

The Impact of Parenting Styles on Adult Attachment

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Every adult began their lives in the environment through which they were raised before being introduced to the world that they had to navigate. That environment is where a child either learns or does not learn the tools, the attitudes, and skills later utilized to interact with and find a way through the world. The attachment theory explores how the relationships that a child has with their parents carries into their adulthood. This paper connects these attachment styles to the variety of parenting styles by investigating studies that have been conducted to determine whether parenting styles can indicate how attachment styles develop.

Attachment Styles

John Bowlby, a British psychologist, described attachment as the connection humans have with others (Barry, 2015). He initially studied this to better understand the variation in responses that young children have when they are not with their primary caregivers (Barry, 2015). Bowlby theorized that humans are innately born to attach to others, originally for survival purposes, and the form in which they do so varies based on environment (Barry, 2015). Mary Ainsworth, Mary Main, and Judith Solomon further developed Bowlby's theory by classifying the four different responses and attachment styles; secure, avoidant, anxious, and disorganized, allowing them to be applicable to adulthood because attachment is an ongoing process that takes place in every classification of relationship (Barry, 2015).

Those with secure attachment styles are trusting, they happily welcome people into their lives and they allow the relationships to flourish and last (Barry, 2015). Children with secure attachment styles as children typically have warm, responsive parents (Barry, 2015).

Those with an anxious attachment style find themselves stuck in a mental cycle where they convince themselves that others do not want a relationship with them, they subconsciously

prepare themselves for rejection by holding onto relationships tightly, leading to dependence (Barry, 2015). Typically people with anxious attachment styles had less warm parents with turbulent relationships (Barry, 2015).

Those with an avoidant attachment style do not allow themselves to be emotionally intimate with others, they find trust challenging (Barry, 2015). People with avoidant attachment styles often describe their parents as being cold and rejecting (Barry, 2015).

Parenting Styles

Parental styles are the give and take of parental acceptance and parental control. Initial attachment is not so much innate, but more so takes place through parental acceptance where parents fulfill their child's basic needs (Akhtar, 2012). As the child develops parental control plays more of a role (Akhtar, 2012).

Baumrind studied parenting styles in terms of the interaction between acceptance and control and she classifies this interaction in three parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian and permissive (Akhtar, 2012).

An authoritarian parent leans more toward the control side of the parenting spectrum, where they demand a lot from their children and do not allow them to question their authority (Akhtar, 2012). These parents rarely allow space for emotional connection in the relationships that they have with their children (Akhtar, 2012).

Permissive parents are on the opposite end, leaning more towards the acceptance aspect of parenting (Akhtar, 2012). These parents do not ask much of their children, the only restrictions that they may have on their children are for things that could bring them physical harm (Akhtar, 2012).

Authoritative parenting is the moderate balance of both acceptance and control (Akhtar, 2012). These parents are involved in their children's lives and have high expectations, however, a partnership is developed where conversation and negotiation is welcomed (Akhtar, 2012).

It is commonly theorized that these different behaviors of parents influence the attachment style that a child develops or the way in which they interact with their parents (Akhtar, 2012). Less commonly, but still presently, many researchers have explored the theory that the influence that these parenting styles have on child attachment carries over into adult attachment, primarily in the context of romantic relationships (Akhtar, 2012).

Assumption

Previous studies, for example, those conducted by Karavasilis, Doyle, and Markiewicz in 2003 found a positive association between authoritative parenting styles and secure attachment (Akhtar, 2012). This is the most common hypothesis made in following studies, the assumption that children that are reared by parents who are sensitive to their needs and are rewarded with warmth as opposed to being punished find themselves developing secure relationships throughout their lives, because they experienced a relationship that they could trust and depend on in their early years (Akhtar, 2012). Carrying out this hypothesis, it is assumed that parents who utilize an authoritarian style of parenting, with very strict control, raise children with avoidant attachment styles because they are left with low self esteems and a fear of rejection (Akhtar, 2012). The last hypothesis is that parenting permissively is paired with anxious attachment styles because the inconsistency of carefree parenting instills a fear of abandonment (Akhtar, 2012).

Findings

The study reviewed in the article “Attachment Styles, Parenting Styles, and Depression” found that there was surprisingly no significant relationship found between authoritative parenting styles and secure, anxious or avoidant attachment styles (Akhtar, 2012).

In the study reviewed through the article “The Effect of Parenting Style of Parents on the Attachment Styles of Undergraduate Students” the opposite of the prediction was in fact found, where there was a significant relationship in authoritative parenting with anxious and avoidant attachment styles, but not with secure attachment styles (Akhtar, 2012). Significant relationships were also found between authoritarian parenting style and anxious attachment styles, and permissive parenting when driven by the father with avoidant attachment styles, however, when driven by the mother an anxious attachment style was more common (Akhtar, 2012).

When the study that was covered in “The Effect of Parenting Style of Parents on the Attachment Styles of Undergraduate Students” looked at the impact of varying styles for solely the mothers an interesting finding was observed (Akhtar, 2012). It did not matter which side of the extreme a mother was, authoritarian or permissive, the children revealed anxious styles, indicating that a child needs to see their mothers' being completely attentive to their needs and overall presence (Akhtar, 2012).

The study reviewed in the article “The Relationship Between Perceived Parenting Style and Emotion Regulation Abilities in Adulthood.” focused on the impact that the varying parenting styles have on a person’s ability to regulate their emotions, which is a necessary skill in order to have secure relationships (Tani, 2018). It was found that the most significant results were found in the dysregulation results that permissive and authoritarian parenting styles had on children (Tani, 2018). This finding is consistent with the common assumptions because the idea behind being a balanced, authoritative, is not that it will undoubtedly result in a child that can

form secure relationships, but rather, the intention is that it will not set a child back from being able to do so (Tani, 2018).

Alternative Factors

It is crucial to note the difference between intended applications of the benefits in authoritative parentings because it is not guaranteed that this style will result in an emotionally secure child, there are a variety of other factors that impact parenting and attachment styles (Bleske-Rechek, 2021).

A parent could be the perfect balance of demanding and warm, but oftentimes children will grow up to use their own parents' relationship as a model for their own, thus living in a turbulent home could be an alternative factor for varying adult attachment styles (Bleske-Rechek, 2021).

However, the home environment can not be the sole attributor to adult attachment styles, this is seen in the study reviewed in the article “Individual differences in romantic attachment: Shared environment does not predict shared attachment style.” The individuals that participated in this study did not resemble the attachment styles of their siblings and parents indicating the incredible impact that nonshared environments and relationships can have on the development of one’s attachment style (Bleske-Rechek, 2021).

The impact that parenting styles and attachment styles varies depending on gender. In the article “Gender Differences in the Association between Attachment Style and Adulthood Relationship Satisfaction.” there were a few findings reported (Kalil, 2020). One being that the negative effects that avoidant attachment styles have are greater for women while the effects that anxious attachment styles have are greater for men (Kalil, 2020). This finding was paired with the finding that avoidant attachment typically results from separation from mother, which

perhaps impacts the lives of young women more because they require secure attachments with their mothers in order to develop emotionally securely (Kalil, 2020). On the other hand, anxious attachment is correlated with a caregiver who does not care a lot about their child and it has a greater impact on men because, with less affection and acceptance for men socially, they grow up to be forever concerned that their partner does not truly want them (Kalil, 2020).

Socioeconomic status is another very significant factor (Kalil, 2020). A parent wants to raise the most emotionally secure child that they can and they may have the intention to be the ideal parent, however, statistically, although unfortunate, parents of lower socioeconomic status live with disadvantages (Kalil, 2020). More often than not these parents do not have as much time to spare, they are more likely to be working unpredictable and nonstandard hours missing potentially very crucial times to invest in their children (Kalil, 2020). Parents of low socioeconomic status may also be poorly informed, despite their drive to be the ideal parent they may just not have the information or guidance that people of higher socioeconomic status have at their disposal, making them less aware of the negative or positive impacts that particular parenting techniques may have on their child's development (Kalil, 2020). Additionally, the stressful environment generated by significant economic pressure, although often unavoidable, can cause parents psychological stress which their children internalize and can come into play as they develop their own attachment styles (Kalil, 2020).

Discussion

As any theory in psychology, there clearly is no direct proven connection between parenting styles and adult attachment styles. The investigation conducted throughout this paper reveals the numerous factors that come into play as a child develops their attachment style. The concepts used in the studies covered are relatively new, thus leaving plenty of space for further

investigation. An underlying accepted concept is that an authoritative, balanced parenting style is the healthiest and most beneficial for a developing child, so a valid next step in investigation could be to look at solely children who have been parented authoritatively that way alternative factors for attachment styles can be more certainly determined.

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