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Psychology

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Abstract

In the first of two studies, the use of data compiled from questionnaires concerning perceived parenting style and romantic attachment style of Coastal Carolina University students were used to test the hypothesis that the authoritative parenting style would be related to the secure attachment style. The researcher used the terms attachment style and romantic attachment style interchangeably throughout the study. These variables were then statistically analyzed by a chi-square test of independence and showed statistical significance to support the hypothesis. The frequency of students who answered to have both authoritative parenting and secure attachments was significantly higher than the other combinations of parenting and attachment style. In the second study the researcher focused on students' preferred coping tendencies as a function of parenting style. These variables were then statistically analyzed by an unpaired t-test and were found to significantly support the hypothesis that students' perceived parenting styles would be a function of coping styles. The data suggests the importance of parenting and the influence it can have on adult attachment style and coping tendency. This heightened awareness will hopefully make a difference in the decisions parents make in regard to their children. Parenting skills can have a tremendous impact on the psychological health and well being of children. Thus, knowledge about improving parenting skills may lead to improved emotional and social health.

In recent years, parental authority has become a popular concern due to an increased curiosity about the outcomes it can have on individual development. Baumrind (1971) established a model consisting of three types of parental authority: permissiveness, authoritarianism, and authoritativeness. Permissive parenting styles are characterized by a higher level of responsiveness as opposed to a more rigid expectation of behavior. Authoritarian parents are commanding, yet are not responsive. They expect complete obedience without question. They outline strict rules and scrutinize their children's undertakings. The authoritative parenting styles are demanding and responsive. There are guidelines for behavior, but they support exploration and self-discovery (Baumrind, 1971).

The current literature concerning parental authority leads one to question the outcomes of parenting style. Hazan and Shaver have developed much of the research concerning adult attachment theory, including the adult attachment model of attachment styles (1987). Attachment styles have been divided into secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent. Secure attachment style is defined by

an ability to have close relationships with others, being comfortable with a give and take dependency, and experiencing no eminent fear of abandonment. The avoidant style is characterized by an inability to get close to others. These avoidant characteristics include difficulty trusting or depending on others, and often significant others wish to get closer than an avoidant individual is comfortable being. Finally, the anxious-ambivalent attachment style often manifests itself as feelings of self-doubt in concern with relationships and wanting to merge completely with another individual. These feelings that anxious-ambivalent individuals have often result in pushing their partners away through the individuals' overwhelming compulsion to combine lives with their partner (Bringle & Bagby, 1992; Carranza & Kilmann, 2000; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Nair & Murray, 2005).

More recently, there have been new studies leading to fresh discoveries in the literature concerning parental styles. Authoritarian parenting has been found to influence students to be more reliant upon others, less likely to gain pleasure from work, and to result in a quitting attitude when confronted with a difficult obstacle (Gonzalez, Greenwood, & WenHsu, 2001). Also, Neal and

Frick-Horbury (2001) found that 70% of their participants who reported an authoritative parenting style were securely attached. However, only 12.5% of participants who reported an authoritarian parenting style were securely attached. This finding implies that authoritative parenting styles seem to be related to secure attachment style. In another study, 56% of participants classified themselves as secure, 25% as avoidant, and 19% as anxious-ambivalent (Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001). This study by Neal and Frick-Horbury supported the definition constructed by Hazan and Shaver for an avoidant individual to exhibit characteristics of fear of intimacy, emotionality, and jealousy (2001, 1987). Overall, the researchers found warmer parental relationships were reported by participants with secure attachment as opposed to those with the two insecure (avoidant and anxious-ambivalent) attachments. Also, there was a similarity between the attachment histories of secure and avoidant participants. This apparent discrepancy was attributed to avoidant adults' tendency to glamorize their parental relationships and disregard any negative feelings associated with these relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Support for the authoritative parenting style being the most positive determinant of intimate relationships was reported in a study conducted by Sharabany, Eshel, and

Hakim (2008). They found that maternal authoritative parenting style was associated with favorable or healthy same-sex friendships in girls. The characteristics of favorable and healthy friendships would be classified as secure attachment. Similarly, paternal authoritative parenting styles produced favorable same-sex friendships in boys (Sharabany, Eshel, & Hakim, 2008).

Recently, in a study conducted in Turkey, Ozen (2003) found that children from divorced families tended to develop more fearful attachment styles compared to children from intact families. However, the researchers found no data to indicate that the other two attachment styles (insecure and secure) were affected by the parents' marital status. Simpson, Winterheld, Rholes, and Orina (2007) found that women give more attentive, and emotional care than men in relationships. The increased care results in lower stress for the receiver and an overall more favorable reaction to their partners' care giving attempts. This finding suggests that the warmth or responsiveness that is characteristic of the authoritative parenting style is imperative for the comfort and positive attachment reactions of children. Findings in a study on children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) indicated that when parents allowed these children more autonomy,

this increased autonomy resulted in anxious attachment, while restriction of autonomy predicted avoidant attachment (Finzi-Dottan, Manor, & Tyano, 2006). Viewed in the context of the permissive parenting style, which would coincide with the allowance of children's autonomy, this concept of increased or decreased autonomy shows a trend of attachment that occurs in this investigator's research.

The studies reported here provide the framework in which the current study was conducted. The relationship between parenting styles and romantic attachment styles was studied. The researcher predicted that an authoritative parenting style would predict a secure romantic attachment style. Also, the researcher predicted there would be a distinctly higher percentage of participants who would classify themselves as secure, rather than avoidant or anxious-ambivalent.

Method

Design

The study was conducted using a correlational design. The first dependent variable was students' perceived parenting style, which had three levels. The categories were authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles. The next dependent variable was attachment style,

which also had three levels. These categories were secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent attachment styles.

Participants

The sample included 73 undergraduate student volunteers enrolled in classes at Coastal Carolina University. Thirty-four of the student volunteers agreed to participate in this study as a course requirement in an introductory psychology class. The other 39 participants were solicited from a Latin class and an upper-level history class.

Materials

The materials included four separate forms. The first was an informed consent form, the second was a demographic survey, the third was an attachment styles questionnaire, and the fourth was the Parental Authority Questionnaire or PAQ (Buri, 1991). The informed consent form had information for the participants about the study, informed them they would not be harmed by participating in the study, and assured them of the voluntary nature of the study. The demographic survey was designed to obtain information related to the participants' age, sex, and major. The attachment styles questionnaire contained three paragraphs that described the three types of attachment styles. The participants were instructed to choose the statement that

best described their typical romantic attachment style (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). The PAQ consists of 30 statements to which subjects respond on five-point Likert scales with response options from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The 30 questions were divided into three categories; ten pertaining to permissive parenting, ten pertaining to authoritarian parenting, and ten pertaining to authoritative parental authority. Each statement described the participants' perceived maternal parenting styles.

Procedure

The researcher arranged to meet with students from the introductory psychology classes during three scheduled times. With each group she introduced herself, and informed the students that participation in the study was voluntary. Students were also told they could leave the testing area at any time and not complete the materials or items if they felt uncomfortable responding to the statements. All participants received identical materials packets, each of which contained an informed consent form, demographic survey, attachment styles questionnaire, and Parental Authority Questionnaire. The participants were instructed to choose one of the styles from the attachment styles questionnaire that best described their tendencies, and to

rate the statements in the Parental Authority Questionnaire on the Likert scales by choosing response options from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Data collection required approximately 15 minutes in each classroom. Once subjects completed all materials, the researcher reminded them they could receive information about the results of the study if they wished by emailing the investigator at the end of the semester. The researcher wrote her email address on the board.

Results

The researcher hypothesized that students who experienced the authoritative parenting style would develop a secure attachment style and that a significantly larger percentage of participants would classify themselves as secure rather than avoidant or anxious-ambivalent. The data did, in fact, show a significant relationship between the two variables. Sixty-five percent of respondents classified themselves as secure. This percentage was much higher than the 32% of participants who classified themselves as avoidant and the 3% of participants who classified themselves as anxious-ambivalent.

When calculating a 2x2 chi-square test of independence the researcher did not include data from the permissive parenting style and anxious-ambivalent attachment style

categories due to their low frequencies. The chi-square test showed the relationship between the remaining categories to be statistically significant, $X^2(1, N = 72) = 4.71$, $p = .03$. Refer to Table 1 and Figure 1 to see the frequencies of parenting style and attachment style categories.

Discussion

The hypothesis that the authoritative parenting style would be a predictor of secure romantic attachment style was confirmed. The second hypothesis that there would be a distinctly higher percentage of participants who would classify themselves as secure, rather than avoidant or anxious-ambivalent, was also confirmed. Sixty-five percent of the respondents were self-categorized as secure and influenced by the authoritative parenting style. This percentage was substantially more than the occurrence of avoidant attachment style at 32% and anxious-ambivalent attachment at 3%.

These results are not consistent with a study conducted by Neal and Frick-Horbury (2001), who found 56% of participants to be secure, 25% avoidant, and 19% anxious-ambivalent. Quite possibly, in this study students were uncomfortable categorizing themselves as anxious-ambivalent because the statements were described

negatively. The percentage of participants who had both authoritative parenting style and secure attachment was 51%. These results were different from a study conducted by Neal and Frick-Horbury (2001), who found that 70% of their participants reported authoritative parenting styles and secure attachment.

The researcher attempted to use previous research on parenting styles along with attachment styles to find research that supported the two hypotheses. The focus of this study was on authoritative parenting style because there was extensive research where it was reported to be the most effective parenting style (Simpson, Winterheld, Rholes, & Orina, 2007). Authoritative parenting style was reported by Neal and Frick-Horbury to be the most prevalent by previous research (2001). Therefore, it could be argued that more parents are becoming aware of the major impact parenting has on their children because of the higher prevalence of authoritative parenting.

Previous research has primarily focused on either parenting style or attachment style. It is important to know the implications of studies on parenting style and attachment style to show society the outcomes of positive, warm parenting. It is desirable that, next time a similar

study is conducted, it includes both mother and father parenting.

Interesting dissimilarities were apparent between the results of this study and others conducted previously. There were so few respondents who had permissive parenting styles and anxious-ambivalent attachment styles. These discrepancies could be due to social desirability or because the participants did not take the questionnaires seriously.

Study 2

With the establishment of a relationship between parenting styles and attachment styles, the next study was an attempt to examine the relationship between parenting styles and dispositional coping tendencies, which are trait styles. The basis for the coping style questionnaire that was used in this study, the Brief COPE, was derived from a model of stress and coping developed by Lazarus and his colleagues (Carver, 1997; Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Coping can be divided into problem-focused coping, which involves acting to remove or circumvent the source of the stress. Emotion-focused coping involves the attempt to remove or avoid the emotional distress caused by the stressful situation. In situations where an individual believes the stressor can be minimized or avoided, one is

more likely to utilize problem-focused coping. However, in situations that are unavoidable and unable to be changed one will most likely try to deal with the stressful emotions caused by a stressful situation through emotion-focused coping. These two coping responses often interact and usually co-occur (Carver & Scheier, 1994).

To assess the relationship between dispositional coping and situational coping, which is a state coping tendency, Carver and Scheier designed a study to track students through the phases of a stressful experience in the form of an exam (1994). Carver and Scheier found that dispositional or trait coping styles were a low-moderate predictor of situational or state coping strategies. However, they also found that what they characterized as adaptive responses (active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, use of instrumental support, use of emotional support, positive reframing, acceptance, and use of religion) were reported by participants more frequently than those characterized as dysfunctional (denial, mental disengagement, behavioral disengagement, and the use of alcohol).

Scheier, Weintraub, and Carver (1986) detected a link between problem-focused coping and optimism, and also between emotion-focused coping and pessimism. They tested

their hypotheses and found that optimism positively correlated with the use of problem-focused coping, seeking social support, suppression of competing activities, and positive reinterpretation. These classifications for coping came from the original COPE Inventory (Carver & Scheier, 1994). However, optimism was inversely associated with the coping mechanisms of denial and distancing (Scheier, Weintraub & Carver, 1986).

A separate study conducted by Baldwin, McIntyre, and Hardaway (2007) revealed that authoritative parenting styles were significantly related to late adolescent optimism and that authoritarian parenting style was not a predictor of optimism (2007). Based of the results of the studies of Baldwin et al. and Scheier et al. one might infer that there is an association between authoritative parenting styles and those strategies previously defined as functional coping (the use of problem-focused coping, seeking social support, suppression of competing activities, and positive reinterpretation). These studies develop the framework of the second hypothesis that the authoritative parenting style would be related to functional coping styles.

The current study was conducted to examine the relationship between parental authority and coping style.

The independent variable was parental authority type and
the dependent variable was coping style. One hypothesis was
that more participants would report using functional coping
styles than potentially dysfunctional coping styles. The
second hypothesis was that that coping tendencies would be
a function of parenting styles.

<div align="center">Method</div>

Design

The study was conducted using a one-factor between
groups design. The independent variable was students'
perceived parenting style. Parenting style was subdivided
into three levels, which were authoritarian, authoritative,
and permissive. The dependent variable was students'
adaptive coping tendency. With the help of an experienced
professor, the researcher chose three categories that
represented adaptive coping, which were active coping,
instrumental support and planning. Also, the researcher
chose three categories to represent dysfunctional or
maladaptive coping tendencies based on a previous study by
Carver and Scheier (1994). These categories were denial,
behavioral disengagement, and substance use.

Participants

The sample included 54 undergraduate student
volunteers enrolled in classes at Coastal Carolina

University. Thirty-nine of the student volunteers were solicited from upper-level history classes. The other 15 participants were solicited from an introductory level astronomy course. Of those who responded to the demographic survey, 22 were women, and 32 were men. The ages of participants ranged from 54 to 19 years with an average age of 24 (SD = 7.05). There was a wide range of academic majors including political science, middle school education, history, communication, education, English, math, biology, accounting, professional golf management, art, finance, resort tourism, accounting, psychology, sociology, economics, marketing, and management. Participants also included 4 sophomores, 18 juniors, and 32 seniors.

Materials

The materials included three instruments. The first was a demographic survey designed by this investigator to obtain information about the participants' age, sex, and academic major. The second instrument was the Parental Authority Questionnaire or PAQ (Buri, 1991). The PAQ consists of 30 statements, each of which is followed by a five-point Likert reponse scale. The 30 statements are divided into ten that reflect permissive parenting, ten which reflect authoritative, and ten which reflect

authoritarian parenting. The response options on the Likert scales range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Buri, 1991).

The third instrument was the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997). The Brief COPE is a 28-item measure designed to assess emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Participants were administered a dispositional version of the Brief COPE, which was developed to measure a wide range of possible coping responses. Each subscale was brief (two items) as compared with the original COPE Inventory that had four items for each scale it measured (Carver & Scheier, 1994; Carver, 1997).

Each item in the Brief COPE was designed to elicit responses that would correspond with how the individual generally coped with stressful situations (e.g. "I learn to live with it") Subjects respond to each item by selecting one of four response alternatives ranging from 1 (I usually don't do this at all) to 4 (I usually do this a lot).

The researcher and a professor chose three dysfunctional and three functional dispositional coping tendencies to measure in this study. The items categorized as dysfunctional coping tendencies were those that concerned participants' substance use, behavioral disengagement, and denial. The items that were categorized

as functional coping strategies were active coping, instrumental support and planning.

Procedure

All participants were solicited from history and astronomy classes. The professors of the classes arranged times that would be convenient for the researcher to solicit participants and collect data. Upon greeting students and introducing herself the investigator informed students about the current study and asked if they would volunteer to become participants in the study. Those who consented were informed again that their participation was voluntary and if they felt uncomfortable at any time during data collection they could leave the room at any time. All participants received identical materials packets, each of which contained a demographic survey, Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997), and PAQ (Buri, 1991). The participants were instructed to rate the coping tendencies on the Brief COPE Inventory on Likert scales with response options from 1 (I don't do this at all) to 4 (I do this a lot). Also, on the PAQ they were instructed similarly to choose response options from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Data collection required approximately 20 minutes in each classroom. Once participants completed all materials the researcher notified them that her email address was on the

board if they wanted to receive the results of her study at the end of the semester.

<div align="center">Results</div>

The researcher hypothesized that students would report more functional coping tendencies than dysfunctional coping tendencies. The data showed a much larger proportion of individuals with functional coping at 92% and dysfunctional coping was only reported as used more frequently than functional coping by 8% of respondents. The participants' functional coping score being higher than their dysfunctional coping score from the Brief COPE Inventory determined whether they were categorized as having functional or dysfunctional coping. The researcher's second hypothesis was that coping tendencies would be a function of parenting styles. When conducting a two-tailed t-test to test the hypothesis, the researcher did not include three of the participants' data sets due to illegible handwriting or incompletion. The researcher also removed the data set of permissive parenting style from the statistics due to its low frequency. The two-tailed t-test showed a significant relationship between those who reported authoritarian and authoritative maternal parenting styles and their functional coping scores, $t(44)= 3.61$, $p < .001$. However, the relationship between the authoritarian and

authoritative paternal parenting styles and their

functional coping scores was not statistically significant,

t(39)= 1.68, p < .05, two-tailed. Refer to Table 2 to see

the means and standard deviations of the functional coping

scores reported by the participants.

Discussion

The hypothesis that participants would report the use

of functional coping styles more frequently than

dysfunctional coping styles was confirmed. The percentage

of individuals who used functional coping styles was 92%,

while dysfunctional coping was reported by 8% of the

participants. The second hypothesis that coping style would

be a function of parenting style was confirmed for the

authoritative maternal parenting style. However, the

authoritarian maternal parenting style, and authoritative

and authoritarian paternal parenting styles showed no

significance.

The results of the first hypothesis are consistent

with a previous study conducted by Carver and Scheier

(1994). The researchers found that adaptive or functional

coping responses were reported by participants more

frequently than maladaptive or dysfunctional coping.

Perhaps, the participants were concerned about how they

would appear to others, which is also known as the social

desirability bias. The participants most likely had a strong desire to appear favorably, even though their data was not to be used for identifying purposes.

The results of the second hypothesis agree with the findings of Uehara et al. (1999), which showed the parenting style of the mother was critical to her child's ability to cope with stress later in life. The only significance was found with the maternal authoritative parenting style. This discovery suggests that paternal influences are not as strong or not as available. Perhaps most children spend more time with their mothers because their fathers are working. It would be interesting to learn if there is a biological explanation that shows that a strong maternal bond with an infant influences the child's development throughout life more than a paternal bond.

The results for the second hypothesis also concur with the findings of Baldwin et al. (2007) and Scheier et al. (1986) that show an association between authoritative parenting and functional coping styles. Correlations between coping and parenting style may be due to people with a certain coping style interpreting parenting in a dysfunctional manner. Other relationships could have been explored between parenting styles and coping tendencies if there had been more participants who classified themselves

with the permissive parenting style. However, there were only four respondents who classified their maternal parenting style as permissive and only two for paternal parenting style.

Interestingly, the data of this study represented more men than women. From most of the studies the researcher used as background for this study, the data found in the other studies comes from a higher percentage of women. For example, in the study by Carver and Scheier (1994) the researchers had 54% women and 46% men, which tends to be the normal trend for sampling in colleges. In this study, 42% of participants were women and 58% were men. However, the results were more significant concerning maternal parenting style. Perhaps men are more affected by their maternal parenting style than women.

This study also included a diverse group of majors. Generally, when conducting psychological research, freshmen psychology majors are the easiest participants to recruit, because they are enrolled in introductory psychology courses, which are often used for soliciting subjects. However, the current study contained a sampling of about 20 different majors. None of the participants were freshmen, and only four were sophomores. The effect of having a more mature sampling might have caused the participants view

their parents' parenting styles from a less biased view, untainted by youth. Most teenagers tend to rebel against their parents or they view their parents' actions as unfair. Also, these participants had more time to develop unique and beneficial coping strategies to deal with the pressures of college life.

Previous researchers have established a coping model (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman 1984) and a parental authority model (Baumrind, 1991). Together these two models can be explored through research on the interaction between the two models that may provide more information on why only maternal authoritative parenting is effective at producing functional coping responses. This interaction could be interpreted to mean that fathers are not a critical influence in the development of coping strategies in children. Perhaps further studies will reveal characteristics that develop in children that are more influenced by fathers than mothers. This cooperation between parents to build their child's coping skills could be why a child is supposed to have two parents; because that child needs certain parenting that one parent can give to a better degree than the other.

General Discussion

This research is important because parents should be well informed about their role as parents and the possible effects they have on their children. These studies are just a step toward the knowledge required in this area, because no result can ever be completely substantiated. Further studies should focus on personality differences between individuals, self-esteem issues, and confidence between subjects. Focusing on these individual characteristics should make the research more applicable to all people and not just generalized results. Shifting the focus from attachment style to coping style could show how parental authority further shapes individuals by investigating another aspect that is affected by parenting. Parenting should be based on a number of integrated factors, and not applied without thought to the later consequences of one's actions.

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Table 1

Frequencies of Students' Perceived Parenting Styles and Romantic Attachment Styles

	Parenting Styles		
Attachment Styles	Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive
Secure	8	37	2
Avoidant	9	12	2
Anxious-Ambivalent	1	1	0

Table 2

Functional Scores from Cope Inventory

	Parenting Style			
COPE Scores	M-A	M-F	P-A	P-F
Means	20.00	18.00	19.00	20.00
SDs	2.74	3.93	3.35	3.72

Note. M-A is the maternal authoritarian parenting style, M-F is the maternal authoritative parenting style, P-A is the paternal authoritarian parenting style, and P-F is the paternal authoritative parenting style.

Figure 1. The frequencies of anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, and secure attachment styles in groups of authoritarian, authoritative, permissive parenting styles.