

The Effect of Parenting Style and Attachment Style on New Adult Intimacy

Jing Luo¹

¹ Department of Applied Psychology, New York University, US

Correspondence: Jing Luo, Department of Applied Psychology, New York University, US.

doi:10.56397/SPS.2025.06.05

Abstract

Establishing intimate relationships with romantic partners is an essential part of emerging adulthood, but how good relationships are established and whether they are related to parenting styles, early attachment styles, and adult attachment styles still need to be studied. The current study will examine how parenting style relates to attachment style and what role attachment style plays in intimate relationships. This paper proposes the following hypothesis: parenting styles influence the development of attachment styles. Attachment styles in childhood form different adult attachment styles under different parenting styles, which ultimately influence new adult intimate relationships.

Keywords: new adult, parenting style, parent-child attachment style, adult attachment style, intimate relationship

1. Introduction

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a crucial period of development. During this period, individuals become increasingly independent from their families. Young adults may still maintain close relationships with their parents, but they also develop close bonds, or intimate relationships, with their romantic partners. The formation of intimate relationships is an important milestone during this stage. People develop throughout their lives with the influence of childhood experiences, and intimate relationships are no exception. Childhood family relationships in emerging adults lay the foundation for later relationships with others inside and outside the family (Bretherton, 1985). Intimate relationships often develop through learning patterns of relationships with parents and other family members. Attachment theory

provides a model for understanding the correlation between the quality of children's relationships with their parents and their later relationships with their parents and others.

Attachment styles are divided into attachment relationships with nurturers during childhood and attachment relationships that develop in adulthood with close loved ones (Bartholomew, 1993). Research suggests that attachment styles lead to internal working patterns that guide intimate relationships in adulthood (Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001). Early attachment history is the basis for an internal working model of adult relationships (Collins & Read, 1990). Individuals with secure childhood attachments exhibit higher trust, intimacy, and reliability levels. In contrast, the opposite is true for those with insecure childhood attachments (Bowlby, 1973, 1982).

Attachment and caregiving systems are often activated simultaneously (Doinita & Maria, 2015). Baumrind (1991) defined three parenting styles: authoritative parenting style, with high responsiveness and high demand; authoritarian style, with low responsiveness and high demand; and permissive style, characterized by increased responsiveness and low demand. Responsiveness refers to how responsive parents are to their children's needs and the degree of support, warmth, and care they show them. Demanding refers to the degree to which parents require maturity and responsibility from their children, the rules and limits parents establish and apply for their children. Research has shown that secure attachment experiences with partners and responsive care for partners are positively associated with authoritative parenting styles and negatively associated with authoritarian and permissive parenting styles (Millings, Walsh, Hepper & O'Brien, 2013). Parenting style explains attachment style, while schematic style predicts two sub-dimensions of attachment style (Mahasneh, Al-Zoubi, Batayneh & Jawarneh, 2013). Therefore, this research paper aims to explore the attachment styles of children who grow up with different parenting styles and whether these impacts affect the building of their intimate relationships. This paper proposes the following hypothesis: parenting styles influence the formation of attachment styles. Attachment styles in childhood form different adult attachment styles under different parenting styles, which ultimately affects the intimate relationships of new adults.

2. Parenting Styles Influence New Adults' Attachment Styles

Attachment style is an internal and consistent working model throughout one's life and is influenced by parenting style. Longitudinal studies have demonstrated that childhood attachment relationships extend into adulthood (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). According to attachment theory, the initial attachment figure is the caregiver (parents), but throughout development, the attachment object gradually changes to the romantic partner (Doinita & Maria, 2015). This is because early interactions between children and caregivers have developed internalized beliefs and encoded them into a cognitive and emotional schema that becomes an internal working model. This working schema learned from interactions with parents is

the attachment style and continues to influence individuals' emotions, behaviors, and expectations in intimate relationships. Parenting style is an interaction with parents, so it affects this internal working model, which is the attachment style. Therefore, parenting style influences attachment style.

Different parenting styles explain different attachment styles. Research has shown a significant positive correlation between authoritative, neglectful, and authoritarian parenting styles and secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant attachment types and a significant negative correlation between neglectful and anxious-ambivalent, redundant protective, and secure parenting styles (Doinita & Maria, 2015). Warm and accepting parents are consistently associated with positive developmental outcomes, such as emotional attachment security and good relationships with others (Ladd & Pettit, 2002). Secure attachment in childhood occurs when parents are responsive to the needs of their children. Positive parenting provides an environment in which children can safely explore and allows children to develop the confidence to interact with an autonomous world, face challenges, and regulate emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004). Neglect or failure to engage parents and indifferent discipline can imprint the emotional circuitry and lead to the adoption of an anxious or avoidant attachment strategy (Collins & Feeney, 2010). Parenting characteristics, such as lack of warmth, supervision, inconsistency, and poor parenting practices, are associated with anxious parent-child attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978).

3. Parenting Styles Influence New Adults' Intimacy

Parenting styles shape early parent-child relationships and foster an emotional climate in children that can be generalized to intimate relationships. The family is one of the most potent influences on young people before they enter mature intimate relationships (Simons, Simons, Landor, Bryant & Beach, 2014). This is because children are exposed to parenting practices that influence behavior, cognition, and emotion, internalizing interactions with parents as their working models. Romantic relationships (intimate relationships) are the same emotionally charged relationships as parent-child relationships, so the internal working models learned from parent-child

relationships can guide the intimate relationships children form and maintain in the future. According to Detterman's (1993) cognitive research, the similarity between two situations will help the skills learned from one situation to transfer more directly to the other, as mentioned above, where both parent-child and romantic relationships are emotionally close.

Parents' different parenting styles influence the quality of their children's future intimate relationships. According to social learning theory, family experiences can influence a person's performance in later relationships by mimicking parental interaction styles (Seiffge-Krenke, Overbeek & Veermulst, 2010). For example, parental caring and encouraging autonomy are positively associated with later romantic relationship satisfaction in children (Scharf & Mayseless, 2008). Unskilled parenting, characterized by poor communication, inadequate monitoring, unresponsiveness, and insensitivity, is associated with adverse interactions with intimate partners in early adulthood (Simons et al., 2014); young people who experience positive parenting perceive others as accessible and responsive, have meaningful and vital relationships with others and are significantly associated with the degree to which they can form healthy relationships (Dalton III, Frick-Horbury & Kitzmann, 2006).

4. Attachment Styles Influence Intimate Relationships in New Adult

Childhood attachment styles are consistent with adult attachment styles and influence the quality of intimate relationships in new adults. Research suggests that attachment styles continue after infancy and influence many aspects of an individual's life as they enter adulthood (Feeney & Cassidy, 2003). The adult attachment carried over from childhood, with stylistic qualities nearly identical to the attachment style with their primary caregiver as a child (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). According to Ainsworth and colleagues (1978), adults can be classified into three attachment styles. Adults who fall into the secure attachment category have the healthiest relationships characterized by compassion, helpfulness, minimal jealousy, and trust. Those who fit into the anxious attachment style are characterized by dependency and a strong desire to make commitments in relationships, but their inability to trust leads to clinginess. Avoidant attachment styles tend to avoid

intimate relationships altogether (Feeney & Noller, 1990).

Adult attachment styles influence the quality of intimate relationships through attachment to romantic partners. A series of studies have shown that, as intimate relationships develop, young adults are primarily inclined to use romantic relationships for attachment-related functions according to Umemura, Lacinová, and Macek (2015). Over time, young people become increasingly dependent on their romantic partners (Umemura, Lacinová, Macek, & Kunnen, 2017). Romantic partners, like caregivers to parents, can serve as essential attachment roles, one of the critical tenets of romantic attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

As with parent-child attachment in childhood, the quality of intimate relationships may vary across adult attachment styles. Some people have relatively strong bonds with their partners, while others have somewhat insecure relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). People with a secure attachment style should be attracted to and develop stable, supportive relationships with high levels of trust, interdependence, commitment, and satisfaction. Conversely, those with an avoidant style should form emotionally distant relationships with low levels of trust, interdependence, loyalty, and joy (Simpson, 1990). Insecure adults have difficulty managing the powerful emotions that arise in intimate relationships. However, biased interpretations and maladaptive coping skills related to negative perceptions of self or others create an imbalance in seeking connection and retaining autonomy, both of which are important for healthy intimate relationships (Blatt & Levy, 2003). For example, an insecure person craves connection. However, research has shown that they may become addicted, lose control over their sexual relationships, and express themselves too freely and too much to be acknowledged by others (Shaver, Schachner & Mikulincer, 2005).

5. Parenting Style and Attachment Style Influence Intimacy in New Adults

It has been argued above that parenting styles influence attachment formation, and that parenting style and attachment style predict intimacy in young adults. Therefore, according to the above foundations, this paper concludes that: parenting styles influence the formation of

attachment styles, attachment styles in childhood form different adult attachment styles under different parenting styles, and adult attachment styles influence intimacy in new adults.

Parenting styles shape early family relationships and influence individuals' attachment relationships with their parents. There was a significant positive correlation between authoritative, neglectful, and authoritarian parenting styles and secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant attachment types (Doinita & Maria, 2015). Children's earliest family relationships set the stage for later relationships with others (Bretherton, 1985). A large body of empirical data relates attachment to broad socialization outcomes during childhood and adulthood (Waters et al., 1986). Young people's relationships with romantic partners are social relationships that develop from early attachment relationships with their parents, forming adult attachment relationships. Research has shown that young people's perceptions of the quality of their childhood relationships with their parents are significantly associated with the type of current attachment to others (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Maternal respect, confidence, acceptance, responsibility, non-aggression, non-demand, paternal care, love, and humor can differentiate between secure and insecure (avoidant and anxious or ambivalent) adult attachment styles (Feeney & Noller, 1990).

Different attachment styles influence the quality of intimate relationships. Attachment theories can be divided into parent-child attachment relationships and adult attachment relationships. There is a connection between the two. The attachment relationship children form with their parents may translate to the quality of their marital relationships in the future. People who had a secure attachment style to their parents as children endorsed trusting relationships and were able to maintain romantic relationships in adulthood; people who had an anxious attachment style to their parents as children showed codependency in adult relationships and no lasting romantic relationships; Those with an avoidant attachment style to their parents were distrustful, distant from others, and reported fewer romantic experiences (Feeney & Noller, 1990). As adults, couples with an insecure parent-child attachment style were more likely than couples with a secure parental attachment

style to report marital difficulties (e.g., disagreements, verbal violence, decreased intimacy) and divorce within the first few years of marriage (Crowell et al., 2009). Attachment theory provides a framework to conceptualize how healthy and unhealthy love arises from rational adaptations to early social experiences. These patterns persist into adulthood and serve as templates for intimate relationships (Stackert & Bursik, 2003).

Therefore, it can be concluded that parenting style influences attachment style, and attachment style influences intimacy. Parenting style and attachment style together influence intimacy.

6. Discussion

6.1 Limitations and Future Directions

First, the study does not discuss different cultures and socioeconomic statuses (SES). Most empirical studies cited in this paper are based on Western cultural samples, so further research is needed to study whether the findings apply to different cultural contexts. For example, whether authoritarian parenting is more prevalent in Asian contexts and whether people raised in authoritative and authoritarian parenting behave differently in intimate relationships than people from Western contexts. Moreover, the effects of parenting styles on close relationships may differ across economic levels. Culture and SES are areas of great inquiry for the future.

Second, gender differences are not discussed in this paper. Parenting styles also differ between mothers and fathers. Children are influenced by parenting styles that may come from their fathers, mothers, or both parents. Whether the absence of the father's or mother's role in the child's development affects the child's attachment style and future intimate relationships. In addition, whether there are gender differences in attachment styles and quality of intimate relationships between girls and boys is also an area worthy of study.

Third, most of the empirical findings cited in this paper are based on individual self-reports, which may be biased. Because the findings may be overestimated due to common methodological differences and response tendencies, such as consistency bias and social desirability. Most research samples provided retrospective reports of parental behaviors from childhood memories. Retrospective reports of childhood experiences are likely to contain

errors, unreliability, and imperfect memories. In addition, parents of new adults commenting on their less-than-ideal parenting style may also contribute to the bias of new adult reports.

Fourth, the effect of parenting and attachment styles in the conclusions presented in this research paper is unidirectional. However, it must be acknowledged that this is an uncritical conclusion and that there is a two-way possibility for any influence. Therefore, further causal analysis is needed in the future. Because the quality of past and present parent-child and intimate relationships were measured simultaneously in the previously cited studies, any interpretation must acknowledge the possibility of a two-way influence. For example, current relationship quality may affect young people's memories and perceptions of attachment security or quality in early parent-child relationships.

Finally, the research population of this paper is new adults and does not cover late adulthood. Because most of the existing empirical studies are on college students, it is also worthwhile to explore whether parenting styles and attachment styles affect intimacy and even marital relationships in late adulthood.

References

- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Armsden, G.C., & Greenberg, M.T. (1987). The inventory of parent and peer attachment: Individual differences and their relationship to psychological well-being in adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 16*, 427-454.
- Bartholomew, K. (1993). From childhood to adult relationships: Attachment theory and research.
- Baumrind, D. (1991). Parenting styles and adolescent development. In J. Brooks-Gunn, R. Lerner, A.C. Peterson (Eds.), *The encyclopaedia of adolescence* (746-758). New York: Garland.
- Blatt, S. J., & Levy, K. N. (2003). Attachment theory, psychoanalysis, personality development, and psychopathology. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 23*(1), 102-150.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). Attachment and loss: Volume II: Separation, anxiety and anger. In *Attachment and loss: Volume II: Separation, anxiety and anger* (pp. 1-429). London: The Hogarth press and the institute of psychoanalysis.
- Bowlby, J. (1982). Attachment and loss: retrospect and prospect. *American journal of Orthopsychiatry, 52*(4), 664.
- Cassidy, J., Ziv, Y., Mehta, T. G., & Feeney, B. C. (2003). Feedback seeking in children and adolescents: associations with self-perceptions, attachment representations, and depression. *Child development, 74*(2), 612-628.
- Collins, N. L., & Feeney, B. C. (2010). An attachment theoretical perspective on social support dynamics in couples: Normative processes and individual differences. *Support processes in intimate relationships, 89-120*.
- Collins, Nancy L., Read, S.J. (1990). Adult Attachment, Working Models, and Relationship Quality in Dating Couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58*(4), 644-663.
- Crowell, J. A., Treboux, D., & Brockmeyer, S. (2009). Parental divorce and adult children's attachment representations and marital status. *Attachment & Human Development, 11*, 87-101. doi:10.1080/14616730802500867
- Dalton III, W. T., Frick-Horbury, D., & Kitzmann, K. M. (2006). Young adults' retrospective reports of parenting by mothers and fathers: Associations with current relationship quality. *The Journal of General Psychology, 133*(1), 5-18.
- Detterman, D. K. (1993). The case for the prosecution: Transfer as an epiphenomenon.
- Doinita, N. E., & Maria, N. D. (2015). Attachment and parenting styles. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 203*, 199-204.
- Feeney, J. A., & Noller, P. (1990). Attachment style as a predictor of adult romantic relationships. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology, 58*(2), 281.
- Feeney, J. A., & Noller, P. (1990). Attachment style as a predictor of adult romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58*, 281-291. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.58.2.281
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. R. (1994). Attachment as

- an organizational framework for research on close relationships. *Psychological Inquiry*, 5(1), 1-22.
- Hazan, C., Shaver, P. R., & Bragshaw, D. (1988). Love as attachment the integration of tree behavioral systems. *The psychology of love*, 68-99.
- Ladd, G. W., & Pettit, G. S. (2002). Parenting and the development of children's peer relationships. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Vol. 5. Practical Issues in Parenting* (pp. 269-309). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Mahasneh, A. M., Al-Zoubi, Z. H., Batayenh, O. T., & Jawarneh, M. S. (2013). The relationship between parenting styles and adult attachment styles from Jordan university students. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 3(6), 1431-1441.
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2004). Security-based self-representations in adulthood. *Adult attachment: Theory, research, and clinical implications*, 159-195.
- Millings, A., Walsh, J., Hepper, E., & O'Brien, M. (2013). Good partner, good parent: Responsiveness mediates the link between romantic attachment and parenting style. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39(2), 170-180.
- Neal, J., & Frick-Horbury, D. (2001). The effects of parenting styles and childhood attachment patterns on intimate relationships. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 28(3), 178-178.
- Scharf, M., & Mayseless, O. (2008). Late adolescent girls' relationships with parents and romantic partner: The distinct role of mothers and fathers. *Journal of Adolescence*, 31(6), 837-855.
- Seiffge-Krenke, I., Overbeek, G., & Vermulst, A. (2010). Parent-child relationship trajectories during adolescence: Longitudinal associations with romantic outcomes in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Adolescence*, 33(1), 159-171.
- Shaver, P. R., & Hazan, C. (1993). Adult romantic attachment: Theory and evidence. *Advances in personal relationships*, 4, 29-70.
- Shaver, P. R., Schachner, D. A., & Mikulincer, M. (2005). Attachment style, excessive reassurance seeking, relationship processes, and depression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31(3), 343-359.
- Simons, L. G., Simons, R. L., Landor, A. M., Bryant, C. M., & Beach, S. R. (2014). Factors linking childhood experiences to adult romantic relationships among African Americans. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 28(3), 368.
- Simpson, J. A. (1990). Influence of attachment styles on romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(5), 971.
- Stackert, R. A., & Bursik, K. (2003). Why am I unsatisfied? Adult attachment style, gendered irrational relationship beliefs, and young adult romantic relationship satisfaction. *Personality and individual differences*, 34(8), 1419-1429.
- Umamura, T., Lacinová, L., & Macek, P. (2015). Is emerging adults' attachment preference for the romantic partner transferred from their attachment preferences for their mother, father, and friends? *Emerging Adulthood*, 3(3), 179-193.
- Umamura, T., Lacinová, L., Macek, P., & Kunnen, E. S. (2017). Longitudinal changes in emerging adults' attachment preferences for their mother, father, friends, and romantic partner: Focusing on the start and end of romantic relationships. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 41(1), 136-142.