary caregiver’s origin family helps explain the patterns in rule setting indicating a sticky social class pattern in child-rearing strategies.

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