

The Relationship between Father's Parenting Behavior and Adult Attachment

Zhile Chen^{1,a,*}

¹*College of Arts and Sciences, New York University, New York, United States*

**corresponding author: zc2544@nyu.edu*

Abstract: Parenting behaviors are based on the Internal Working Model (IWM), which people acquire through attachment experiences in childhood. Bowlby and Ainsworth developed the fundamental model of childhood attachment. Later, researchers extended the original attachment theory and measures of adult attachment to study adult attachment bonds. The attachment styles of adults and their parenting behaviors are closely related. There is a connection between a parent's adult attachment style and parenting style, as they have varying levels of demandingness in their IWM. Nonetheless, when fathers and mothers experience marital conflict or maltreatment, there is a difference between them. As most previous research concentrated on mothers, it is important to investigate and gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the father's adult attachment and father's parenting style, considering various marital factors. Father with an insecure adult attachment tend to adopt approaches of withdrawal or authoritarian control in parenting, especially in the case of conflict. A secure adult attachment of father is essential for the child to develop a secure attachment. A better understanding of the father's parenting style can help improve family intervention programs. This review can provide some insights for future research regarding the role of father in a family.

Keywords: father's adult attachment, parenting behavior, emotion

1. Introduction

1.1. Theory of Adult Attachment

Besides emphasizing the importance of attachment style in childhood, classic literature has provided existing evidence on the importance of attachment relationships throughout life. Adult attachment, according to Hazan and Shaver, is a type of affective attachment related to what exists between infants and their primary caregiver [1]. At the same time, the characteristics of the early attachment style also exist in the adult attachment in the later stage of life.

Before discussing the relationship between the early attachment theories and adult attachment, it is important to demonstrate the development of early attachment style theories. One of the researcher representatives, Bowlby, developed the basic concept of attachment theory, which was conceptualized as humans' proclivity to form strong affectionate bonds with significant others [2]. With Bowlby's attachment theory, Ainsworth et al. identified three early attachment patterns using the Strange Situation Protocol: secure, anxious-resistant, and avoidant [3]. Early attachment is

strongly associated with coordinated interpersonal behavior, as well as expectations and beliefs about oneself, others, and relationships.

Hazan and Shaver originally related adult attachment to the relationship between infants and their primary caregivers [1]. They explored the effects of avoidant, secure, and ambivalent early attachment styles on children's later understanding of self, intimate relationships, and relationships with other people. Hazan and Shaver believe that adult attachment in the couple relationship is related to early attachments [1]. Psychologists classified adult attachment styles using the tripartite system designed by Ainsworth and colleagues to demonstrate individual differences in early attachments [3]. However, besides their similarities, it is not sufficient to conclude that adult and early attachment are the same concepts. The adult attachment style is not only related to one's physical and mental health but also their interpersonal relationships [4].

One of the essential concepts when discussing attachment styles is the Internal Working Model (IWM). The model postulates that a person's history of close peer relationships, romantic relationships, and parenting behaviors. It might be influenced by that person's prior experiences with affinity, interpersonal interactions, and relationship expectations. Attachment experiences during early childhood can influence later attachment styles in life. Plus, attachment styles in adults can influence how they raise their children [5]. A person is more likely to have a secure adult attachment style if, for instance, they had a secure attachment style when they were children and maintained that style throughout their lives. Furthermore, this person's adult attachment toward their romantic partner and parent-child attachment will be secure, too. In conclusion, the IWM from childhood can influence people's later attachment style, which is related to their adult attachment.

1.2. Measurements of Adult Attachment

To measure adult attachments, researchers used the approach of self-report. For example, the Love-Experience Scale Questionnaire designed by Hazan and Shaver measured 12 aspects of attachment, including happiness, trust, fear of closeness, and other factors [1]. And then they classified respondents into three categories: secure attachment style, avoidant attachment style, and anxious/ambivalent attachment style. Later in 1998, Brennan and Shaver developed a more reliable self-report scale, the Multi-item Measure of Adult of Romantic Attachment Scale, on items from several existing self-report scales [6]. However, the classification of this scale is more diverse, which has 4 categories: secure, fearful (avoidant), preoccupied (anxious), and dismissing.

For interviews, the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) can classify adults' states of mind about attachments, and it has a series of questions about early connections with parents and early attachment [7]. Besides the AAI, there are also several other interview approaches, such as Adult Attachment Scales (AAS), and similar questionnaires that also measure adult attachments, but from a slightly different perspective. These diverse interviews and questionnaires make the studies on adult attachment more comprehensive and detailed.

1.3. Parenting Styles

This paper focused on fathers' parenting behavior in a family structure including cisgender fathers and mothers. Doinita and Maria define three parenting practices as varying degrees of responsiveness and demandingness between child-parent interactions on a continuum [5]. The permissive parenting style, in which parents have almost no control over their children, have moderate responsiveness. Parents rarely interfere with the children's actions and decisions. In the authoritative style, these parents have a moderate level of control while allowing their children some autonomy, which is high in affection and responsiveness to the child. Finally, with an authoritarian parenting style, parents

expect high obedience from children. They often use power to control children's behaviors when inappropriate behaviors occur.

It is also known that insecure parent-adult attachment leads to decreased parenting quality [4]. The secure adult attachment tends to support parents to have a positive, supportive, warming attitude while parenting their children. In contrast, insecure parents are likely to have more difficulties in responding to their children sensitively and warmly. In the avoidance and anxiety style, parents tend to have more harsh parenting, which means more physical attacks, verbal attacks, and other crude behaviors or emotions towards their children [8]. The harsher the parenting style, the less attachment bond the parents build with their children.

In today's modern society, people pay more and more attention to the quality of parenting. However, it is still uncommon for fathers to be the leading caregiver in families' educational activities. When people talk about the connection between attachment and parenting, they frequently neglect fathers and neglect that involving fathers in the family may positively impact the child's mental and physical development. Unfortunately, there has been little research on parenting that includes fathers as research participants. It is conceivable that researchers should put more emphasis on studying the father's adult attachment style and his function in the family as an educator. More research is needed to detect the extent to which a child's development is influenced by the adult attachment style of the child's father, the emotions experienced by the father, and the role that the father plays in the family. This review can provide some guidance for future attachment research.

2. Common Impacts of Adult Attachment on Parenting

Early attachment experiences, mainly in the family context, will shape and gradually develop a person's Internal Working Model. Furthermore, this model will influence their emotional and cognitive development as they move into adulthood. The attachment style will be applied to many facets of a person's life and will be used to determine his or her adult attachment styles and relationships with others. Research suggests that the adult attachment of both fathers and mothers will determine their parenting styles in the future. Doinita and Maria investigated the connection between various adult attachment patterns and parenting styles [5]. Participants in the study completed a questionnaire to measure their adult attachment types and self-reported parenting styles. Each parent has attachment styles linked to different parenting practices regulated by the attachment's IWM. The findings show a positive relationship between secure adult attachment style and authoritative parenting styles. In an Authoritative style, parents usually have a warm and sensitive caregiver that will lead to positive developmental outcomes. In this situation, with the secure adult attachment style, parents are more likely to provide their children with high responsiveness and demandingness where children constantly experience warm and receptive positive parenting based on their needs. Children will also build a secure base with these emotionally stabilized parents. As a result, they are more likely to establish a stable parent-child attachment. Moreover, there is also a positive correlation between fathers' and mothers' fearful adult attachment and permissive parenting styles. Parents with anxious or avoidant adult attachment styles usually have a difficult time regulating their own emotions already. Thus, when they are taking care of their children and demanding them to have high responsiveness, they have more difficulties sensitively responding to their children promptly. In Doinita and Maria's study, there are shared common impacts of adult attachment and parenting styles within their marital relationship. These results suggest that if there are interventions or lessons for the insecure type of parents to learn to improve their emotional stabilities and encourage them to increase positive parenting behaviors, this may improve their parent-child relationship.

Past experience like maltreatment of parents predicts less sensitive and more authoritarian parenting styles as adults. Since they have not personally experienced secure attachment, parents who

have experienced childhood trauma are less likely to comprehend how to act as a caregiver in a constructive, nurturing, and sensitive manner. Particularly, dismissive parents are less aware of the demands of their kids. The preoccupied parents have a less supportive authoritarian parenting style and have a more challenging time controlling their emotions. To determine whether attachment style and childhood abuse predict sensitive parenting during babyhood, early childhood, and middle childhood, the parents participated in research [9]. Researchers gathered the information for this study from a longitudinal study to assess the efficacy of parenting programs for families receiving child protective services. The result shows that, during infancy, dismissive parents are found to predict modestly poorer sensitivity scores than autonomous parents. In early and middle childhood, parents' dismissive attitudes predicted significantly lower sensitivity ratings than autonomous parents. Parents with unresolved IWM only consistently predicted significantly lower sensitivity scores than autonomous parents during infancy. There was no connection between parental sensitivity ratings and childhood abuse at all three points. According to the findings, parents' unresolved states of mind predict insensitive caregiving in early childhood, while parents' dismissive states of mind predict insensitive caregiving from infancy through middle childhood. For example, when a father has experienced maltreatment during childhood, he is more likely to develop an insecure adult attachment. This insecurity may increase the likelihood of a permissive or authoritarian parenting style. Additionally, he might feel more negative emotions when parenting, be less sensitive, and spend less time showing compassion to his kids when they engage with him as a father. This indicates that he is less attached to his mother or his kids. Therefore, there may be some parenting challenges that result in more stressful parenting situation.

The disorganization of the household and the insecure type of attachment are two factors that are very likely to predict negative parenting behavior. However, how the household chaos may influence fathers and mothers with different types of adult attachment and then increase the negative parenting behaviors remains unclear. Zvara et al. conducted research in 2020 that recruited 742 children and their parents who lived in low-resource rural regions [4]. To examine the connection between father and mother's adult attachment, home disorder, and parenting style, researchers employed self-report adult attachment style using AAS, evaluated household chaos, and assessed controlled play between parent and children. Results suggest that the household disturbance will exacerbate the bad parenting practices of insecure attachment parents for both fathers and mothers. According to research, not only does parental attachment insecurity reduce the quality of parenting behavior for mothers and fathers, but the chaos of a persistently disordered home environment may also impact the parents by amplifying fewer sensitive and more authoritarian parenting practices. Therefore, parental attachment insecurity reduces the quality of parenting behavior for fathers and mothers. And a disordered home environment amplifies fewer sensitive and more authoritarian parenting practices. It was shown that fathers with dismissive attachment styles were less responsive during parenting. The disorganized stressors were associated with less sensitivity and increased authoritarian interactions with children during father caregiving. Therefore, it leads to a more adverse outcome for the children. In general, insecure adult attachment parents are less responsive than the secure type and have lower self-control over their emotions. When introducing the noise or chaotic household to them, they will encounter even more difficulty controlling their negative emotion, leading to more negative parenting behaviors. Thus, if the household cleanliness can be improved, then both parents' caregiving quality should be increased for the insecure and secure parents.

3. The Unique Role of Father's Adult Attachment in Parenting

3.1. The Relationship between Father's Different Parenting Aspects and Adult Attachment

There is much less existing research about fathers' parenting styles and behaviors compared to the study about mothers' parenting. When discussing parenting, both parents are supposed to take action to accompany, educate and fulfill the needs of their children; however, mothers take most of the responsibility and spend most of the time taking care of children. Therefore, it is interesting to see how a father's adult attachment styles may impact the relationship within the family. In the study about the mediating role of harsh parenting that was carried out by Li et al., the researchers used Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) questionnaires to collect data from approximately one thousand families of adolescents in the province of Henan in China [8]. According to the findings, adverse parent-adolescent attachment is more strongly associated with father avoidance and harsh paternal parenting than with insecure adult attachment and harsh parenting behavior of the mother. The adult attachment between father and mother would influence not only father-child attachment but also the mother-child attachment. It was found that father's parenting style had a greater impact on the family's overall harmony than mother's. Their study suggests that within the traditional Chinese family, a father's adult attachments influence his authoritative parenting, relationships with adolescents, and the attachments between the mother and adolescents. Based on these findings, the relationship between parents' adult attachment has a primary effect on parent-adolescent relationships. Suppose two parents have a pleasant and stabilized relationship, as well as a good ability to regulate their emotions. In that case, it will not only benefit themselves but also help the whole family. According to these findings, adult attachment between parents affects parent-adolescent relationships. If the father has an insecure type of adult attachment, he might influence the family's happiness more than if the mother has an insecure type of attachment. These insecure attachment styles of parents are likely to impact the child-parent attachment negatively.

Parent relationship quality and parenting style significantly impact family harmony and influence the children's later development. According to a recent study on relationship evaluation by Chang and Overall, people with less secure feelings in their relationship are more negatively biased when recalling their relationship quality [10]. Generally, the studies suggest that insecure adult attachment people are more inclined to memorize adverse depressing events in their relationship, evaluate the quality of their relationship more negatively, and have more negative emotions during their relationship, thus decreasing their relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, if two parents are securely attached, they are more likely to implement more sensitive and nurturing parenting behaviors towards their children. This is determined by parents' IWM, where their interpersonal relationship and implicit parenting styles originated.

For a typical modern family constructed by cisgender parents, most of the time father is the role that encourages the children to go out of their comfort zone and explore the surrounding world. At the same time, the mother takes care of nurturing and safety of the children. Therefore, two parents have different parenting goals and motivations on how to treat and interact with their children. Fathers as caregivers engage in rough and tumble play with their infants more. Safyer et al. focused on 12m old infants and their parents to study implicit moves of power and affiliation in father and mother's parenting styles and parenting behavior [11]. They employed self-report for adult attachment types between two parents and collected observational data to try to forecast parenting behavior using implicit moves. The findings indicate that adult attachment anxiety is negatively related to positive parenting behaviors, whereas lower attachment anxiety encourages positive parenting behaviors. Stronger affiliative desires like responsiveness and nurturing predict lower anxiety and more positive authoritative parenting, while higher power motivation predicts authoritarian parenting. Adult attachment avoidance relates to fewer positive parenting behaviors, whereas attachment anxiety

relates to more negative parenting behaviors. Lower power motivation predicts positive fatherhood, whereas higher power motivation predicts poor fatherhood. Lower father attachment anxiety encourages positive parenting behaviors, while higher attachment anxiety discourages them.

It is very likely to increase harsh parenting behaviors when there is an increase in conflict and marital withdrawal between the parents. The IWM, measured by the secure base script, exerts an influence on the connection between parents and children and the relationship between parents. The IWM is also connected with conflicts and existing vulnerabilities. Additionally, it may provide people resilience when facing risk (like marital withdrawal) from another attachment figure. In order to identify risk and resilience factors within family relationships and parenting, Trumbell and colleagues are interested in the impact of parents' conflict on parenting style when viewed from the perspective of the family system [12]. The researchers used laboratory settings to monitor discussion tasks, observe the parents in free play sessions with their children, and used an adult attachment assessment named Attachment Script Assessment (ASA). The study's findings indicate that fathers' IWM experience is inversely related to their level of intrusion and emotional detachment. On the other hand, fathers whose secure base script scores often respond sensitively to their infants and have a higher level of emotional involvement with them. For fathers, a secure IWM, or secure adult attachment type, was related to positive emotional engagement and regulation and more authoritative parenting behaviors, whereas for mothers, this was not the case. This might be because mothers are more attached to their children no matter how they are attached to their spouses. The attachment bonding between mother-child often has a stronger connection than father-child attachment, no matter the type of adult attachment of parents. However, when marital conflict exists, the fathers are more apt to withdraw from the family when their IWM is weak. Fathers do not have an urgent need to take care of their children with the mother's presence, and they are more likely to take less responsibility for parenting unconsciously.

An adult's secure or insecure attachment style influences the likelihood of experiencing mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. People with safe attachments tend to live happier lives overall than those with insecure attachments. For example, in the study of Marganska et al., researchers found that people with insecure attachment styles usually had higher depression and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) scores and more emotion dysregulation. In contrast, the secure attachment styles were associated with lower sadness, fewer GAD symptoms, and reduced emotion dysregulation [13].

Suppose an intervention can help with the conflict in the parents' relationship. In that case, it may also help improve both parents' ability to regulate their emotions and increase the adult's attachment security. More secure feelings and beliefs towards their spouse might encourage more positive parenting behavior and decrease harsh negative parenting. Because both parents' actions impact their children's growth, it is vital to evaluate the father's role and adult attachment to his children. In the study of Zvara et al., researchers compared data collected before and after interventions to determine how the intervention works differently for fathers and mothers [14]. In addition, the present study uses data to determine how the intervention works. The findings demonstrate that: (1) Father's adult attachment style, emotional stability, mental health situation, and parenting style also contribute to explain for children's future development in addition to the mother's influences. (2) There is a significant indirect effect of an intervention that it helps reduce family conflicts, father's anxiety or depression symptoms, and children's behavioral problems. At the same time, the intervention increases desired positive parenting behaviors. Additionally, the attachment style served as a mediator for marital conflict and negative parenting behaviors exhibited by both the fathers and the mothers.

3.2. Unique Trait of Fathers and Relevant Effects

When the father has an insecure attachment, there are more marital conflicts. And more marital conflicts may, in return, lead to even more insecure adult attachment toward his spouse. Fearful attachment is when a person fears intimacy and tries to avoid getting close to the significant other. Moreover, the preoccupied attachment is the type of person constantly changing ways asking for reassurance from the spouse about their love and relationships. Bi et al. investigated father spousal attachment and father emotional expression (with marital conflict as a variable); father's adult attachment with his spousal and father-child attachment; and father expression of emotion and child attachment to the father [15]. The conclusion is based on the Spousal Attachment Styles Questionnaire (SASQ), interviews, and coded observational data between child-father interactions completed by the three family members (father, mother, and child). The result shows that fathers with a preoccupied adult attachment style generally have more negative emotions during parenting that might lead the children to develop a less secure type of IWM. Father's traits of low sensitivity and low responsiveness are likely to contribute to this result. In samples with greater marital conflict, preoccupied adult attachment type fathers experience negative feelings more and positive feelings less during their interaction with the children. However, fathers with higher fearful attachment predicted fewer negative feelings and more positive emotions during interactions with their children when the marital conflict was present. Finally, the data also shows that marital conflict strengthens correlations between the father's preoccupied attachment and affective displays in father-child interactions.

4. Conclusions

Parenting styles are intricately intertwined with the adults' attachment styles of the parents. This article compiled several previous studies that measured a father's adult attachment, parenting style, emotion, and other factors, such as parental conflict and household chaos. Generally, parents with an insecure attachment style are more likely to have an authoritarian parenting style. In contrast, securely attached parents tend to develop an authoritative parenting style. When there is an increase in the household's disorganization and conflict between the father and the mother, it becomes more challenging for insecure fathers to deal with their children. When disturbance occurs, both parents are more emotionally susceptible to their environment, resulting in less sensitive parenting. However, fathers are more likely to withdraw from parenting and report more negative emotions. In light of these unfavorable circumstances, the father reported more instances of negative authoritarian control as well as more instances of negative emotion directed toward both the mother and the children. The majority of existing studies are mainly focused on the adult attachment of mothers, but not fathers. Considering the important role of father in a family, future researchers should investigate more about father's adult attachment and father's role in a family. This review can provide some guidance to the design of parent education programs in communities and schools.

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