

What Caused the Collapse of Parental Authority?

You've been there. You're in the store, minding your own business when suddenly you hear the angry screams of a child, interspersed with:

"Johnny, get up off the floor this instant!

I mean it, Johnny! By the time I count to three...

Johnny, mommy will give you a cookie when we get to the car if you get up off the floor."

Unfortunately, such a scenario is all too real in a society which no longer seems to value parental authority. In fact, parental authority seems to have all but disappeared in many families. Instead, children are given the velvet glove treatment – their desires must always be fulfilled, their whims never crossed.

How did we arrive at such a state?

Professor and author Christopher Lasch offers an interesting answer to this question in his book [*The Culture of Narcissism*](#). In essence, one might say that the growth of our feelings-oriented culture is a main culprit:

"According to [Jules] Henry and other observers of American culture, the collapse of parental authority reflects the collapse of 'ancient impulse controls' and the shift 'from a society in which Super Ego values (the values of self-restraint) were ascendant, to one in which more and more recognition was being given to the values of the id (the values of self-indulgence).'"

As Lasch goes on to explain, the increasing value we've placed

on feelings and self-indulgence has handcuffed parents in dealings with their children. Instead of laying down the law and teaching their children restraint, American parents “‘find it easier to achieve conformity by the use of bribery than by facing the emotional turmoil of suppressing the child’s demands.’” Unfortunately, such a tactic has severe consequences:

“In this way they undermine the child’s initiative and make it impossible for him to develop self-restraint or self-discipline... The decline of parental authority reflects the ‘decline of the superego’ in American society as a whole.”

Many parents, teachers, and public figures have come to recognize how valuable it is for children to develop these same traits of initiative, self-restraint, and self-discipline. The question is, will we be able to foster these coveted traits in the next generation without the restoration of parental authority? And is it possible to restore parental authority when the current generation of parents was raised without it?