

Relating Parenting Styles to Adult Emotional Intelligence: A Retrospective Study

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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. To evaluate the link between parenting style and current emotional intelligence, the present study asked psychology undergraduates to complete 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 for those raised authoritatively and permissively than for those 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: *demandingness, emotional intelligence, emotion, parenting style, responsiveness.*

Literature Review

Following Adler's (1924) original theory outlining the impact of parenting style on adult personality, subsequent research across the decades has shown significant links to such constructs as wellness in life, self-control, self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction (see Darling and Steinberg 1993, Erikson 1959, Mahasneh et al. 2018, Sutcliff 2014, Turpyn et al. 2015). The present study examined 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 (Ausubel 1954, Betts et al. 2009, Maccoby and Martin 1983, Maddahi et al. 2012) has been characterized as the combined dimensions of parental reinforcement (i.e., love and support, known commonly as *responsiveness*); and the number, volume, and type of demands imposed (i.e., rules and regulations placed on the

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child, known commonly 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: more egalitarian methods of authority, offering rationale for parenting decisions, providing autonomy, and holding appropriate expectations (Baumrind 1989). By crossing parents' levels of responsiveness with levels of 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. *Authoritarian Parents* alternatively 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 and support (Bednar and Fisher 2003, Sullivan et al. 2010).

In past decades, substantial research has examined how parenting style predicts children's outcomes in later life. For example, authoritative parenting style has been associated with positive self-concept (Lee et al. 2006), less relational aggression (Kawabata et al. 2011, Sutcliffe 2014), fewer symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress (Betts et al. 2009, Lee et al. 2013, Wagner et al. 1996), fewer internalizing behaviours leading to maladaptive eating in children and adolescents (Salafia et al. 2007), and finally academic procrastination and misbehaviour (Diaconu-Gherasim and Mairean 2016, Mahasneh et al. 2018, Xu et al. 2018, Zabihollahi 2013). Research has found similar, albeit indirect, results when examining samples from more diverse contexts such as race, culture, and income (Amato and Fowler 2004, Lee et al. 2013, Maddahi et al. 2012, Rudy and Grusec 2006, Shumow et al. 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 – so labelled "emotional intelligence." Since then, other researchers have added different categories. Mayer et al. (2008) considered emotional intelligence as the *ability* to not merely reason about emotions but to also use emotions as a factor in rational thought. They identified three different perspectives by which to view emotional intelligence: (1) the "specific ability" approach places in direct focus 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) the integrative model approach converts an overall measurement of several specific emotional skills into an overall emotional intelligence value; and finally (3) the mixed model approach includes other factors that are not typically placed under emotional intelligence, but rather incorporates related traits (Mayer et al. 2008). Petrides and Furnham (2001) focused instead on the distinction between emotional

intelligence as either a trait or ability. Trait-based emotional intelligence is often measured in personality (chiefly self-report) studies, and focuses on dispositional dimensions; in contrast, ability-based emotional intelligence is typically measured through performance tests, and relates to specific cognitive abilities. Salovey and Mayer (1990) previously introduced a separate (ability-based) definition of emotional intelligence, 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. The authors proposed a hierarchical model of emotional intelligence development, from basic perception of emotions to the more complex regulation of emotions. Most researchers have reached the consensus that both trait and ability models are useful in conceptualizing emotional intelligence (Schutte et al. 2011).

Subsequent research has shown the significant impact of emotional intelligence when applied to relationships (Lopes et al. 2004, Lopes et al. 2003), education (Ferrando et al. 2011, Maynard 2003, Rivers et al. 2012), health outcomes (Turpyn et al. 2015), and the workplace (Jung and Yoon 2012, Kotzé and Venter 2011). Furthermore, emotional intelligence has been studied in the context of teamwork, job performance, and job satisfaction (Carmeli 2003, Chien et al. 2012, Lee and Ok 2012). This may be attributed to the tendency for individuals with high emotional intelligence to have lower turnover rates and more effective organizational commitment. Satisfaction may increase also because of lower levels of negative feelings or through superior work conduct.

Finally, research has shown positive personal outcomes for individuals with high emotional intelligence 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). Studies indicate that individuals who have developed emotional intelligence also display a more positive affect (Fernández-Berrocal and Extremera 2016). Moreover, emotional intelligence has also been negatively correlated with maladaptive behaviours, such as alcohol consumption (Schutte et al. 2011) and regular smoking habits among young adults (Hill and Maggi 2011). Potential benefits have also been implicated in clinical therapy settings due to improved receptiveness to the training (Zeidner et al. 2008).

Parenting Style and Emotional Intelligence

Emotional socialization research has shown the family to be the initial learning centre for children, recognising that parents significantly impact their children's social and emotional development (Salovey and Sluyter 1997). It is therefore plausible to further assume that parenting style plays a significant role in the development of children's emotional intelligence. Research in this area remains fairly limited. Alegre (2012) examined the link between mothers' parenting style and her children's emotional intelligence, but uncovered no significant results. In contrast, Karim et al. (2013) explored 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, but the reverse for children raised in an authoritarian style.

Present Study and Hypotheses

This retrospective study evaluated the relation between perceived parenting behaviours (typified by the four styles) and emotional intelligence. These findings will augment the current literature from a new perspective, specifically that of adults responding retrospectively about both of their parents' behaviours and child-rearing styles. This should provide insight into the more long-term effects of parenting style, while offering empirical support for its relation to emotional intelligence. The model of ability-based emotional intelligence was used presently to focus on the critical emotional skills attained the parenting style that respondents remember. The central hypothesis investigated whether differences in emotional intelligence could be predicted from unique parenting styles; however, additional hypotheses were 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 emotional intelligence.

Hypothesis 3. *Permissive* parenting behaviours (High Responsiveness + Low Demandingness) would correspond to levels of all components of emotional intelligence, situated between those of authoritative and authoritarian styles. No research to date has specifically examined permissive parenting behaviours, and research on responsiveness and demandingness affecting emotional intelligence remains mixed. High responsiveness behaviours are associated with higher understanding of emotions (Dunn and Brown 1994) and emotion knowledge (Bennett et al. 2005). Parental monitoring is an aspect of positive demandingness, relating to high levels of general emotional intelligence (Liau et al. 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 emotional intelligence 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% Caucasian, 11% African-American, 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 offered as partial credit towards their eligible psychology course.

Measures and Procedure

In addition to age and sex, the *demographics questionnaire* asked whether (and how long) participants currently live 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 et al. 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 1= "never" to 5= "very often." Analysis of the three major subscales showed high internal consistency: Responsiveness ($\alpha = .93$), Positive Demandingness ($\alpha = .86$), and Negative Demandingness ($\alpha = .91$). Whereas the original scale was written for adolescents, items were adapted to suit an audience of young to middle adult years, answering retrospectively about their childhood for the purposes of the present 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.

Finally, the 10-item *Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale* (BEIS-10; Davies et al. 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 one's own emotions, recognition of others' emotions, regulation of one's own emotions, regulation of others' emotions, and utilization of emotions (Salovey and Mayer 1990). With a 5-point scale (1= "strongly disagree" to 5= "strongly agree"), the overall scale demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = .86$).

After providing informed consent, participants completed the 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 (overall $N=78$).

Means and standard deviations are found in Table 1. With significance set at .05 for all tests, an analysis of variance revealed significant differences in overall emotional intelligence by group, $F(3, 74)=10.40, p<.001$. Student-Newman-Keuls post-hoc comparison tests showed no significant difference in overall emotional intelligence between Neglecting and Authoritarian parenting ($p>.05$), and no significant difference between Authoritative and Permissive parenting. There was, however, a significant difference between parenting styles with high and low levels of responsiveness. Participants who believed their parents were highly responsive – either Permissive or Authoritative in style – had higher overall emotional intelligence levels than participants who believed their parents were less responsive – either Authoritarian or Neglecting in style ($p<.05$).

There were also significant differences by group for both regulation of other's emotions, $F(3, 74) = 42.34, p<.001$; and use of emotions, $F(3, 74) = 24.39, p<.001$; both not for the following variables: recognition of one's own emotions, recognition of other's emotions, and regulation of one's own emotions ($p>.05$). Student-Neuman-Keuls multiple comparison procedures revealed the same pattern as with overall emotional intelligence, 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 ($N=78$)

BEIS-10 SCALES	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive	Neglecting
Recognition of own emotions	7.36 _a (2.08)	7.50 _a (1.44)	7.80 _a (1.37)	7.00 _a (1.67)
Recognition of others' emotions	7.44 _a (2.26)	8.00 _a (1.41)	7.80 _a (1.42)	7.40 _a (2.13)
Regulation of own emotions	7.20 _a (2.40)	7.80 _a (1.52)	7.87 _a (1.47)	7.25 _a (1.88)
Regulation of other' emotions *	8.60 _a (1.80)	3.72 _b (1.52)	7.80 _a (1.47)	5.00 _b (1.59)
Use of emotion *	8.70 _a (1.50)	5.59 _b (1.47)	8.00 _a (1.56)	5.06 _b (1.95)
Emotional Intelligence (Total) *	39.24 _a (7.06)	32.64 _b (4.32)	39.27 _a (4.50)	31.69 _b (5.31)

Note. * 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 emotional intelligence by style. Contrary to hypotheses that parenting style would uniformly relate to all components of emotional intelligence, there was no significant difference by parenting style on the emotional intelligence 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, though it may have resulted from the lower sample size. In addition, whereas secondary hypotheses predicted parenting styles to relate to emotional intelligence scores in a linear hierarchical fashion, results indicated a polarized 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 emotional intelligence. Conversely, the styles characterized by low responsiveness further confirm these findings. That is, participants reporting being raised under either an Authoritarian or Neglecting parental style had lower emotional intelligence scores on two of the three components, as well as overall emotional intelligence. The absence of differences between these two unresponsive styles indicates that placing harsh demands on children without offering support is associated with lower emotional intelligence 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 parenting style and children's emotional intelligence, though this appears (in the wider theoretical landscape) to be anomalous. In the current retrospective study, participants were asked to provide their memory of their parents' child-rearing behaviours, representing a measure of perceived parenting; rather than soliciting a parenting inventory directly from the parents. It is possible that parenting in the current study was reported with less bias than the mothers' self-reports in Alegre's (2012) study. This would also explain the surprisingly high number of participants reporting a frequency of parental behaviours low enough that qualified as 'neglecting.' Uniquely, the current study examined the style presented by both parents, rather than simply the mother's parenting style. 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 the 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, beginning with a lack measurement 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 and contributed to the lack of significant difference along some measures. The use of retrospective scales to assess parenting style 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, a respondent's memory for parental behaviours may be poor or even altered over time. The parent-child relationship itself is liable to change with time and skew one's recollection of past parental behaviour. In any case, it is important to keep in mind that the present results are based on the participants' perception of parenting styles displayed in their childhood, and not necessarily true parenting styles. Additionally, the administration of all measures was carefully executed in an effort to eliminate socially-desirable responding, however it remains possible that emotional intelligence 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 et al. 2001). In future, research on the link between parenting and emotional intelligence would do well to consider parenting behaviours within various relevant contexts.

With the acknowledgement of these limitations, it is important to note that the present research offers several significant contributions to the emotional intelligence literature, the first of which is the potential of optimal parenting style to encourage positive emotional intelligence outcomes. As the majority of homes become dual-income and the line between work and home life blurs, it may result that in trying to meet basic needs today's parents increasingly lack the time or energy to communicate effectively with their children. Our recommendation then would be a parent's increase in both the amount of warmth and affection displayed and the frequency of responsive behaviours (e.g., asking about a child's feelings or recognizing when the child is upset and offering to listen) should help shift a parent from a neglecting (harmful) style to at least a permissive parenting style. Furthermore, despite the common use of adult samples in emotional intelligence research, parenting perceptions are more often gathered from adolescent samples. Thus, the current study offers confirmatory results within an under-explored domain – that of adults' perceptions of their parents' child-rearing behaviours. On that same note, the present study is unique in its examination of parenting of both mother and father. Thus, results in the current can expand the research literature beyond what was typically focussed on the mother's parenting style. Results also greatly contribute to the literature surrounding emotional intelligence. Although not the first to identify a relation between parenting style and emotional intelligence (Alegre 2011, 2012), and although causation cannot be determined, these results call attention to a relation between two constructs that are empirically entwined.

Implications should be stated as means to improve child-rearing outcomes. Intervention and education programs for parents should focus on behaviours to enhance parental responsiveness to children for most the effective results, especially concerning both the ways and means toward regulating the emotions of others. The present results indicated that responsiveness was significantly related to the regulation of others' emotions, the use of emotion for thought, and overall

emotional intelligence. The same results were not however found for demandingness. Thus, parenting styles high in responsiveness (regardless of discipline level) would offer the best outcome for adult emotional intelligence.

Future research would benefit in the analysis of confounding factors that may influence the parenting style-emotional intelligence relationship such as age, gender, education level. So too, whereas the present study utilized an ability-based approach to emotional intelligence, and equivocal argument could be made that a trait-based approach is a legitimate means to evaluate the hypothesis. As such, the concept of how to both define and measure emotional intelligence – as it relates to the empirical testing of hypotheses – remains a contested matter. Finally, it would be worthwhile to explore how different combinations of parenting styles in two-parent homes (e.g., a permissive mother with an authoritarian father) relate to emotional intelligence

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