

Adult Attachment Styles: Relationship with Parenting

Mehak Goel

University of California, Irvine

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the connection between adult romantic behaviours—specifically, commitment and ghosting—and parenting methods, using a sample size of 97 participants. The study explores how early caregiver interactions mould internal working models of relationships, based on attachment theory, and how these influence adult romantic behaviours. The research focuses on how authoritative, authoritarian and, permissive parenting styles may relate to the development of four attachment styles- secure, preoccupied, fearful and dismissing which in turn impact adult relationship behaviours. The study employed the Perceived Parenting Style Scale and the Revised Adult Attachment Scale- Close Relationships Version to gather data. Understanding the interactions between parenting styles, attachment types, and adult romantic behaviours can provide key insights into the factors influencing healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Keywords: Attachment theory, parenting styles, romantic relationships, commitment, ghosting, four attachment styles.

I. Introduction

Human relationships are not to be trifled with, especially when family relationships come into view. From childhood into adulthood, the associations made with parents greatly affect how one will approach relationships later in life—and especially marital ones. According to Bergen (2022), parenting styles establish the foundation for relational dynamics, which in turn influences the attachment styles that children develop. These early experiences with caregivers create internal working models that dictate not only how people view relationships but also how they behave within them.

According to Gregory et al. (2020), parenting forms the vital foundation for adult attachment. Parents who show a secure attachment style, typified by warmth, responsiveness, and predictability, are most likely to raise children who are themselves securely attached. In contrast, parents with insecure attachment styles, such as those who are avoidant or anxious, are more likely to fall into less satisfying and more stressful parenting practices that set the stage for the attachment styles their children will develop. These carry over into adult relationships, influencing behaviors related to commitment and, inversely, ghosting.

Parenting styles commonly fall into four categories: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. According to Baumrind's theory, authoritative parenting, which balances high responsiveness with high demands, is associated with positive developmental outcomes. Children raised by authoritative parents tend to develop secure attachments, which lead to healthier romantic relationships later in life. According to Onsando et al. (2021), an authoritative parent is able to provide the proper emotional warmth and behavioral structure for the child to feel secure in their relationships. This type of parenting is associated with lower levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance, which, in turn, reduces attachment issues that may affect commitment in romantic relationships and ghosting behavior.

In contrast, authoritarian parenting is marked by high demands but low responsiveness. This style is often linked to anxious attachment in children, which manifests as fear of abandonment and excessive clinginess in romantic relationships. However, Colón (2020) asserts that children raised in such families are likely to exhibit high and heightened levels of attachment-related anxiety due to their emotional dysregulation. This anxiety leads to maladaptive behaviors in relationships, such as being more likely to ghost a partner because one is afraid or insecure. By contrast, if a permissive parent—that is, a high-responsive but low-demanding one—the children are also likely to develop an attachment-related avoidance of romantic relationships. Although this dynamic may provide emotional support, the lack of necessary structure hinders the children's ability to establish healthy boundaries. This may manifest in their romantic relationships during adulthood, as they may exhibit avoidant attachment by completely avoiding commitment and intimacy.

Neglectful parenting, which is low in both responsiveness and demands, is perhaps the most detrimental of the four styles. Children raised in neglectful environments often develop disorganized attachment styles, which are characterized by confusion and fear in relationships. Thomas (2020) found that such children are likely to have trouble forming stable romantic relationships later in life and engage more in ghosting behaviors because they don't develop the emotional tools necessary to handle intimacy and commitment. The

literature represents the link between neglectful parenting and disorganized attachment very well. Thomas (2020) underscores the long-term relational repercussions of developing in an emotionally devoid environment.

John Bowlby first developed attachment theory, which provides a strong framework for understanding how early experiences with caregivers translate into adult romantic behaviors. He believed that children develop an internal working model of relationships based on their caregivers' responsiveness and availability. Such models then carry over into adult relationships, influencing one's views on intimacy, trust, and commitment. Ainsworth's Strange Situation Experiment elaborates this view by categorizing attachment into four main styles: secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganized. It is secure attachment that results from consistent and responsive caregiving, leading to healthier adult relationships, while the other three styles are associated with a variety of relational difficulties.

As argued by Bergen (2022), children who develop secure attachments will form trusting and committed romantic relationships during adulthood. They are comfortable with intimacy and do not fear abandonment; thus, they are less likely to engage in ghosting behaviors. Individuals with an anxious-ambivalent attachment, a result of inconsistent caregiving, frequently struggle with feelings of abandonment and clinginess in relationships. Due to past hurts or rejections, this attachment style strongly correlates with commitment issues in romantic relationships.

The avoidant attachment develops when the caregivers are emotionally unavailable or unresponsive (Epstein, 2023). In such a case, children will learn how to suppress their emotional needs and abstain from intimacy as a line of defense against rejection. When they grow up, individuals with this kind of attachment struggle with commitment, often ghosting partners just because it saves them from getting into emotionally vulnerable situations. According to Epstein (2023), this behavior is consistent, especially among those whose parents were either authoritarian or permissive in their childhood.

The interplay between parenting styles and attachment theory enables one to glean valuable insight into the relational behaviors of adults, especially within romantic relationships. As Colón (2020) notes, it is not only the behavior of the parents that is in focus but the condition of the whole family, which plays a significant role in developing an attachment style in children. Millings et al. (2013) explored the associations between romantic attachment, responsive caregiving, and parenting styles in a sample of couples whose children were between 7 and 8 years old. The findings revealed that attachment avoidance and anxiety negatively predicted responsive caregiving. Responsive caregiving was associated with optimal parenting styles and negatively related to non-optimal styles. In addition, responsive caregiving mediated the association between attachment and parenting styles. Attachment anxiety was also a direct predictor of nonoptimal parenting styles. Such findings point out the integrating role of attachment and caregiving in less-than-optimal parenting.

Parenting styles have the most powerful influence on the development of attachment styles, which later influence adult romantic behaviors. More specifically, authoritative parenting balances warmth and structure and, therefore, acts as a key harbinger of secure attachment that culminates in healthier romantic relationships. Authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful styles, on the other hand, create different types of insecurely attached individuals who increase the emergence of commitment issues and ghosting in romantic relationships by so much. Understanding the relationship between parenting styles, attachment theory, and adult romantic behaviors can provide insight for both the researcher and practitioner interested in improving relational outcomes. Early interventions that could enhance secure attachments and healthy parenting might reduce the adverse relational outcomes associated with insecure attachment styles.

II. Methodology

Aim

To investigate the the role of commitment as well as approved ghosting behaviors in regard to perceived parenting styles.

Objectives

1. To examine the different parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian and permissive) and their impact on individuals' relational behaviors.
2. To assess the association between parenting styles and the likelihood of committing in a romantic relationship.
3. To explore the relationship between parenting styles and the likelihood of ghosting in a romantic relationship.

Hypothesis 1

There will be a significant relationship between parenting style i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive and the adult attachment styles namely secure, preoccupied, fearful and dismissing in close relationships based on commitment among adults.

Hypothesis 2

There will be no significant relationship between parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) and adult attachment styles (secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing) in close relationships based on commitment among adults.

Research Design and Participants

For the present study, an online cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. The participants in the study were 97 young adult Indian students aged between 18 and 30 years. Convenience sampling was chosen to enroll the participants; this is a common method of sampling since it can produce a diverse pool of participants in the targeted category of the population. Google Forms were used to conduct online data collection since participants could answer the questions whenever they wanted.

Sampling Method

Convenience sampling was used in this study to reach the target group through social media platforms, academic professional groups, and scholarly writing forums. This sample method facilitated the recruitment of children and ensured the collection of data within the restricted time frame. However, this method may result in selection bias; specifically, participants in a study may be more self-reflective, have a background in relationship psychology, or exhibit proclivity for it.

Measures

Perceived Parenting Style Scale (PPSS)

Developed by Divya and Manikandan (2013). The scale measures how adolescents perceive their parents' parenting styles. It focuses on three main styles:

Authoritative: Open communication, clear guidelines, encouragement, nurturing, spending time together.

Authoritarian: High standards, strictness, criticism, little affection, restriction. Permissive: Few rules, low expectations, view children as friends, inconsistent parenting.

There are total number of 30 items and the response format entails 5-point Likert scale (Strongly

Agree - Strongly Disagree)

Reliability: Cronbach Alpha coefficient for each style Authoritative: 0.79 (acceptable)

Authoritarian: 0.81 (acceptable)

Permissive: 0.86 (acceptable)

The authors claim face validity (appears to measure what it intends to).

Revised Adult Attachment Scale—Close Relationships Version (RAAS)

To assess participants' attachment styles, the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS; Collins, 1996) was administered. This 18-item self-report measure assesses three dimensions of attachment style: anxiety, avoidance, and security. Participants responded to each item on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (Very characteristic of me). The RAAS has demonstrated good psychometric properties and is widely used in adult attachment research.

III. Results

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation

SCALE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	N
PPSS	53.21	8.181	97
RAAS	8.89	1.193	94

The table summarizes the mean and standard deviation for two scales: PPSS (Perceived Parenting Style Scale) and RAAS (Revised Adult Attachment Scale). For PPSS, the mean is 53.21 with a standard deviation of 8.181 (N = 97), reflecting participants' perceptions of parenting styles. For RAAS, the mean is 8.89 with a standard deviation of 1.193 (N = 94), indicating attachment-related tendencies. These values provide an overview of the central tendencies and variability in the data.

Table 2: Correlation Between Variables

	PPSS	RAAS	Authoritative Score	Authoritarian Score	Permissive Score
PPSS	1.000	0.083	0.183	0.673	0.786
RAAS	0.083	1.000	0.190	-0.025	-0.027
Authoritarian Score	0.183	0.190	1.000	-0.412	-0.286
Authoritative Score	0.673	-0.025	-0.412	1.000	0.549
Permissive Score	0.786	-0.027	-0.286	0.549	1.000

The table displays correlations between PPSS (Perceived Parenting Style Scale) and RAAS (Revised Adult Attachment Scale) across various parenting styles. PPSS is strongly correlated with Permissive Score ($r = 0.786$) and moderately with Authoritarian Score ($r = 0.673$), indicating that perceived parenting styles align closely with these dimensions. In contrast, RAAS shows weak correlations with all variables, with the highest being with Authoritarian Score ($r = 0.190$). This suggests that perceived parenting styles (PPSS) are more significantly associated with specific parenting dimensions than adult attachment patterns (RAAS).

IV. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) and adult attachment styles on the quality and experiences of close relationships in adulthood among young adults aged 18–30 years. Specifically, the study sought to assess the relationships between parenting styles, adult attachment patterns, and relational behaviors such as commitment and ghosting. The findings provide valuable insights into these dynamics, reflecting complex patterns of influence. Hypothesis 1 proposed a significant relationship between parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) and adult attachment styles (secure, preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing) in close relationships. However, the results of the correlational analysis did not support this hypothesis. No significant correlation was found between PPSS (Perceived Parenting Style Scale) and RAAS (Revised Adult Attachment Scale). This lack of significant correlation suggests that while parenting styles influence relational behaviors and perceptions in young adulthood, they do not directly determine adult attachment patterns. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is rejected.

The findings of this study provide nuanced insights into the interplay between parenting styles and adult attachment patterns. While the lack of significant correlation between PPSS (Perceived Parenting Style Scale) and RAAS (Revised Adult Attachment Scale) challenges initial assumptions, it opens the door for a deeper understanding of how relational behaviors evolve. The rejection of Hypothesis 1 suggests that adult attachment styles are not directly dictated by early parenting styles, but rather emerge as a product of both early experiences and the accumulation of relational contexts across a person's lifespan. This aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the fluidity of attachment styles. McCarthy and Maughan (2010) and Sümer and Gungor (1999) underscore that while early caregiving establishes foundational relational frameworks, adult attachment patterns are influenced by ongoing life experiences. These findings reinforce the importance of examining relational dynamics within a broader developmental context, recognizing that attachment is not a static construct but one that can adapt over time in response to new experiences.

One of the key implications of these findings is the role of compensatory relationships in adulthood. As highlighted by Gillath, Selcuk, and Shaver (2008), positive relationships with supportive romantic partners, close friends, or even therapists can mitigate the effects of earlier insecure attachments. For example, an individual who experienced neglectful parenting and developed an avoidant attachment style may shift toward a more secure attachment if they form a consistent and affirming romantic relationship. These relationships can "rewrite" earlier attachment patterns, emphasizing the importance of later-life relational experiences in shaping adult attachment. Additionally, the findings suggest that adult attachment styles are influenced by significant life events and transitions. Longitudinal studies, such as those by Fraley (2002) and Waters et al. (2000), indicate that attachment styles are subject to change due to both positive and negative life experiences. Events such as marriage, divorce, trauma, or personal growth can reshape relational templates, demonstrating the adaptability

of attachment patterns. These insights highlight the necessity of focusing not only on early-life experiences but also on the ongoing relational contexts that individuals encounter throughout their lives. The weak correlations between RAAS and parenting styles observed in this study may also reflect the limitations of self-report measures. These instruments, while widely used, are subject to biases such as recall inaccuracies and the influence of current relational dynamics. Participants may reinterpret their past experiences based on their present emotional state, which could obscure the direct effects of parenting styles on attachment patterns.

Contextual and cultural aspects are also very important. Cultural norms and beliefs are ingrained in parenting practices, which might influence how they affect attachment. As evidenced by Chao (2001), East Asian cultures see authoritarian parenting as supportive and essential for fostering discipline. Authoritarian parenting may be viewed as a form of care and discipline in collectivist cultures rather than as a strict or aloof approach. This cultural diversity emphasizes how crucial it is to look at how societal and cultural settings influence the bond between attachment and parenting (Bornstein, 2019). To better investigate these characteristics, future research should try to incorporate samples from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the results highlight the intricacy of relationship behaviors, including commitment and ghosting. Although attachment styles were thought to have an impact on these behaviors, the study's lack of substantial correlations raises the possibility that other factors—like personality characteristics, social norms, and environmental stressors—may be more important (Luo & Zhang, 2009).

These findings have important practical ramifications for programs meant to enhance relationship outcomes. The goal of early parenting programs should be to foster stable connection by being consistent, warm, and responsive (Sroufe, 2005). However, tactics that address relationship dynamics in adolescence and maturity should be used in conjunction with these attempts. Regardless of their early attachment experiences, relationship education programs, for instance, can assist people in learning how to resolve disagreements, set healthy boundaries, and foster trust (Markman et al., 2005). In order to promote safe connection in adulthood, therapeutic interventions might also be quite important. People can be empowered to create healthy relationships using cognitive-behavioral techniques that address maladaptive relational patterns (Beck et al., 2024) and emotion-focused treatments that investigate fundamental attachment dynamics, such as Emotionally Focused Therapy (Johnson, 2004). Furthermore, people can process their relationship difficulties and forge closer bonds by establishing supportive communal settings like peer support groups or counseling services (Barlow et al., 2012). Practitioners can address the intricate interactions between variables affecting attachment dynamics and relationship behaviors by combining these methods.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored the relationship between perceived parenting styles and adult attachment patterns in shaping relational behaviors, including commitment and ghosting. While the findings did not support a significant correlation between parenting styles and attachment patterns, they underscore the complex interplay of early caregiving experiences and broader relational influences across the lifespan. This suggests that while early parenting provides a foundation for relational dynamics, adult attachment patterns are shaped by a variety of factors, including significant life events, supportive relationships, and personal growth. These results emphasize the importance of fostering positive relational experiences in adulthood, as they have the potential to mitigate earlier attachment insecurities and promote healthier relationships.

Future Implications

Future research should adopt a longitudinal approach to track changes in attachment patterns over time, assessing how various life events, such as marriage, trauma, or therapy, influence attachment and relational dynamics. Additionally, interventions aimed at fostering secure attachment styles in adulthood, such as relationship education programs, therapeutic interventions, or community support systems, could be explored to mitigate the impact of early attachment insecurities. Furthermore, educational programs emphasizing conflict resolution and emotional intelligence might help people deal with attachment-related issues and lessen maladaptive behaviors like ghosting. Finally, to provide a more comprehensive and inclusive knowledge of their influence on relational outcomes, future research should take cultural differences in parenting and attachment styles into account.

References

- [1]. Bergen, D. (2022). *Developing Attachment: The Theoretical Work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth*. In *Theories of Early Childhood Education* (pp. 118-127). Routledge.
- [2]. Colón, J. R. (2020). *Parenting Styles and Child Outcomes in Puerto Rican Families: A Comparison of Dyadic and Individual Coding* (Doctoral dissertation, Utah State University).
- [3]. Epstein, O. B. (2023). *John Bowlby, Attachment Theory, and Attachment-Based Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*. In *Underlying Assumptions in Psychoanalytic Schools* (pp. 78-88). Routledge.
- [4]. Gregory, M., Kannis-Dymand, L., & Sharman, R. (2020). A review of attachment-based parenting interventions: Recent advances and future considerations. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 72(2), 109-122.

- [5]. Onsando, E., Mwenje, M. K., & Githui, P. (2021). The influence of parenting style on male juvenile delinquency: a case of Kamiti Youth Correction and Training Center (KYCTC), Kiambu County, Kenya. *European journal of humanities and social sciences*, 1(3), 21-29. Thomas, S. (2020). The Role of Parenting Style in Cultural Transition (Master's thesis, Sam Houston State University).
- [6]. Collins, N. (1996). Revised Adult Attachment Scale- Close Relationships Version [Review of Revised Adult Attachment Scale-Close Relationships Version]. University of California Santa Barbara.
https://labs.psych.ucsb.edu/collins/nancy/UCSB_Close_Relationships_Lab/Resources_files/Adult%20Attachment%20Scale.doc
- [8]. Divya, T. V., & Manikandan, K. (2013). Perceived Parenting Style Scale. Department of Psychology, University of Calicut, Kerala, India.
- [9]. Bornstein, M. H. (2019). Cultural Approaches to Parenting. *Parenting*, 12(2-3), 212–221.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15295192.2012.683359>
- [10]. Chao, R. K. (2001). Extending Research on the Consequences of Parenting Style for Chinese Americans and European Americans. *Child Development*, 72(6), 1832–1843. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00381>
- [11]. Luo, S., & Zhang, G. (2009). What Leads to Romantic Attraction: Similarity, Reciprocity, Security, or Beauty? Evidence From a Speed-Dating Study. *Journal of Personality*, 77(4), 933–964. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2009.00570.x>
- [12]. Sroufe, L. A. (2005). Attachment and development: A prospective, longitudinal study from birth to adulthood. *Attachment & Human Development*, 7(4), 349–367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616730500365928>
- [13]. Markman, H., Stanley, S., & Blumberg, S. L. (2005). Fighting for Your Marriage: Positive Steps for Preventing Divorce and Preserving a Lasting Love. *Family Court Review*, 36(1), 95–95. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.174-1617.1998.tb00498.x>
- [14]. Beck, A. T., Rush, A. J., Shaw, B. F., Emery, G., DeRubeis, R. J., & Hollon, S. D. (2024). *Cognitive Therapy of Depression: Second Edition*. Guilford Press. <https://www.guilford.com/books/Cognitive-Therapy-of-Depression/Beck-Rush-Shaw-Emery/9781572305823?srsId=AfmBOooYQRpDF5t6XVzXSiTBF1pHJy0mXVJI9hUqaTWTQ8ZiKyEWhHzb>
- [15]. Johnson, S. M. (2004). *The practice of emotionally focused couple therapy: Creating connection*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- [17]. Barlow, J., Smailagic, N., Huband, N., Roloff, V., & Bennett, C. (2012). Group-based parent training programmes for improving parental psychosocial health. *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 6, CD002020.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD002020.pub3>
- [18]. Gillath, O., Selcuk, E., & Shaver, P. R. (2008). Moving Toward a Secure Attachment Style: Can Repeated Security Priming Help? *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(4), 1651–1666. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2008.00120.x>
- [19]. Fraley, C. (2002). Attachment Stability From Infancy to Adulthood: Meta-Analysis and Dynamic Modeling of Developmental Mechanisms. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 6(2), 123–151. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0602_03
- [20]. McCarthy, G., & Maughan, B. (2010). Negative childhood experiences and adult love relationships: The role of internal working models of attachment. *Attachment & Human Development*, 12(5), 445–461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2010.501968>
- [21]. Sumer, N., & Gungor, D. (1999). Psychometric evaluation of adult attachment measures on Turkish samples and a cross-cultural comparison. *Türk Psikoloji Dergisi*, 14(43), 71–109.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299011827_Psychometric_evaluation_of_adult_attachment_measures_on_Turkish_samples_and_a_cross-cultural_comparison
- [22]. Waters, E., Merrick, S., Treboux, D., Crowell, J., & Albersheim, L. (2000). Attachment Security in Infancy and Early Adulthood: A Twenty-Year Longitudinal Study. *Child Development*, 71(3), 684–689. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00176>