Relating Parenting Styles to Adult Emotional Intelligence: 
A Retrospective Study

Parenting style is a known associate to many aspects of emotion socialization, knowledge, and self-understanding. However, there is little empirical research comparing parenting styles to emotional intelligence overall. The current study explores the relation between parenting style from students’ childhood (and subsequent adult) emotional intelligence. Psychology undergraduate students completed a retrospective measure of their parents’ childrearing behaviours (coded as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglecting) plus a measure of their current emotional intelligence. It was hypothesized that authoritative parenting would relate to highest emotional intelligence levels, permissive parenting and authoritarian parenting to low emotional intelligence levels, and neglecting parenting to the lowest emotional intelligence levels. Results showed that emotional intelligence was higher among participants raised authoritatively and permissively than it was for participants raised by authoritarian or neglecting parenting styles, indicating that the responsiveness and levels of support characteristic of these styles have the strongest positive relation to adult emotional intelligence. The implications of the present findings, as well as the directions for future research, are discussed.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, emotion, parenting style, responsiveness, demandingness

Literature Review

Following Adler’s (1924) original theory outlining the impact of parenting style on adult personality, decades of subsequent research has shown significant links to such constructs as wellness in life, self-control, self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction (see Darling & Steinberg, 1993). The present study seeks to examine the link between parenting style and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) in a retrospective study of university students.

Parenting Style

Since Baumrind’s (1966, 1989, 1991) original conceptualization, parenting style (PS: Betts, Gullone, & Allen, 2009; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Maddahi, Javidi, Samadzadeh, & Amini, 2012) has been characterized by the combined dimensions of parental reinforcement (i.e., love and support), known as responsiveness; and the number, volume, and type of demands (i.e., rules and regulations) made on a child, known as demandingness. To be clear, demandingness can be negative or positive (Alegre, 2011) wherein negative
demandingness includes psychological manipulation and inconsistent or excessive discipline, whereas positive demandingness involves employing more egalitarian methods of authority, offering rationale for their decisions, providing autonomy, and holding appropriate expectations (Baumrind, 1989). By crossing parents’ level of responsiveness with their demandingness, this renders a four-cell configuration. Specifically, Authoritative Parents place high positive demands on children, while providing consistent reinforcement in the form of affection and support. Alternatively, Authoritarian Parents are high in negative demands with little or no positive reinforcement. Permissive Parents show little demandingness but are highly responsive; and Neglectful Parents demand little from their children but similarly provide them little or no attention or support.

In past decades, substantial research has examined how PS predicts children’s outcomes in later life. For example, authoritative PS has been associated with positive self-concept (Lee, Daniels, & Kissinger, 2006), less relational aggression (Kawabata, Alink, Tseng, van Iljendoorn, & Crick, 2011; Sutcliffe, 2014), fewer symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress (Betts et al., 2009; Lee, Li, & Thammawijaya, 2013; Wagner, Cohen, & Brook, 1996), fewer internalizing behaviours leading to maladaptive eating in children and adolescents (Salafia, Gondoli, Corning, McEnery, & Grundy, 2007), and finally academic procrastination and misbehaviour (Diaconu-Gherasim & Mairean, 2016; Mahasneh, Bataineh, & Al-Zoubi, 2018; Xu, Dai, Liu, & Deng, 2018; Zabihollahi, 2013). Research has found similar, albeit indirect, results when expanding to samples from more diverse contexts such as race, culture, and income (Amato & Fowler, 2004; Lee et al., 2013; Maddahi et al., 2012; Rudy & Grusec, 2006; Shumow, Vandell, & Posner, 1998).

Emotional Intelligence

Although not the first to coin the term, Goleman (1995) was instrumental in popularizing the construct of Emotional Intelligence. With little discrepancy found in relational or occupational outcomes between individuals with high vs. low IQ, Goleman (1995) believed these differences could be explained by personality characteristics such as determination, self-control, and motivation—solabelled emotional intelligence (EI). Since then, other researchers have added different categories of EI. Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade (2008) considered EI as the ability to not merely reason about emotions, but to use emotions as a factor in rational thought. They identified three different perspectives by which to view EI: (1) the ‘specific ability’ approach sees a direct focus in one’s ability to use emotions to achieve different skills, such as perceiving the emotions of others (e.g., emotional input in thought and management of emotion); (2) alternatively, the integrative model of EI connects an overall measurement of several specific emotional skills into an overall EI value; and finally (3) the mixed model includes other factors that are not typically placed under EI, but encapsulate related traits (Mayer et al., 2008). Petrides and Furnham (2001) focused instead on the distinction between EI as either a trait or ability. Trait-EI is often measured in
personality (chiefly self-report) studies, and focuses on dispositional traits; in contrast, Ability-EI is typically measured through performance tests, and relates to specific cognitive abilities. Salovey and Mayer previously introduced a separate (ability-based) definition of EI, reflecting one’s ability (a) to perceive emotions in oneself and others, (b) to use emotions to help with thought, and (c) to understand emotions and regulate them to promote personal growth (1990). The authors proposed a hierarchical model of EI development, from basic perception of emotions to the more complex regulation of emotions. Most researchers have reached consensus that both trait and ability models are useful in conceptualizing EI (Schutte, Malouff, & Hine, 2011).

Subsequent EI research has shown its significant impact when applied to relationships (Lopes et al., 2004; Lopes, Salovey, & Strauss, 2003), education (Ferrando et al., 2011; Maynard, 2003; Rivers et al., 2012), health outcomes (Turpyn, Chaplin, Cook, & Martelli, 2015), and the workplace (Jung & Yoon, 2012; Kotzé & Venter, 2011). Furthermore, emotional intelligence has been studied in the context of teamwork, job performance, and job satisfaction (Carmeli, 2003; Chien Farh, Seo, & Tesluk, 2012; Lee & Ok, 2012).

Research has further shown positive personal outcomes for individuals with high EI such as subjective and psychological well-being (Burrus et al., 2012), greater cooperation, and fewer externalizing and internalizing behaviours in later childhood (Izard et al., 2001). Moreover, EI has also been negatively correlated with maladaptive behaviours, such as alcohol consumption (Schutte et al., 2011) and regular smoking habits among young adults (Hill & Maggi, 2011). Potential benefits have also been suggested for clinical therapy settings (Zeidner et al., 2008).

Parenting Style and Emotional Intelligence

Emotional socialization research has shown the family to be the initial learning centre for children, recognizing that parents significantly impact their children’s social and emotional development (Salovey & Sluyter, 1997). It is therefore plausible to further assume that PS plays a significant role in the development of children’s EI. Research in this area remains fairly limited. Alegre (2012) examined the link between mothers’ parenting style and their children’s EI, but uncovered no significant result. In contrast, Karim, Sharafat, and Mahmud (2013) examined the emotional regulation of over 200 children given a particular parenting style, and found a more adaptive regulation in children raised in an authoritative style, and the reverse for children raised in an authoritarian style.

Introduction

This retrospective study aims to identify the relation between perceived parenting behaviours (typified into the four styles) and EI. These findings will augment the current literature from a new perspective, specifically that of adults responding retrospectively about both of their parents’ behaviours and parenting.
styles. This should provide insight into the more long-term effects of PS, while offering support for its relation to EI. The model of ability-based EI was used for this study to allow a focus on the critical emotional skills attained by the form of parenting experienced. The central hypothesis in this study tests whether a difference in emotional intelligence exists between PSs; however, additional hypotheses are offered:

**Hypothesis 1.** Authoritative parenting behaviours (High Responsiveness + High Demandingness) would correspond to the highest levels of all measured components of emotional intelligence (viz. emotion recognition in self and others, emotion regulation in self and others, and use of emotions for thought).

**Hypothesis 2.** Authoritarian parenting behaviours (Low Responsiveness + High Demandingness) would correspond to low levels of all components of EI.

**Hypothesis 3.** Permissive parenting behaviours (High Responsiveness + Low Demandingness) would correspond to levels of all components of EI, between those of authoritative and authoritarian styles. No research to date has specifically examined permissive parenting behaviours, and research on responsiveness and demandingness affecting EI remains conflicting. High responsiveness behaviours are associated with higher understanding of emotions (Dunn & Brown, 1994) and emotion knowledge (Bennett, Bendersky, & Lewis, 2005). Parental monitoring is an aspect of positive demandingness, relating to high levels of general EI (Liau, Liau, Teoh, & Liau, 2003); and it is possible that the lack of positive demands made on children with permissive parents negates the benefits of responsiveness provided.

**Hypothesis 4.** Finally, Neglectful parenting behaviours (Low Responsiveness + Low Demandingness) would correspond to the lowest levels of EI on all components.

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample consisted of 85 undergraduate students (91% female) from a mid-sized university. Participant ages ranged from 16 to 39 years with a median age of 20. The ethnic background of participants was 68% White, 11% Black, 6% Middle Eastern, 2% East Asian, and 1% Latino (12% Other). All participants were taking at least one university psychology course enrolled in the psychology participant pool; compensation was provided through partial credit towards their eligible psychology course.

**Measures and Procedure**

In addition to age and sex, the demographics questionnaire asked...
whether participants currently lived with parents (or how long since they lived with parents); whether they grew up with a single parent, both parents, or shared custody; and whether they had children of their own.

The 30-item Parental Behaviour Questionnaire (PBQ; Wissink, Dekovic, & Meijer, 2006) assessed the frequency of specific parental behaviours. Six paired subscales were assessed: warmth and responsiveness (responsiveness), strictness and discipline (negative demandingness), and explaining and autonomy granting (positive demandingness). Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale format, ranging from ‘never’ (1) to ‘very often’ (5). Analysis of the three major subscales showed high internal consistency: Responsiveness (α = .93), Positive Demandingness (.86), and Negative Demandingness (.91). Whereas the original scale was written for adolescents, items were adapted to suit an audience of young to middle adult years, answering retrospectively about childhood for the purposes of this study. Baumrind (1991) found high consistency between mothers and fathers raising children together; the scale was adapted for responses averaging the frequency of behaviours displayed by both parents.

The 10-item Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10; Davies, Devonport, & Scott, 2010) assessed behaviours related to participants’ emotions. As a concise version of the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS; Schutte et al., 1998), the BEIS-10 consists of five subscales: recognition of own emotion, recognition of others’ emotion, regulation of own emotions, regulation of others’ emotions, and utilization of emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). With a 5-point scale (1 = ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 = ‘strongly agree’), the overall scale showed high reliability (α = .86).

After providing informed consent, participants completed a questionnaire comprised of two scales and a separate pencil-paper demographics questionnaire (in randomized order); all other responses were recorded using computer scoring sheets, taking under thirty minutes.

Results

Subscale scores of support, and both positive and negative demandingness were calculated; scores above the median were classified as high, and scores on or below were classified as low. Participants scoring high on both positive demandingness and support were coded as Authoritative (n = 25); high negative demandingness with low support was coded as Authoritarian (n = 22); high support with low demandingness was coded as Permissive (n = 15); and low support and demandingness were coded as Neglectful (n = 16). Data from 7 participants, who fell into none of these categories, were excluded (final N = 78).

Means and standard deviations can be seen in Table 1. With significance set at .05 for all tests, an analysis of variance revealed significant differences in overall EI by group, $F(3,74)=10.40, p < .05$. Student-Newman-Keuls post-hoc comparison tests showed no significant difference in overall EI between Neglecting and
Authoritarian parenting, and no significant difference between Authoritative and
Permissive parenting (ps > .05). There was, however, a significant difference
between styles with high and low responsiveness. Participants who believed their
parents were highly responsive – either Permissive or Authoritative in style– had
higher overall EI levels than participants who believed their parents were less
responsive –either Authoritarian or Neglecting in style.

There were also significant differences by group for both regulation of other’s
emotions, $F(3,74) = 42.34, p < .05$; and use of emotions, $F(3,74) = 24.39, p < .05$;
both not for the following variables: recognition of own emotions, recognition of
other’s emotions, or regulation of own emotions (ps > .05). Student-Neuman-Keuls
multiple comparison procedures revealed the same pattern as with overall EI,
namely that Neglecting and Authoritarian styles (though not different from each
other) had significantly lower levels of both regulation and use of emotion than the
Permissive and Authoritative styles (which were not significantly different from
each other).

**Table 1.** Means (Standard Deviations) of Emotional Intelligence by Parenting
**Style (N = 78)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEIS-10 Scales</th>
<th>Authoritative</th>
<th>Authoritarian</th>
<th>Permissive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of own emotions Neglecting</td>
<td>7.36&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (2.08)</td>
<td>7.50&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.44)</td>
<td>7.80&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.67)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of others’ emotions</td>
<td>7.44&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (2.26)</td>
<td>8.00&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.41)</td>
<td>7.80&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.40&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (2.13)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of own emotions</td>
<td>7.20&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (2.40)</td>
<td>7.80&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.52)</td>
<td>7.87&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.25&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.88)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation of other’ emotions *</td>
<td>8.60&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.80)</td>
<td>3.72&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (1.52)</td>
<td>7.80&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.00&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (1.59)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of emotion *</td>
<td>8.70&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.50)</td>
<td>5.59&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (1.47)</td>
<td>8.00&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (1.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.06&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (1.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence (Total) *</td>
<td>39.24&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (7.06)</td>
<td>32.64&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (4.32)</td>
<td>39.27&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt; (4.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.69&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt; (5.31)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant ANOVA ($p < .05$)

Means with identical subscripts are not significantly different ($p > .05$)

**Discussion**

The central hypothesis in the present study was supported, based on
significant differences in EI by style. Contrary to hypotheses that PS would
uniformly relate to all components of EI, there was no significant difference by PS on the EI subcomponents of recognition of one’s own or others’ emotions, and regulation of one’s own emotions. More research is needed to sufficiently explain the lack of relation between these factors. In addition, whereas secondary hypotheses predicted PSs to relate to EI scores in a linear hierarchical fashion, results indicate a more bipolar model along the spectrum of responsiveness. Authoritative and permissive parenting – both highly responsiveness styles – were related to higher scores in regulation of others’ emotions, use of emotions for thought, and overall emotional intelligence. That the two responsive styles were not different from each other is meaningful, since parents who are engaging, supportive, and warm in their approach should likely observe their child exhibit strong levels of EI. The styles characterized by low responsiveness further confirm these findings. Participants reporting Authoritarian or Neglecting parents had lower EI scores on two of those three components, as well as overall EI. Absent differences between these two unresponsive styles indicates that placing harsh demands on children without offering support is associated with lower EI scores.

The current results match well with the findings of (a) Betts et al. (2009), who found increased risk of depressive symptomatology among adolescents raised with low nurturance and high overprotection; and Karim et al. (2013) who reported emotional regulation was highest for youth raised by authoritative parents and lowest when raised by authoritarian parents. Conversely, the present results differ somewhat from Alegre (2012), who found no relation between mothers’ self-reported PS and children’s EI. In the current study, participants were asked to report their memory of their parents’ behaviours, representing a measure of perceived parenting, rather than a self-report format performed by parents. It is possible that parenting in the current study was reported with less bias than the mothers’ self-reports in the previous study, offering clearer results. This would also explain the surprisingly high number of participants reporting a frequency of parental behaviours low enough to qualify as neglecting. Additionally, the current study examines the style presented by both parents, rather than simply mothers’ PS. Likely the interaction of both parents’ styles better predicts emotional intelligence than what could be garnered from a solitary parent (Alegre, 2012). To date, no research has examined this specific interaction of mother, father, and child with regards to the child’s emotional outcomes, but the current results suggest that avenue should prove fruitful.

The present study is not without its limitations, the first of which is a lack variance in each of ethnicity, age, and gender within the sample. With a university student sample, it is assumed that social class and household income are also of limited range. Thus, the relative heterogeneity of the sample impedes the generalizability of findings. Due to the constraints of the available pool of participants, the sample size was also not especially large. The use of retrospective scales to report parenting harbours its own limits. Some research has shown that adolescent perceptions of their parents’ style is at times inaccurate (Smetana, 1995). However, in the case of participants no longer living at home, their memory for parental behaviours is poor or altered over time. The parent-child relationship
itself is liable to change with time, and may skew one’s perception of past
behaviour. In any case, it is important to keep in mind that all results are based on
the participants’ perception of PSs displayed in their childhood, and not
necessarily true PSs. Additionally, the administration of all measures was carefully
done in an effort to eliminate socially-desirable responding, however it remains
possible that EI scores may carry some inaccuracies due to respondent bias.
The present study also fails to take into account the various contextual factors known
to affect parenting. Distal factors such as neighborhood poverty and available
social services have been found to affect the type of parenting behaviours
displayed, as well as family factors such as children’s difficult behaviour, parent’s
education, and mothers’ ages (Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster, & Jones, 2001). In
future, research on the link between parenting and EI would do well to consider
parenting behaviours within various relevant contexts.

Alternatively, the present research offers several significant contributions, the
first of which is the potential of PS in avoiding poor EI outcomes. As the majority
of homes become dual income and the line between work and home life blurs, it
may be that in trying to meet basic needs today’s parents increasingly lack the time
or energy to communicate sufficiently with their children. A simple increase in the
frequency of responsive behaviours such as asking about a child’s feelings or
recognizing when the child is upset and offering to listen, and increasing the
amount of warmth and affection shown, would shift a parent from a neglecting to a
permissive PS, a move which the present findings suggest would have a positive
impact on a child’s EI development. Despite the common use of adult samples
within EI research, parenting perceptions are most often gathered from adolescent
samples. Thus, the current study presents significant findings from an under
researched perspective, that of adults’ perceptions of their parents’ past parenting
behaviours. Furthermore, the present study is unique by examining parenting of
both mother and father. Thus, results in the current can expand a literature that
focuses primarily on mothers’ parenting. Results also greatly contribute to the
literature surrounding emotional intelligence. This study is the first to significantly
identify a relation between PS and emotional intelligence. While causation cannot
necessarily be inferred, these results call attention to a relation between two
constructs needing greater empirical recognition.

In summary, the present study identifies a significant relation between PS and
children’s emotional intelligence in adulthood. Implications can also be made to
improve child outcomes. Intervention and education programs for parents should
focus on behaviours showing responsiveness to children for most effective results,
especially when it comes to learning how to regulate the emotions of others.
Results indicate that responsiveness has a significant relation to the regulation of
others’ emotions, the use of emotion for thought, and overall EI. The same results
are not found for demandingness. Thus, parenting styles high in responsiveness,
regardless of discipline level, have the best outcome for adult emotional
intelligence.
References


