

## **The Effects of Parenting Styles and Childhood Attachment Patterns on Intimate Relationships**

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This paper examines the idea that parental behavior characteristic of authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles seem to parallel the parental behavior connected with secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment styles. Since it has been demonstrated that attachment styles result in an internal working model which guides intimate relationships as an adult, it is hypothesized that parenting styles which mirror the attachment pattern will also predict relationship abilities as an adult. Fifty-six volunteer undergraduate students participated in this study. Results show that although 92% of the students with authoritative parenting styles are also securely attached, that only attachment styles predict intimacy patterns. Those students who were securely attached to their parents scored significantly higher on tests of personal intimacy and belief in other's abilities to be intimate as opposed to those students with authoritarian or permissive parents. Results are discussed in the context that attachment patterns form an early working model while parenting styles are more prevalent when the child is older and may affect other variables.

Many variables contribute to the formation of an attachment between child and caregiver. Ainsworth (1964) developed a classification system that categorized attachment into three types; secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment, each characterized by the mother's typical behavior towards the child and the child's reaction to the mother. For example, mothers of securely attached children rate higher on scales of sensitivity, acceptance, cooperation, and emotional accessibility (Ainsworth, 1967; Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Karen, 1998). Due to this, the child has a great deal of autonomy, affective sharing, cognitive flexibility, problem-solving ability and perseverance (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1979). All of these outcomes indicate that secure attachment results in healthy family and peer relationships as well as, high self-esteem for the child (Bowlby, 1988). Conversely, the mothers of insecurely attached children display behaviors that range from chaotic or inconsistent care-taking (Bridges & Connell, 1991; Egeland & Farber, 1984) to rejection and maltreatment of their children (Ainsworth, 1989). In response to these parenting techniques, these children become emotionally isolated from both family and peers and seldom have stable interpersonal relationships or a good self-concept (Bowlby, 1988).

The type of attachment that a child forms has long-term repercussions into many aspects of the child's development and adult life (Bowlby, 1969). Some of these aspects include peer relationships and the ability to maintain long-term intimate relationships. Collins and Reed (1990) propose that early attachment histories are the basis of an internal working model for adult relationships whereby persons with secure childhood attachments show higher levels of trust, closeness, and dependability while insecure childhood attachments predict the reverse (Bowlby, 1973, 1980, 1982). However, there are other variables within a parent-child relationship that might also predict the outcome of the child's future interpersonal relationships. One of these variables is that of parenting styles. Baumrind (1966) defines the three types of parenting styles as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Parental behavior for each of these styles seems to parallel that of parental behavior for individual attachment patterns. For example, similar to the parent of a securely attached child, the authoritative parent is sensitive to the child's needs, does not use punitive discipline, and reasons with the child in a loving and affectionate manner (Baumrind, 1966).

Likewise, comparable to avoidant parenting, the authoritarian parent is demanding, but unresponsive to the child, tends to use punitive and harsh punishment, physical enforcement, reprimands, and prohibitive interventions (Kochanska, Kuczynski, & Radke, 1989). Similarly so, the outcomes of authoritarian parenting tend to overlap the characteristics of avoidant attachment. The children of authoritarian parents have been described as anxious, angry, aggressive, and having low self-esteem (Baumrind, 1967; 1971). In like manner, Elicker, Englund, and Sroufe (1992) have described avoidant children as angry, aggressive, isolated and disliked by their peers.

Although not as clear, the parent who fosters an ambiguous attachment may also mirror permissive parenting. For example, the permissive parent is generally described as lax, and inconsistent, and use withdrawal of love as punishment (Connor, 1980). They also tend to show their ambivalence about discipline by alternating praise and punishment (Baumrind, 1967). Similarly, mothers of ambivalently attached children are described as lacking in responsiveness and sensitivity to their children, and as being either too lenient or too controlling of their child (Egeland & Farber, 1984). Baumrind (1967) reported that children of permissive parents have low self-control and self-reliance, and are very immature while ambivalently attached children are described as anxious, immature (Karen, 1998), and show little initiative (Egeland & Farber, 1984).

If it is true that childhood attachment styles can predict the quality of adult interpersonal relationships, and if parenting styles reflect the same influence as attachment styles, then it seems likely that parenting styles should also predict relationship outcomes. If however, parenting styles are fundamentally different from attachment, then parenting styles and attachment should predict relationship outcomes differently. In other words, according to current research, attachment patterns should predict the quality of relations that includes both a person's ability to have healthy intimate relationships as well as a set of beliefs about other people's abilities. For example, Dalton and Frick-Horbury (submitted manuscript) found that in contrast to those people with insecure attachment, people with a secure parental attachment scored higher on variables such as warmth, feelings of security, and healthy independence which were predictive of a person's intimacy abilities. Additionally, those people with secure attachment had more positive perceptions on variables which predicted their beliefs about other people's accessibility, trustworthiness, and responsiveness to one's needs than those with an insecure attachment. Thus, if parenting styles parallel attachment patterns, then we hypothesize that those with authoritative parents will also score higher on variables of both self-intimacy and perceptions of other's intimacy than those with either an authoritarian or permissive parenting style. Further, we hypothesize that parenting styles will be just as predictive as attachment on variables of both self-intimacy and perception of other's intimacy. Finally, we predict that those with an authoritative parenting style will be more likely to be securely attached than those with an authoritative or permissive parenting style.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants were fifty-six voluntary undergraduates from Appalachian State University who received extra credit in their undergraduate psychology courses. Only students who grew up in a two-parent home were eligible to participate. The participants consisted of 19 males and 34 females ranging in age from 18 to 22.

### Materials and Procedure

Participants were asked to fill out several questionnaires. A demographics questionnaire obtained background information such as gender, relationship status, and parental marital

history. In addition, participants were asked to relate their perceptions of their parental attachment history using a modification of the Descriptions of Parental Caregiving Style (Hazan & Shaver, 1986; unpublished manuscript). The scale is based on Hazan and Shaver's Attachment Style Measure that categorizes adult attachment patterns as secure, avoidant, or anxious/ambivalent.

Relationship with others [RO] and self-relationship qualities [RS] were assessed using the Attachment and Object Relations Inventory [AORI] developed by Buelow, McClain, and McIntosh (1996). RO assesses relationships with others via three subscales of Peers, Parents, Partners and the RS using the three subscales of Secure, Independent, and Close.

Parenting styles were assessed with the Parenting Practices Survey developed by Robinson, Mandelco, Olsen, & Hart (1995). Authoritative parenting was assessed using the subscales of warmth, induction, democratic participation, and easy-goingness. Permissive parenting was assessed using the variables of lack of follow through, ignoring misbehavior, and self-confidence. Authoritarian parenting was rated on verbal hostility, corporal punishment, punitive strategies, and directiveness.

Participants completed the questionnaires in groups of no more than fifteen participants at a time. The completion of the packet required approximately 45 minutes of the participant's time.

## Results

Ratings on the AORI were calculated to give a score for RS and RO for each participant. Scores for the three parenting styles were calculated and each participant was assigned a parenting style according to the highest category score.

Table 1 reveals the means for RS and RO as a function of parenting styles. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine any differences between the groups. Contrary to the hypothesis, results showed that for the dependent variable of RS, there were no significant differences between the three parenting styles ( $F(2, 53) = 1.11$ ,  $p$  [is greater than] .05). However, for the variable of RO, as predicted, the authoritative parenting condition scored significantly higher than either the authoritarian or permissive parenting conditions with  $F(2, 53) = 7.41$ ,  $p$  [is less than] .01.

Table 1  
Means and Standard Deviations for RS  
and RO across Parenting Styles

	RS	RO
Parenting Style		
Authoritative	104.3 (16.0)	120.2 (17.2)
Authoritarian	97.2 (19.2)	103.6 (17.2)
Permissive	99.2 (7.9)	100.0 (10.5)

Additionally, scores for attachment styles were compared and each participant was assigned an attachment pattern for each parent according to the highest mean of the three categories. With the original 3 X 3 design there were four cells that were empty or n [is less than] 3. Thus, attachment was further categorized as just secure or insecure and parenting styles were grouped into authoritative or non-authoritative resulting in 4 conditions of secure attachment with authoritative parents [Sec/Atat], secure attachment with non-authoritative parents [Sec/NonA], insecure attachment with authoritative parents [Insec/Atat], and insecure attachment with non-authoritative parents [Insec/NonA]. An ANOVA revealed that for the variable of RS, there was a main effect for attachment ( $F(1, 51) = 3.95, p = .05$ ), but not for parenting style ( $F(1, 51) = 0.01, p [is greater than] .05$ ), and no significant interaction ( $F(1, 51) = 0.75, p [is greater than] .05$  (see Table 2). Post hoc tests revealed that the Sec/Atat and Sec/NonA conditions scored significantly higher than the Insec/Atat and Insec/NonA conditions. There were no significant differences within the secure attachment groups nor within the insecure attachment groups. The same pattern of results were found for the variable of RO with a significant main effect of attachment ( $F(1, 51) = 16.38, p [is less than] .01$ ), but not parenting style ( $F(1, 51) = 0.18, p [is greater than] .05$ ), and no interaction effect ( $F(1, 51) = 0.22, p [is greater than] .05$ ).

Table 2  
Means and Standard Deviations for RS and RO across  
Parenting Styles and Attachment Patterns

	Sec/Atat n=23	Sec/NonA n=2	Insec/Atat n=10	Insec/Non A n=20
RS	109.8 (10.6)	103.5 (36.1)	92.3 (15.4)	97.2 (15.4)
RO	126.7 (12.9)	127.0 (16.9)	105.5 (18.2)	100.2 (13.4)

Additionally, as hypothesized, 70% of those participants with an authoritative parenting style were securely attached while only 12.5% of those with an authoritarian parenting style were securely attached, and 0% of those with a permissive parenting style were securely attached. A chi-square showed these percentages to be significantly different from each other.

Finally, in order to assure that parenting styles and attachment were not unrelated, a Spearman rho revealed a correlation of 0.56.

## Discussion

The present study examined the effects of parenting styles on a person's perception of their own relationship qualities and their perception of how other people relate to them interpersonally. We had hypothesized that those persons with authoritative parents would score higher on variables such as warmth, feelings of security, and healthy independence which were predictive of a person's intimacy abilities. Although the scores were in the predicted direction, the primary finding was that those persons with authoritative parents did not have higher self-intimacy abilities than those participants with authoritarian or permissive parents.

Similarly, we hypothesized that the influence of authoritative parents, in contrast to those participants with either authoritarian or permissive parents, would result in more positive perceptions on variables which predicted a person's beliefs about other people's accessibility, trustworthiness, and responsiveness to one's needs. As predicted, participants with authoritative parents did score significantly higher than participants with authoritarian and permissive parents.

These results would imply that parenting styles do not have any influence on a person's self-perceptions of their relationship abilities but do influence how other people are viewed in the same context. One possible explanation for these findings is that parenting styles tend to be involved in discipline situations more than general parent-child interaction and may not be directed toward the child until they are older. Thus, they may be more likely to influence how a child feels about other people while the self-image is formed at an earlier age. This is consistent with the second analysis that showed that the main effects of attachment were significant for both self-perception and feelings about others but there were no main effects of parenting style for either variable. Thus, our hypothesis was not confirmed concerned the proposal that parenting styles and attachment measured similar constructs. Again, it seems that attachment is the decisive factor in formulating the internal working model and although parenting styles seem to parallel attachment styles, they, in fact, do not. Indeed, while 92% of those participants that are securely attached have authoritative parents, only 70% of the total number of authoritative participants are securely attached. The remainder of the majority of authoritative participants (27%) were ambiguously attached. Therefore, although there seems to be a high overlap of the concepts of attachment and parenting, it is clear that parenting styles do not influence either a person's ability to be intimate or their perception of other people's relationship abilities. Exactly what personal or interpersonal variables are affected by parenting styles awaits further research.

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