

## The Influence of Family Education on the Formation of Children's Personality

Zhuofan Li

Ulink College of Shanghai, 559 South Laiting Road, Jiuting Town, Songjiang District, Shanghai, 201615, China

Corresponding Author: Zhuofan Li, Email: winky-li@qq.com

### Abstract

There is abundant evidence, some of it reviewed in this paper, that children's personality development is substantially influenced by family education. This study takes parenting styles (including permissive, authoritarian, authoritative, and uninvolved) as an instrumental expression of family education, examining its effect on children's personality dimensions (including five factors extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experiences). Literature on the relationship between parenting and children's personality (including attachment styles) is reviewed. Discussion on Nature-Nurture Debate of personality formation and how attachment to parents impacts children's personality conclude that family education and upbringing, as an integral part of "Nurture" and children's first educational environment, has a profound influence on the personality formation of children.

### Keywords

Attachment; Caregiving; Personality

### Introduction

Family is the first educational environment as a child first gets education and guidance from parents at home. Parents' words, behavioral characteristics, educational concepts, and style all have a profound impact on their child and often subtly determine the child's temperament, hobbies, character, and thoughts as an adult in future life. Then how exactly will family, a primary environment of personality formation, influence the development of a child's personality?

This paper is going to focus on the influence of family education on the formation of children's personalities and explicate the role of parents in shaping children's personality development. Most of the citations and references are from 20th century literature, which at the time laid the

*Citation: Zhuofan Li. (2022) The Influence of Family Education on the Formation of Children's Personality 4(36): e20220915*

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*Received on August 20, 2022; Accepted on August 30, 2022; Published on September 15, 2022*

foundation for subsequent investigations and studies.

In terms of family education, there is great variation in how parents raise their children since different parents will adopt different approaches when educating their children. Meanwhile, there are many commonalities from one parent to another. There is enough similarity that researchers represented by Dr. Diana Baumrind (1991) have tried to group parents into four common parenting styles, Authoritarian, Permissive, Authoritative, and Uninvolved, based on responsiveness and demandingness of parents towards their children. Each parenting style varies in at least four areas: discipline style, communication, nurturance, and expectations. According to Dr. Diana Baumrind(1991)'s theory, parenting styles can be an instrumental expression of the family education model.

In real life, a thousand people can have a thousand personality types. In this study, the child's personality traits will be captured by the Five-Factor Model and attachment style. The next chapter gives a review of the above theories as well as relevant empirical studies. Chapter 3 discusses topics including the nature or nurture debate in personality development, how attachment relates to personality and comments on parenting and personality.

This research could have the potential impact of addressing the importance of family education and reminding educators and caregivers around the world of the importance of their significant roles. It may inform educators, parents, and grandparents of their influence on child development and help stakeholders in the education of future generations, suggesting how to become good caregivers as well as what parents could do to foster well-developed children.

## Literature Review

### **Attachment, Caregiving, and Parenting**

The existence of an instinctive motive to form bonds of affection with particular individuals and to turn to those individuals to relieve distress is the essence of attachment theory. The most important function of attachment bonds is to protect infants and children from danger, which can be regarded as caregiving. Caregivers of children may include parents, grandparents, and babysitters, with parents being more prevalent in life.

According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982), parenting is governed by two behavioral systems—attachment and caregiving. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver (2019) reviewed theoretical and empirical evidence concerning the link between these systems and the ways in which individual differences in each shape function in the other.

### *Attachment*

The attachment system is one of many behavioral systems that have evolved to promote survival and reproductive success (Hinde, 1982). The goal of attachment behavior is to seek protection by maintaining proximity to the attachment figure or parent in response to real or perceived stress or danger (Bowlby, 1982). The attachment system contributes to survival by motivating children and adults to seek protection and comfort in times of threat or distress. This is especially important during early childhood, because human infants are born without the capacity to protect themselves, feed themselves, or learn important survival skills.

The quality of care determines the qualitative organization of the relationship through its effect on the child's confidence in the availability of the caregiver (i.e., feelings of security – Ainsworth

et al., 1978; de Woolf & van IJzendoorn, 1997). On the basis of infants' responses to separation from and reunion with caretakers in a structured laboratory procedure, Ainsworth (1978) identified three distinct patterns of infant attachment: secure, anxious-resistant, and avoidant. Children classified as securely attached welcome their caretaker's return after a separation and, if distressed, seek proximity and are readily comforted. Infants classified as anxious-resistant show ambivalent behavior toward caregivers and an inability to be comforted during a reunion. Infants classified as avoidant avoid proximity or interaction with the caretaker on a reunion. Continuity in infant attachment patterns seems to be mediated largely by continuity in the quality of primary attachment relationships (Lamb et al., 1984).

### Caregiving

As with the attachment system, the first step in defining the caregiving system in its own right is to trace the behavioral goal and adaptive function of the system. Conceptualized as a system reciprocal to attachment (Bowlby, 1982), the goal of the caregiving system is to keep the infant or child close to the caregiver under conditions of threat or danger (i.e., to keep the child safe). The ultimate or adaptive function of the caregiving system, as with attachment, is the protection of the young. It is fair to assume, as did Bowlby, that there is an instinctual or species-characteristic component to the caregiving system. It is certainly associated with strong feelings - pleasure in being close to the young, and anxiety and anger when proximity is threatened or frustrated. (Solomon & George, 1996)

### Parenting Styles

McCobay and Martin's parenting styles (1983), which is the evolved form of parenting styles of Diana Baumrind, is one of the most commonly

used patterns in the field of parenting practices. Baumrind (1971) explained two independent dimensions in education to predict children's behavior. The first dimension, responsiveness, is the amount of nutrition, warmth, emotional expression, and positive reinforcement associated with children's opinions. The second dimension, demandingness, concerns that parents have requirements for their children to be mature and responsible, and the rules and limits established and applied by parents to their children. Based on these two dimensions, there are four types of parenting styles (as shown in Figure 1): authoritative (high on both dimensions), authoritarian (high on demandingness and low on responsiveness), permissive (low on demandingness and high on responsiveness), and uninvolved (both low).

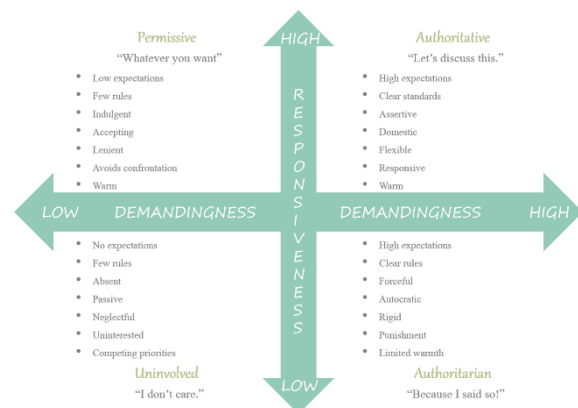


Figure 1. The four parenting styles and two dimensions

Authoritarian parents are often thought of as disciplinarians. They use a strict discipline style with little negotiation possible. Punishment is common while communication is mostly one way, from parent to child. Rules usually are not explained. Parents with this style are typically less nurturing, expecting high for their child with restricted flexibility.

Permissive parents are more like friends than parents. Their discipline style is the opposite of

strictness, retaining limited or no rules and mostly letting children figure problems out on their own. Communication is open but these parents let children decide for themselves rather than giving directions. Accordingly, parents in this category tend to be warm and nurturing. Expectations are typically minimal or not set by these parents.

Uninvolved parents give children a lot of freedom and generally stay out of their way. Some parents may make a conscious decision to parent in this way, while others are less interested in parenting or unsure of what to do. No particular discipline style is utilized. An uninvolved parent lets a child mostly do what they want, probably out of a lack of information or care. Communication is limited. This group of parents offers little nurturing with few or no expectations of children.

Authoritative parents are reasonable and nurturing. Children with parents who demonstrate this style tend to be self-disciplined and think for themselves. Disciplinary rules are clear and the reasons behind them are explained. Communication is frequent and appropriate to the child's level of understanding. Expectations and goals are high but stated clearly. Children may have input into goals.

## **Personality**

### ***Definition of Personality***

Psychologists define personality as the complex set of psychological qualities that influence an individual's characteristic patterns of behavior across different situations and over time. Or more specialized, personality is made up of traits and tendencies which is led to individual differences in behavior, behavior stability over time, and behavior continuity in various situations (Feist & Feist, 2002). Theories of

personality are hypothetical statements about the structure and functioning of individual personalities. Each theory has two major goals. First, the theories try to understand the uniqueness of each individual with respect to the structure, origins, and correlation of personality. Second, they attempt to understand how each unique personality yields characteristic predictions about the way people will respond and adapt to life events.

One of the oldest approaches to personality involves scaling the degree to which people can be described by different traits. There seems to be a natural tendency for people to classify their own and others' behavior along different dimensions. Traits are enduring qualities or attributes that predispose individuals to behave consistently across situations. Some trait theorists think of traits as predispositions that cause behavior, but more conservative theorists use traits only as descriptive dimensions that simply summarize patterns of observed behavior. Prominent trait theories include Allport's Trait Approach (Allport, 1937), Identifying Universal Trait Dimensions, and Five-factor Model (McCrae & Costa, 2008).

### ***The Five-Factor Model***

The Five-Factor Model is a widely accepted model of personality description in terms of traits (De Raad and Perugini, 2002; McCrae and Costa, 2008; Matthews et al., 2009). McCrae and Costa, the authors of the dominant Five-Factor variant in the literature, argue that the universal personality structure consists of five essential traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience.

Openness to experience is the desire for curiosity, imagination, aesthetics, wisdom, enlightenment, and humanism (John, 1989; McCrae & Costa,

1992). Conscientiousness is the desire for organization, discipline, autonomy, efficiency, reliability, continence, progressiveness, logic-focused, and reflection (John, 1989; McCrae & John, 1992, Watson & Clarck, 1997). Agreeableness refers to the desire for amnesty, kindness, benevolence, confidence, empathy, obedience, and, sacrifice (John, 1989; McCrae & John, 1992). Neuroticism is the desire to experience anxiety, stress, self-consuming, hostility, impulsiveness, shyness, irrational thinking, depression, and low self-esteem (John, 1989; McCrae & John, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1992).

Each dimension has two poles (as shown in figure 2) -- terms that are similar in meaning to the name of the dimension describe the high pole, and terms that are opposite in meaning describe the low pole.

Factor	End Points of the Dimension
Extraversion	Talkative, energetic, and assertive versus quiet, reserved, and shy
Agreeableness	Sympathetic, kind, and affectionate versus cold, quarrelsome, and cruel
Conscientiousness	Organized, responsible, and cautious versus careless, frivolous, and irresponsible
Neuroticism	Stable, calm, and contented versus anxious, unstable, and temperamental
Openness to experience	Creative, intellectual, and open-minded versus simple, shallow, and unintelligent

Figure 2. The Five-Factor Model

Note: Adopted from Gerrig & Zimbardo (2001).

The most prominent and extensively studied bipolar personality-trait continua are neuroticism-emotional stability and extroversion-introversion. People high in neuroticism are more likely to feel anxious, depressed, and guilty than those who are emotionally stable. They are more often self-conscious and more likely to experience threatening and stressful situations. Therefore, not surprisingly, neuroticism is linked to several

psychopathological symptoms (Weinstock & Whisman, 2006). Highly extroverted individuals are more active, gregarious, and confident than introverts, who prefer to engage in fewer social activities and maintain fewer social contacts. Extroverts also engage in more social and enterprising leisure time and job-related interests (Kandler, Bleidorn, Riemann, Angleitner, & Spinath, 2011). Neuroticism and extroversion, or roughly parallel trait concepts, are often included as the first two personality dimensions in personality or temperament models (see Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001). Aspects of these traits, such as anxiety (a dimension of neuroticism) and activity (a dimension of extroversion) are observable in the first years of life.

### **The Influence of Parenting on Children's Personality**

#### *Parenting and Attachment*

The quality of the attachment relationship between children and their parents is important for children's social-emotional development and can have profound consequences for adaptive processes in later life.

Positive parenting practices include more specific behaviors such as parental warmth and openness and constant support, constant monitoring and surveillance, a certain degree of autonomy, availability, setting limits, and clear rules accompanied by inductive discipline, expectations, and applications according to the child's age. These parental practices are similar to a secure attachment figure and an authoritative style (high responsiveness and high demandingness). Mary Ainsworth has shown that sensitive parenting is crucial for developing secure attachment relationships. Sensitive parents are able to pick up signals from the child, interpret them correctly, and act on them

promptly and adequately (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Secure attachment in childhood occurs when a parent is responsive to the needs of the child. This allows the child to safely explore the environment, and it develops confidence in the ability to interact with the autonomous world, face challenges, and regulate their own emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Attachment security and the capacity to be a responsive caregiver affords the parent the resources required to provide not only a haven in times of threat but also a secure base from which to explore. The provision of both a haven and a secure base is a fundamental component of authoritative parenting, which comprises a warm, child-centered approach, but with clear boundaries and democratic rules (Robinson et al., 1995).

Neglect or failure to involve parents, indifference, or brutal discipline can leave traces in the emotional circuit, leading to the adoption of secondary attachment strategies, and anxious or avoidant attachment. Collins & Feeney (2010) suggest that responsive caregiving for others in distress might be particularly difficult for those who are uncomfortable with emotional expression or who have difficulty regulating their own emotions. These difficulties are associated with attachment insecurity, which explains why both, avoidance and anxiety, are associated with lower levels of responsive caregiving. Anxious attachment develops in an environment where constantly maintaining proximity to a parent is inconsistent and needs the privacy and approval of others. People with anxious attachment feel a chronic fear of rejection if they are not enough to close or appreciated as a person, and have a high level of anxiety. Insecure and disorganized children appear to be at risk for adaptational problems in the social and behavioral domains (e.g., externalizing behavior problems). When

parenting behavior is not optimal the development of a secure relationship is at risk.

#### ***Parenting and Personality***

Plenty of empirical evidence suggests that parenting style and personality are significantly correlated. Maddahi and colleagues conducted one study on the relationship between parenting styles and personality dimensions in 2012. 272 students were selected at random and responded to Parenting Styles Questionnaire (Naghashian, 1979) and Five-Factor Personality Factors Questionnaire (McCrae and Costa, 1995). Regarding the research hypothesis, the results of statistical analysis showed that there is an inverse relationship between authoritarian parenting style and openness parenting style and there is a direct relationship between authoritative parenting style and openness parenting style. Also, there is an inverse and significant relationship between authoritative parenting style and neuroticism parenting style and it has been shown that there is a direct and significant relationship between authoritarian parenting style and neuroticism. The results of this study showed that parents' educational manners and styles are effective in the formation of children's personality traits. This finding is compatible with the other studies (Baumrind, 1971; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Pernizieh et al., 2004; Biogetnal & Grousis, 2006).

The methods that parents apply to the education of their children play major roles in shaping their mental health. It is in a healthy relationship that children's needs can be identified and then tries to supply and satisfy them. As indicated, each of these methods has some effects on children's behavior, and the negative and destructive effects of permissive and authoritarian methods are more than others. Coopersmith (1976) and Sepehri (2009) showed that in comparison to authoritarian parents, the parents who have a

permissive parenting style are more prone to train children who have a high amount of self-respect and authoritative parents give positive effects on their adolescent's lifestyle which cause them to consume less smoke as well as drink less alcohol (Jackson et al., 1998).

Children with an authoritative education style have higher social-emotional development and better academic performance. The studies performed by Costa and McCrae (1992) showed that the communicative dimension (warmth and support) is at a high level in the authoritative parenting style and the children who are trained under this pattern show more humanism. On the other hand, a set of social support, mutual relationships, receptivity, responsiveness, and satisfaction toward children can be seen in the authoritative parenting style which causes the development of these components within children (Bamarind, 1971). Also, Maddahi and Samadzadeh (2012) showed that three personality traits, namely agreeableness, extroversion, and openness have a positive relationship with authoritarian and permissive parenting styles and a negative relationship with authoritative parenting styles and conscientiousness personality trait has a positive relationship with authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles and a negative relationship with permissiveness parenting style.

## **Discussion**

### **Comment on Personality Research Method**

As reviewed in Section 2.2.2, the personality traits described in the Five-Factor Model have been measured by researchers in a great number of studies. It is sometimes taken for granted that such measurements of personality are the default method of personality studies. However, it should be noted that Five-Factor Model is only one psychological theory among many others,

and the relevant measuring methods for personality traits are by no means impeccable even after decades of effort to improve it.

The validity and reliability of studies on personality traits depend significantly on the methodologies adopted by the researchers. A majority of empirical studies on child personality used the survey data from both parents only excluding the data from children. There is a potential concern that children may behave differently in front of each parent. Personality is thought of as a stable trait but, for example, Shoda et al. (1994) observed that children's intraindividual organization of behavioral variation across situations was enduring but discriminatively patterned. Their behaviors and attitudes were dependent on the situations. As a tentative solution, researchers usually adopt a mean score of each personality trait but the accuracy and reliability of children's inferred personality traits await further clarification. To achieve a higher validity and reliability, future studies need to carefully consider the methodology issues.

### **Personality: The Nature-Nurture Debate**

The Nature-Nurture Debate is hinged on the influence of an individual's natural physiological makeup as opposed to forces exerted by the environment where one is reared in relation to differences in character and personality. Nurture, or environmental sources including family education and parenting, seems more influential than nature in terms of personality development, especially on a life-long scale.

Personality traits are enduring characteristics that represent consistency in behavior, thoughts, and feelings across situations and occasions. Such consistency could be acclimated in an accumulative manner through a dynamic interaction between individuals and their

environment. Personality is responsible for an individual's unique adjustment to the environment, and family education may remarkably shape this environment. Genetic and environmental sources unfold their impact through many different pathways - from the biological micro to the sociological macro (McAdams, 2015). The effect of nature and nurture working together is critically important in the earliest years of the child's life when the growth of the brain is at its highest. It is believed that personality is largely developed by the age of six. The brain's plasticity and the child's predisposition to learn (biogenetic uniqueness of the child) are shaped by environmental influences and stimulation of physical, emotional, social, cultural, and cognitive nature in creating new pathways in learning and development. The type of family (monogamous or polygamous), the number of children, social and economic status, educational background of the parents, and general demographics of individual families influence the shaping of personality to a large extent. From birth, the personality of the child is affected by the values of the parents as they expect total conformity to such values. This is achieved through role modeling and diverse re-enforcement strategies such as rewards and punishments.

It can be seen that parenting or family education, as a vital environmental factor, has a significant effect on the child's personality and how they behave in front of people. From the moment they are born children are used to imitating parents -- thus parents' approach to the world is a powerful determinant of how children handle an interpersonal relationships, which reflects their personality. In short, Nurture outweighs Nature in children's personality formation, which clears the ground for further discussion.

### **Attachment & Personality**

Based on the above Nature-Nurture Debate about personality formation, this section will focus on how children's attachment style, which is one of the nurture factors, influences their personality.

Children's attachment and their personalities are closely related. Attachment theory can contribute to researchers' understanding of personality development because it articulates how and why certain individual differences in life might have been shaped by the early environments to which individuals were exposed.

Attachment experiences are critical for human emotional and cognitive development. Usually, the family is the primary context of patterns of attachment and emotional adjustment strategy and determines relationships with others and later socializing (Bowlby, 1982, Mikulincer et al., 2003).

Though children's attachment styles determine how they respond to insecurities, most empirical studies only examine short-term changes in mood, such as infants' reactions when parents are momentarily away. This evidence may not prove the effect of parenting styles on children's long-term attachment and personality.

However, it is clear from the literature that parents' responsiveness to their children has a significant impact on a child's attachment style and personality. Children who receive better, more consistent care typically become securely attached to their caregivers, which motivates them to seek out their caregivers for comfort, reassurance, and support in order to manage and quell negative emotions when they are threatened or distressed. Across development, these interpersonal experiences and tendencies generate positive internal working models, in which the self is viewed as worthy of love, care, and support, and significant others are perceived



as being able, willing, and often effective at providing love, care, and support. Starting very early in life, securely attached children learn to adopt a more cooperative, communal, and long-term view of relating to other people. Potentially, they are meant to be more agreeable, more conscientious, and less neurotic than others who do not have such a good start in attachment during early childhood.

Children who receive poor or inconsistent care, on the other hand, usually become insecurely attached. Insecure children are either not easily comforted and reassured by their caregivers when they feel threatened or distressed, or they try to comfort and soothe themselves in a self-reliant manner without depending on their caregivers (Ainsworth et al., 1978). These experiences and tendencies typically translate into negative internal working models of the self and significant others. Insecurely attached children learn to adopt a more opportunistic, self-oriented, and short-term view of relating to others. People are perceived as largely instrumental in helping these individuals achieve their important goals, but relational ties are perceived as weaker, not lasting, and not worth too much investment. Individuals with insecure attachment score lower in stability – to be less agreeable, less conscientious, and more neurotic.

In a nutshell, attachment with parents, as a “Nurture” factor, could function as an “incubator” for children’s personality, which is indispensable for the normal development of children’s personality, even upon the mediation of some genetic factors by the “Nature”.

#### **Comment on Parenting Styles**

Parenting style, which refers to the set of behaviors, emotions, cognitions, values, attributions, and attitudes directed by parents toward their children, is not a constantly

unchanged tradition within a household.

For example, when children are too young to distinguish between right and wrong, parents often adopt an authoritarian parenting style, commanding their children on what to do and keeping them from perceived dangers. Later when children are a little older and have their own ideas, parents may be more inclined to take a permissive approach to the parent that respects and appreciate their children’s ideas. Also, parenting styles may change as parents get older. When parents give birth to their first child, they are usually younger adults, and they may have certain views of how to properly raise their children as a pair of inexperienced parents. Later in life, as they grow more mature and have more children, the parents may make some adjustments in their parenting styles since they are more experienced both in life as well as in parenting. Changes in parenting patterns as shown in the above examples cannot be captured by the static categorization of a certain “style” for particular parents, and researchers should take such factors into consideration when investigating parenting styles.

The results of a study by Ayoub et al. (2018) support the view that parenting is a dyadic and dynamic process, whereby both parents and children influence each other. Also, the warmth and stress of caregivers are partially shaped by the child’s personality. In real life, the specific type of parenting style adopted by parents is not as distinct as described in the theoretical perspective, and results drawn from empirical studies are not definitive. Therefore researchers should be aware of the dynamic changes in parenting style along with time, and consider parenting-style-related research topics from a dynamic perspective.

#### **Conclusion**

This study reveals that family education has a profound influence on children's personality formation.

Parenting styles, as a vital component of family education, have a profound impact on children's attachment styles. Sensitive parenting or parenting styles that are highly responsive to the child are critical to the development of secure attachment. Parenting styles that are not engaging are likely to lead to anxiety or avoidance of attachment in children. One suggestion for a parent to provide more effective parenting could be a much more self-critical, reflective, and differentiated pedagogy developed through meaningful observations, noticing and recognizing what is important and significant to the child and about the child, and responding in a supportive way. This kind of a good match between an individual child's genes and the environmental context in which they develop would mean a good early start. More importantly, where hereditary vulnerabilities and complex behaviors are observed, it may at least increase their chances of more positive pathways in life.

Family education and upbringing, as an integral part of Nurture and children's growth environment, appear to be more influential than nature in personality development, especially within the context of a lifetime. It can be concluded that family education does have a fundamental impact on children's personalities.

**Conflicts of Interests:** the author has claimed that no conflict of interests exists.

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